



Mammal Watching Report to NW China in 2023 Summer

map@TangJun



Main Destinations:

Valley of the Cats at Angsai, Qinghai/Tibet Plateau;
Wild Yak Valley at Golmud, Qinghai/Tibet Plateau;
Gouli Valley at Dulan, Qinghai Province;
Ruoergai wetland, Sichuan Province;
Pingwu for Sichuan Snub-nosed Monkey, Sichuan Province

Participants:

Tang Jun, Frank and Gwen

Dates:

31 July to 18 Aug 2023

Vehicle:

one 4WD TOYOTA Landcruiser

Provided Gears:

SW telescopes and one thermal camera

Reported by:

Tang Jun / China Mammal Tour

Date of report: 31 August 2023



Day by day reports:



28 July Tang Jun started the tour and drove a 4WD TOYOTA Landcruiser from Chengdu to Yushu where he would meet his clients. The journey was 1200km and took two days in a good vehicle. Tang Jun stopped to look for mammals for a couple of hours at Shiqu about 150km before Yushu. He was lucky to have a look of a mother Pallas's Cat with two cubs right beside the road.

Where is the 2nd cub?



29 July Frank and Gwen landed at Chengdu via Frankfurt from Netherlands

30 July They flew to Yushu airport in Qinghai province from Chengdu and met with Tang Jun who have arrived the night before.

With all the participants together we spent the night at the Xinagdenima Hotel (3650m asl) to acclimatize to the high altitude.

We made a big shopping trip to a local supermarket to pick up supplies for the coming 4 nights at a homestay and bought everything we may needed including fruits, vegetables, coffee, soap, toilet paper, bottled drinking water and beer etc. But the next day, when we arrived at the homestay, we discovered it was much better equipped than during Tang Jun's last visit before COVID-19.



Some useful information for the Valley of Cats (VOC) area:

At the moment, the main VOC area has about 22 homestays, where family can accommodate tourists. Five of the homestays are in the east part of VOC area near Niandu Monastery. The rest are located in the west part of VOC area around Reqing Village at Angshai Township. When Tang Jun last visited - before COVID-19 - he stayed at Reqing Village. This time we stayed near Niandu Monastery.



To make a homestay reservation you can go through the official website (<https://www.valleyofthecats.org.cn>) managed by an NGO. But it is important to know that none of the families who run homestay speak any English. The homestay vehicles also vary greatly: most are 7-seat mini vans which are not in great condition or very suitable for a mammal tour.

The cost of staying in the VOC at the moment is Chinese CNY300/day per person for accommodation and food, and CNY1000/day for a max 4-person-group to cover the costs of local guide and homestay vehicle rental. Even if you bring your own vehicle(s) and interpreter you still need to pay this cost. The three of us travelled in our own vehicle and stayed 4N/5D. We paid the homestay about US\$1300/total.

If your group is larger than 4 people you would need to be split into two homestays. For example, 6 people travelling together to the VOC, would need to be split into two homestay, let's say 3 people into each homestay. But the NGO can try pick two homestays close to each other so you can travel together the next day.

The Mammalwatching

31 July After breakfast at the hotel, we drove 2.5 hours to meet our homestay guide - Cai Gai - from the Valley of Cats (VOC). Cai Gai is in his early 30's and actually lives in Yushu city with his wife and 4 kids. After filling up the tank at the last fuel station, we drove another half an hour (12km) to Cai Gai's homestay. The house has 4 bedrooms, one sitting room, one kitchen and a simple outside toilet. Frank and Gwen stay at the container accommodation provided by local committee, Tang Jun got a single bed room and Caigai's Family slept in the other bedrooms.





After settled into homestay we enjoyed a simple lunch cooked by Cai Gai's wife. And then we decided to drive to the main habitat of the cats to have a first look. As always in the VOC you never know! We saw a snow leopard following a flock of White-lipped Deer and it did a try but failed through the thermal camera. Time was passing and though we guessed the cat might try to hunt during the night it was now completely dark and we had to return home.



1 Aug Cai Gai's suggested we return to the area the next morning to see what had happened overnight. After we had breakfast (boiled eggs, milk tea, homemade bread, fruits) again made by Cai Gai's wife at 7am, we drove back to the same site but it looked quite quiet.

We scanned with our bins, telescopes and thermal camera for a long time. But it looked like there had not been a kill during the night. We checked another valley nearby but still nothing exciting. So we ate the packed lunch made by the homestay plus some of the food we had bought from Yushu, and we drove back to homestay and searched another nearby valley.





I forgot to mention one important information! Just before breakfast that morning we had taken a dawn walk in search of mammals and spotted a small cat in the thermal camera. We got the spotlight onto it and Gwen confirmed that it was a Chinese Mountain Cat which is - no doubt - a good report! Yes, Chinese Mountain Cat! Also a pair of Alpine Musk Deer.

