

China, October/November, 2023.



With what turned out in hindsight to be terrible timing, in January, 2020, I booked a trip to China for June of that year. Needless to say, that trip didn't happen, so when China reopened to foreign tourists earlier this year I quickly contacted Sid Francis to see if we could reschedule the trip. Sid, well known to many readers on this site, is in high demand as a guide but fortunately we were able to secure his guiding services for a fall trip and so Tracey and I headed off to Chengdu on October 20, 2023, for a three week visit.

The flights via Hong Kong were uneventful and we landed about 10:00 pm on the night of October 21 in the new Tianfu airport in Chengdu. In keeping with the "bigger is better" attitude prevalent in Chinese infrastructure projects, the new airport is gigantic and currently significantly underutilized. There were few other flights arriving that evening so passage through immigration and customs was quick and straightforward. China has dispensed with any COVID-19 related checks. In fact, no one in the country seems to mention it as having been a thing. You merely answer a couple of questions about respiratory symptoms on a touchscreen and receive a printed card to show to immigration.

We wandered through the cavernous halls looking for the shuttle bus to the Holiday Inn Express. Someone with a translation app on their phone conveyed to us that the bus would arrive outside of door 12. Of course door 12 was locked but after many gesticulated exchanges with random strangers we eventually understood one could go through door 14 and then walk back to where door 12 would exit and, sure enough, a bus arrived, a bit to our surprise. Although described as being in the Tianfu airport

zone, the Holiday Inn is actually a sizable distance away. The most memorable feature of the hotel was a buffet breakfast which encompassed virtually everything one could expect in a North American buffet breakfast in addition to a wide selection of Chinese options, from noodles to stir fries. The coffee was incredibly strong but there was no tea, a pattern which repeated itself consistently in China. At least at breakfast, the old expression “all the tea in China” appears to refer to a virtually non-existent quantity.

Sid arrived as promised at 8:00 and we headed west to the region of Baoxing in Giant Panda National Park. We stopped for lunch at a small hole-in-the-wall restaurant which had fantastic food. The bill for a plentiful lunch came to a total of about seven dollars US for the three of us.

The first mammal of the trip appeared in the form of a troop of Tibetan Macaques on the road. We stopped for a number of pictures, worried we might not see Tibetan macaques at this close a range elsewhere in the trip. This was a needless worry. In several places, it was difficult to avoid taking pictures of Tibetan macaques without their breath fogging up the camera lens.

We arrived at the hotel about 2:00 pm, checked into cozy wood-paneled rooms and then headed down a narrow but paved road into the park. Just inside the park, Sid spotted a Red Panda eating berries in a tree by the roadside. It appeared quite relaxed, possibly due to the berries fermenting at this time of year. We hiked in to an observation point on a hillside looking into the forest-clad hills full of bamboo. I got excited by a couple of white and dark dots in the distance, but these turned out to be just patches of light. We left at dusk and saw another Red Panda on the drive out, again in trees by the roadside. On the way back to the hotel we spotlighted and saw our first Chinese Goral on a hillside. The restaurant was closed by the time we made it back to the hotel, likely because there was only one other guest at the hotel, but Sid cooked up fried egg and chips on his hotplate. We went to back up the road for a short night drive and saw a Tufted Deer in the forest by the side of the road, as well as a cat which was likely domestic.











We arose early, Sid prepared grilled cheese sandwiches and we left for the park by about 6:00 am. We had a quick look at a Mainland Leopard Cat with a rodent in its mouth crossing the road and then walked into the park just as the sun was rising. Stationed at the same lookout as yesterday, Sid picked up two Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys in trees high on a distant ridge. We stayed until 1:00 pm and then headed back to the hotel to pack and move on to Labahe. On the way back down to the hotel we saw two additional Red Pandas and one Tufted Deer.

We arrived at Labahe about 6:00 pm, passing Tibetan Macaques near the entrance to the park. We checked into our rooms and then went for dinner at the hotel dining room. Just outside the dining room windows is a mineral lick which attracted a number of Sambar Deer. On the brief drive back to our rooms, we had a brief sighting of a Eurasian Wildcat, promptly followed by another Mainland Leopard Cat. We headed out on a night drive about 8:30, seeing more Sambar and Chinese Goral. A short way down the road we noticed multiple pairs of eyeshine reflecting off a rock cliff. These turned out to be Red-and-White Giant Flying Squirrels, of which there were five on the rock face. Never having seen a flying squirrel on a cliff face rather than in forest I was surprised, but Sid assured me that they are commonly seen here. Our next flying squirrel presented something of a taxonomic mystery. Smaller than the Red-and-White Flying Squirrels, it had a grey head and appeared to be significantly smaller. This

was previously treated as a subspecies of Spotted Giant Flying Squirrel, but this species has now been split and the squirrel here is most likely Chindwin Giant Flying Squirrel, which is either a species on its own or, less likely, a subspecies of Grey-headed Giant Flying Squirrel. I was hoping to get a better look and opportunity for photos but unfortunately this was the only specimen we saw the entire trip. Our next sighting was a Northern Hog Badger running across the road and then two species of bats roosting in a road tunnel. One of these appeared to be Sichuan Myotis and the other, a Greater Japanese Horseshoe Bat. A little while further down the road we had a sighting at close range of a White-maned Serow under a bridge. Together with yet more Sambar and Chinese Gorals this capped off a gloriously productive night.







