



Manul of Mongolia Photo Tour 2022 – Trip Summary

Saturday July 16th - Sunday July 24th, 2022

Group: Sebastian Kennerknecht and local guide as leaders, three cat expedition clients



Highlights of the Trip

Manul: We photographed seventeen different manul in the steppes of eastern Mongolia. This included mothers and kittens. Sightings averaged forty-five minutes per cat, at an average distance of fifteen yards.



Corsac Fox: We saw more than fifteen corsac foxes with the highlight being a parent bringing rodent prey back to the den.



Steppe Eagle: We had great flight shot opportunities of this gigantic raptor. Additionally, we had the chance to photograph three different nests with chicks of different ages, including at close range.



Manul of Mongolia Photo Tour Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar. Overnight in Ulaanbaatar.

Day 2: Morning departure to field site. Presentation on manul. Afternoon safari.

Day 3-8: General safari at sunrise. Afternoon manul photography from blinds.

Day 9: Morning safari while driving back to Ulaanbaatar. Celebratory dinner in the capital.

Day 10: Fly out.

Detailed Trip Summary of our 2022 Manul Photo Tour

Day 1: Mongolia is a gorgeous country with the lowest human population density in the world. A large percentage of the population is still nomadic. Flight and airport options are few and far between, so everyone landed in Ulaanbaatar, the capital. We enjoyed a welcome dinner before sauntering to bed.

Day 2: With a packed breakfast in hand, we left Ulaanbaatar early with our local guide to make our nine-hour drive to the steppes of eastern Mongolia. The ride didn't seem too long as we had good opportunities to see unique raptors, like the cinereous vulture and saker falcon.



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When we arrived at camp, we admired the beautiful, traditional Gers (yurts) that we would be sleeping in. Soon after we were greeted with delicious, traditional Mongolian lunch. The food included dumplings, bean salads, and homemade butter for breakfast. Our two vegetarian clients were easily accommodated by the thoughtful cooks!



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After a short, yet insightful presentation on the manul (also called Pallas's cats), we headed out for our first safari.

We had an adrenaline inducing sighting right off the bat, with an upland buzzard chasing a corsac fox. That was followed by a close view of a steppe eagle nest with two chicks. Less than fifteen minutes later, our spotters found three manul kittens. One of them was brave enough to come out of the rocks (it seemed like they were moving between dens) and explore its surroundings. It was a fantastic start!



Day 3-8: Days would start at 5:00am in time to find wildlife in good photography light, at sunrise. In the mornings we would focus our efforts on finding the non-manul wildlife of the steppe, as we didn't want to put pressure on the cats. During these mornings we had multiple close encounters with corsac fox, steppe eagles (including chicks in their nest), Eurasian eagle owl fledglings, and families of demoiselle cranes.



For our afternoon manul photography, our local guide would set up temporary blinds at manul dens, early in the afternoon before the cats were active, to minimize disturbance. Then we would generally wait an hour before the first manul kitten would curiously stick its head out the rock pile. Soon after, the rest of the litter would leave the inner den and explore the outside world. They would play with each other, look for mom, stalk songbirds unsuccessfully, all the way until sunset. Mom manul would sometimes return to the den and bring caught rodent, or pika prey, which the kittens would devour quickly. Shortly after sunset we would swiftly take down the blind and leave the cats.

In total we saw seventeen different manul individuals and our average time with each cat was forty-five minutes. Here are some of the highlight photos from our manul sessions!





Day 9: We departed for Ulaanbaatar at sunrise, looking for wildlife along the way. We saw some Mongolian gazelle in the distance and had a close sighting of steppe eagle.

With an early afternoon arrival, everyone enjoyed the comforts of the hotel before meeting up for a final celebratory dinner.

Day 10: Everyone flew out from Ulaanbaatar airport.

Species List for the Trip:

Mammals

Mongolian Gazelle	<i>Procapra gutturosa</i>
Manul	<i>Otocolobus manul</i>
Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>
Mongolian Hamster	<i>Allocricetulus curtatus</i>
Brandt's Vole	<i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i>

Birds

Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>

