



Manul of Mongolia Photo Tour 2023 – Trip Summary

Saturday July 15<sup>th</sup> - Sunday July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023

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



## Highlights of the Trip

*Manul:* We photographed sixteen different manul in the steppes of eastern Mongolia. This included mothers and kittens. Sightings averaged sixty minutes per cat, at an avg distance of fifteen yards. Our best sighting were three kittens hunting just a few meters away.



*Corsac Fox:* Though we saw way fewer corsac foxes than last year, but we were still happy with the eight we saw this year.



*Steppe Eagle:* We found the nest site of a Steppe Eagle, which was incredible to see. Though we stayed back from the nest, we observed the parents flying near it quite a lot.



### *Manul of Mongolia Photo Tour Itinerary*

Day 1: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar. Overnight in Ulaanbaatar.

Day 2: Morning departure to field site. Presentation on manul. Dinner at camp.

Day 3-8: Manul 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: Everyone landed in Ulaanbaatar, the capitol of Mongolia, where we settled into the hotel for the night, after a fun dinner out.

Day 2: The nine-hour drive to eastern Mongolia was a bit more eventful than it should have been, as the rental SUV overheated (this was a nightmare to deal with for the next two months -- never rent from Sixt in Mongolia). We limped into camp, keeping a close eye on the engine heat indicator, and immediately arranged an alternative SUV from a friend. I write this here publicly, because again, my advise would be to find a rental vehicle from a different company if you plan on going there by yourself.

The drive to eastern Mongolia, though long, is beautiful as you drive through uninterrupted steppe, dotted with herds of horses, sheep, and goats. It is completely freeing driving through that landscape. Despite our engine problems making our journey more difficult, we saw a large herd of Mongolian gazelle (the largest we have seen to date) and even saw our first manul close to camp!

As usual, we loved coming to camp, which is made up of six traditional gers (yurts). Seeing the same staff made for happy, re-uniting hugs and conversations. After our delicious Mongolian dinner, we went to bed, ready for the morning.

Day 3-8: Days would start at 5:00am in time to find wildlife in good photography light, at sunrise. The first few mornings we focused on finding steppe wildlife that were not manul, like corsac fox, gazelle, saker falcons, steppe eagles, and little owls. We were successful not only in finding all of them, but had nice photo opportunities with all of them.



Mornings five through eight, as well as every afternoon session was solely focused on spending quality time observing and photographing manul. This was a particularly good year for kittens and we saw five different litters during the tour. We spent most of our time with a litter of three kittens that were a bit older, around eight weeks old. During our time with the cats, we observed kittens at their den, playing and waiting for mom, we watched kittens hunting voles successfully at eight weeks old, and even saw mom moving dens with her kittens at one point. My personal highlight for sure was spending time with the hunting manul kittens. Observing their deadly hunting techniques while so cautiously moving through the short vegetation was so fun. Most hunts we watched were successful, which was incredible to see! Below are some photos of all the manul highlights from the trip.



*Eight-week-old manul kitten licking Its lips after feeding on a vole.*



*Eight-week-old manul kitten on rock, waiting for mom to come back to the den.*



*Six-week-old manul kittens playing on rocks at den.*



*Eight-week-old manul kitten with vole prey.*



*Eight-week-old manul kitten wet after some morning rain. They are so darn cute!*

Day 9: We departed for Ulaanbaatar at sunrise, looking for wildlife along the way. We saw some demoiselle cranes, as well as other wildlife we had seen before, but the highlight for sure was seeing a Eurasian Badger run across the road!

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>
Eurasian Badger	<i>Meles meles</i>
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>
Mongolian Hamster	<i>Allocricetulus curtatus</i>
Brandt's Vole	<i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i>

*Birds*

Demoiselle Crane

Cinereous Vulture

Steppe Eagle

Upland Buzzard

Little Owl

Eurasian Hoopoe

Eurasian Kestrel

Saker Falcon

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

*Anthropoides virgo*

*Aegypius monachus*

*Aquila nipalensis*

*Buteo hemilasius*

*Athene noctua*

*Upupa epops*

*Falco tinnunculus*

*Falco cherrug*

*Passer montanus*