In the morning I checked the few Sherman live traps I had placed close to our rooms and was gratified to find two Chinese Mole Shrews and a Chevrier's Field Mouse. After a buffet breakfast we caught the 9 o'clock bus going up the mountain. Private vehicles are no longer allowed to drive up independently unless one has some serious Guangxi. We saw several Lady Amherst's Pheasants beside the road on the drive. There was a fair bit of mist at the parking area on the mountain but we were able to have a good look at a Red Panda eating berries in a tree just beside the parking lot. The walk down the mountain was enlivened by magpies, wagtails and several species of laughingthrushes. We had a brief sighting of a Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel, which ran across the road and then paused in some small trees for a couple of photographs. We headed off the main road onto a small gravel road near a zip line to find the whole area swarming with Tibetan Macaques. These macaques have discovered that aggressively grabbing people is an effective technique for parting them from their lunches, with the result that we had to constantly threaten them with sticks or stones to leave us alone, a bit of a conflicted situation for a wildlife enthusiast. We walked along a metal boardwalk which provides a great vantage point both of the mountainside and surrounding forest. Sid has found Giant Panda scat on this boardwalk in the past, but we were unlucky in this regard, although I understand that some people might think that not having to pick their way through scat on a boardwalk would be the preferable option. We found a spot with benches for lunch and noticed a Sichuan Takin resting on the far side of the hill. Shortly afterwards, another aggressive troop of Tibetan macaques showed up. Sid threw them a piece of bread hoping that this would appease them, which worked as well as appeasement generally does and kept them coming closer. They followed us for quite a distance, which doesn't do wonders for one's ability to carefully and patiently scan the surrounding hillsides for Giant Pandas. We eventually made it back onto the road and were picked up by one of the shuttle buses continuing down the hill. After a tasty supper we headed out for a night drive a bit earlier than the previous night. The drive was drier but with fewer animals than the previous night. We saw Chinese Goral, Sambar, Red-and-white Flying Squirrels and couple of bats under the highway bridge again. We did find another Northern Hog Badger by the side of the road in a good position for photos but unfortunately I managed to get tangled up in the cord of the spotlight as I was getting out of the vehicle, creating such a disturbance the hog badger wisely took off. Driving along the river we saw several Sambar and then a Forest Musk Deer which bounded up the hillside with its characteristic gait. Back at the hotel we had our first view of a (Himalayan) Masked Palm Civet. At one point that night we heard some banging on the roof which Tracey initially thought might be children. We discussed the likelihood of Chinese children playing on the roof of a forest hotel in the middle of the night and so were not too surprised when the source of the noise turned out to be Tibetan Macaques instead.





We again took the bus up the mountain the next morning and hiked down. We also took a short drive down the road to a spot where someone had built a small hotel. There were several Red Deer which apparently were descendants from some introduced domestic Red Deer. We saw three Pallas's squirrel although not the Perry's Long-nosed Squirrels we were seeking. After finishing a dinner of noodles at a stall just across from our rooms, one of the bus drivers came by and invited us to join him and a friend on a walk. We hiked down the entrance road, seeing a number of Sambar and Goral. Sid then picked us up and we spent a couple of hours driving but didn't see any new mammal species for the night.





On our way out of the park the following morning we again stopped to look for Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel without success and then started the long climbing drive up to the Tibetan plateau. Although the mammal watching was limited, there were plenty of opportunities for accident spotting, as was the case on a number of roads in China. We halted for lunch about 2:00 pm in the town of Baumei for delicious Szechuan food and my first introduction to Szechuan peppers. For those not familiar, these peppers, as well as providing some heat, also make one's tongue and lips tingly and numb, which is a bit of an acquired taste/sensation. The lunch of chicken and peanuts, peppers in a salty sauce and pork and vegetables came to a total of 108 yuan for the three of us, outstanding value indeed. About 5:30 we travelled through a high pass and found our first Plateau/Black-lipped pikas. The sky gradually cleared and we arrived in Ganzi about 7:00 pm at a large ornate hotel. Supper consisted of cheese sandwiches which Sid toasted on his portable hotplate.