2 Aug Our main targets at VOC were as many species of cats as possible. So today our most wanted was Lynx. Following the guidance of Cai Gai, we drove south into valley and made a big trip around the area to search many habitats of the Lynx. We did not see the Lynx but we saw many other quality and interesting things including Plateau Pika and Woolly Hares. We also enjoyed a picnic at a spot Gwen felt was romantic!



We got back to homestay quite late but Cai Gai's family were waiting us to have dinner together.

3 Aug Our homestay was located in the east part of the VOC area which has many good vallies for cats. But we knew the west part of the VOC is good too and so of course we also wanted to visit there. We needed to cover more ground to improve our chances for Lynx and other cats.

We decied to drive about 90km to the west part of VOC. But not more than 8km from our homestay, we had to stop for Brown Bears and Pallas's Cat.

One mother Brown Bear with 2 cubs were on a hillside on one side of the valley and another single adult Brown Bear on the other side by a small river. We watched a single Pallas's Cat hunting pikas in the fields for about half an hour though it was a little bit far from the roadside.

The Brown Bears and Pallas's Cat meant we were late arriving to Reqing Village in the west part of the VOC. We searched 4 vallies and did not see any cats. But we did see a range of nice mammals including Himalayan Marmot, Plateau Pika, Blue Sheep, White-lipped Deer, Alpine Musk Deer, Woolly Hare etc.



4 Aug According to our plan, today we would depart today from the VOC and travel toward to next destination. So we decided, first, to return to the valley where we saw Snow Leopard on our first evening just 28km from our homestay. We scanned the area by telescopes and the thermal camera for the whole morning but still no good news.



So we returned to the homestay for a farewell lunch with the family, took a team picture and said good-bye to the lovely family.

After a stop at a Tibetan Fox den where we enjoyed watching the two cubs playing at the entrance, we drove back to Yushu for a good hotel, meal and hot shower.



5 Aug After breakfast in the hotel, we drove north to the inner

Qinghai/Tibetan Plateau area and today's destination: Qumalai county some 4100m asl. About an hour from Yushu we had an excellent chance to see a Tibetan Fox succeed hunting a Plateau Pika right in front of us: simply unforgettable!



After that we saw several raptors, and visited a big horse racing festival along the way. These festivals are a common site in the Tibetan area each August and thousands of tents and horses gather in the grassland.

We continued to Qumalai county stopping along the way to see Argali and Pallas's Cat. Frank spotted a Pallas's Cat and we stayed with it until dusk. Luckily the hotel was only a 35km drive in the dark.

6 Aug In the morning we took a packed breakfast back to the site where we saw Pallas's Cat the day before and stayed until noon time. We did not see the Pallas's Cat again but along a side road into the valley we found a big flock of Argali which is not a common site in summer.





We returned to hotel to check out then continued our drive north to Xidatan Vallege. Along the way we saw lots of Kiang, Tibetan Antelope, Grey Wolf, Tibetan Fox and Tibetan Gazelle.



The Xidatan guesthouse - the accommodation available – it to be honest quite basic.

7 Aug We put bags into our car and departed at 6:00 am towards Wild Yak Valley, the entrance of which was 30km away. After an 80km drive we had good views of Wild Yaks but still no Lynx. We left the main road and drove into the valley for about 20km where we had to stop: with just a single vehicle it is a big risk to drive further. On our return we had good views of Wild Yak, Saker Falcon, Tibetan Fox and the beautiful landscape. We passed the famous check point and arrived at Golmud city. A good hotel and good meal tonight was a MUST!



8 Aug After a good breakfast at the hotel ,we departed a little later than planned and took a long journey of about 750km today, though along express roads all the way. We visited a site to see Przewalski's Gazelle and we were supposed to stay at in nearby Gangcha county in a good hotel. But we were refused permission: none of hotels in the town had permits to take foreigners. So we have to drive another 60km to Kor Kor Lake: an international tourism area. We found a lake view hotel which was very good.



9 Aug We decided to start early and drive to nearby Tianjun county for breakfast. After that we drove into the mountains in search of mammals following information provided to us by a local wildlife lover. But we did not see that many and returned to the main road to drive toward to Dulan County.

After a good lunch at Chaka, now a quite popular tourist destination, we searched the Gebi area for Goitered Gazelle and after some effort we succeeded in seeing 3 of them. Finally we arrived Xiangride Town and checked into a good hotel where we stayed for 4 nights to explore the Gouli Valley area.

Some useful information of Gouli Valley area.

The areas include 4-5 vallies and all have good habitat with possibilities of Snow Leopard, Lynx, Pallas's Cat, Brown Bear, Kiang, Blue Sheep, Grey Wolf, Tibetan Fox, Red Fox, Tibetan Gazelle, Wooly Hare, Red Deer etc. Tang Jun had visited here a few times during the COVID-19 period and thought it was an excellent site for cats and other mammals and also birds.



If you do not worry too much about basic accommodation and food, we can stay inside the valley where a ranger's station can take about 15 people at the same time in several rooms. But there is no private toilet or hot showers. The ranger – Mr Roubao - is married to a woman who can prepare meals for the visitors. If you would prefer to combine a good hotel & food with good mammals, but not care about an extra two hours' drive each day, you can stay at a good hotel 60km away in Xiangride Town.



10 Aug We visited Gouli for the first time. Right as we arrived in the Gouli area, a gorgeous rainbow appeared in the sky which meant an excellent stay in the Gouli area was likely!



We met the local ranger Roubao who was leading another tour with 3 cars full of Chinese photographers. We travelled together in the morning and we explored

another valley where we saw a wolf hunting a Himalayan Marmot.

11 Aug We returned to Gouli and searched a valley with a high possibility of Lynx. But we still could not get it. We drove to another valley and accidentally saw a Pallas's Cat running along a hillside. We thought there must be a den somewhere close by. But it was noon and very sunny so we planned to come back in the late afternoon to double check.



We drove around for other mammals in the same valley and saw another Pallas's Cat at a higher altitude who hunted Pikas but was distant. We got back to the area where the first Pallas's Cat had disappeared at noon and set up a simple hide to wait. Gosh, after just 20 minutes the Pallas's Cat



came out from a hole and moved around slowly to look for a Pika less than 20 meters in front of us! We were very happy that day!



12 Aug Following the suggestion of Ranger Roubao - and as we still needed to see Lynx - we tried another valley which was a little beyond the main area. It looked like very good Lynx habitat and many many Wooly Hares. But we spent the whole day and checked the key area 6 times. But still no success on LYNX!

13 Aug We decided to check out from our good town hotel and move to the ranger station for one night without a hot shower. On the way we drove into a side valley for Lynx and had about 30 seconds of a Snow Leopard walked across the mountain sky line.



After put our stuff in the ranger station, we explored another valley for mammal watching. In the later afternoon. On our way back to ranger station we got a message from Roubao and join a 10-minute-film of a Snow Leopard catching a Himalayan Marmot. That night we enjoyed the time with other 12 Chinese wildlife photographers at the station.



14 Aug The next morning, we searched the area by ourselves in the morning but still no luck on the Lynx. We had to admit defeat, and we drove about 300km along the express-way to Maqin city where we enjoyed a good hotel on our way to Ruergai at Sichuan.

15 Aug Today was a long driving day for 500km. We arrived Ruergai in the evening and took a night drive to look for Chinese Mountain



Cat. But because of all the highway and railway construction in the area we saw almost nothing during the night.



16 Aug We spent the whole day around Ruergai. Although the site is not as good as it used to be we saw some nice mammals including Sika Deer which showed very well. We tried Gansu Pike in the forest, but it appeared not to be present that day.

17 Aug As Ruergai was not living up to our hopes, we decide to visit a site named Pingwu where it is possible to see Sichuan Snub-nosed Monkeys. That night we stayed at local farmer's 5-star-homestay with fresh local agriculture products, plus very pleasant weather and temperatures. We had an excellent night chatting with the interesting local people.

18 Aug Because the monkey site is still not well known, we spent the morning with about 30 monkeys and no other visitors.. After that we drove back the 6 hours to Chengdu where I said good-bye to Frank & Gwen and they flew back to Netherlands in the next day.



Mammals list (25 species):

Snow Leopard 3 times and 3 individuals;

Pallas's Cat 4 times and 4 individuals;

Chinese Mountain Cat 1 time and 1 individual;

Brown Bear 1 time and 4 individuals;

Sichuan Snub-nosed Monkey 1 time and 30 individuals;

Grey Wolf 4 times and 11 individuals;

Tibetan Antelope 2 times and many individuals;

Argali 2 time and many individuals;

Wild Yak 2 times and many individuals;

Tibetan Fox 7 times and 10 individuals;

Other species were Woolly Hare; Red Fox; Red Deer; Himalayan Marmot; Plateau Pika; Golver's Pika; Kiang; White-lipped Deer; Tibetan Gazelle; Goitered Gazelle; Przewalski's Gazelle; Blue Sheep; Alpine Mush Deer; Rock Squirrel; Sika Deer;

*** All photos by @ [TangJun](#) during the trip by Canon 500mm and Cell Phone + Telescope