Ganzi is situated at 3400 m elevation compared to our hotel the previous night at about 1900 m. Consequently I found myself waking up every couple of hours during the night feeling a bit short of breath. After yet another extensive breakfast buffet we set off under a clear sky. We checked a couple of spots where Sid had previously seen Large-eared Pika but were not successful in finding any. We did see more Lammergeiers than I've seen in the rest of my life put together. Sid's brother-in-law, who was guiding another group, called that morning to report that they'd seen a Eurasian Lynx near Serxu so we decided to stay in that area for the night. We turned off the main highway and saw our first Tibetan

Gazelles, a group of 10 animals accompanied by a Tibetan Fox. As we drove further a police officer pulled up alongside us. I assume someone had tipped him off that there were foreigners in the area poking around with cameras and binoculars. The police officer thawed noticeably when Sid showed him our documentation, hotel reservation, etc. As well as several more Tibetan Foxes we also saw a couple of Red Foxes as we headed to the spot where the lynx had been seen this morning. We saw three Woolly Hares as well as five more Tibetan Foxes and another Red Fox but no sign of the Lynx. After dusk we headed back to Serxu to a friendly hotel with one of my favourite Tibetan accessories, electric blanket warmers.







We were up at five the next morning, had a quick breakfast of toasted egg sandwiches courtesy of Sid and then were on the road by 6:15 or so. We saw two Tibetan Gazelles, one Red Fox and one Tibetan Fox as we made our way back to the spot where we had been searching the previous night. It was one of the coldest mornings of the trip, the thermometer registering  $-9^{\circ}\text{C}$  initially. We scanned unsuccessfully for a couple of hours and then headed back to the area where we had been driving the previous day. We had a nice sighting of a Tibetan Wolf looking down at us from above the road. After returning to Serxu we drove five km out of town to a rocky escarpment where Pallas's Cat had been seen. Two Eurasian Eagle Owls were present at the site but unfortunately no cats. As we were close to Yushu, and our hotel for the night, we took a detour down a dirt road where we spotted a Tibetan Fox and then our first group of Kiang as well as a few Tibetan Gazelles. We had a nice view of several Black-necked Cranes and, in the snow by the side of the road, tracks of a Tibetan Blue Bear were clearly visible. Back on the main road we crossed over a high pass into Qinghai and then drove down a road that dropped quickly in elevation, the temperature rising from  $0$  to  $7^{\circ}\text{C}$  over the course of a few kilometres. We arrived in Yushu at dusk and headed to the Se Xu hotel, one of my favourite hotel names of the entire trip.



Thanks to the lower elevation of Yushu we awoke well-rested and headed south through gorgeous scenery. We saw Red Fox and a couple of Tibetan Gazelles in the grasslands and then turned off into a narrow valley. We saw our first group of Bharal/Blue Sheep and then further along the road, Sid spotted a large McNeill's Deer stag in amongst some shrubs. We drove back to the highway and continued to a turnoff to a nunnery, scanning the cliffs for pikas. We stopped just before the nunnery and observed a couple of groups of Blue Sheep, one of which had about 40 individuals and the other 20 or so. We ate instant noodles and bread while observing the numerous birds of prey circling in the sky. After lunch we drove further up the gorge, passing through significant snow on the road until we came out on a high grassland area where we observed a couple of additional groups of Blue Sheep and a small group of four Tibetan Gazelles lower down the valley. We then headed back to the highway to return to Yushu, scanning the cliffs as we went. We eventually had a quick look at a Glover's Pika on a cliff face and then, driving a little further, we had a prolonged view of a much more obliging individual. We saw a further group of four Blue Sheep on the way back to Yushu, from where we continued on to Zhidoi. On the way we crossed over the highest pass yet, at 4830 m, and went through a huge colony of Plateau Pika. We arrived in Zhidoi about 7:50 pm but had to wait for the police before we could check in. They arrived about 9:10, the contingent consisting of a young attractive female police chief and a couple of constables. We were given two forms each to complete and pictures were taken of all pages in our passports. Just in time I noticed that a hotel staff member was copying down the details from my Cote d'Ivoire visa rather than my Chinese one, which I'm sure would've resulted in numerous bureaucratic snafus had I not noticed it in time. We got up to our rooms to be greeted by the distinct smell of cigarette smoke. I headed down to Sid's room for a grilled cheese sandwich and noticed that his room didn't smell of smoke, then made the mistake of mentioning this to Tracey who suggested that we too could perhaps find a room not smelling of smoke. I went down to the front desk to harass the front desk



guy who showed us to another heavily smoked-in room and finally to one that smelled only slightly, into which we promptly moved.



The next morning we were up at 6:30 and popped in to a small restaurant around the corner from the hotel for fresh steamed meat buns and hot water in lieu of tea. We headed out to a known productive Snow Leopard site about an hour away, seeing Tibetan Gazelles, lots of Blue Sheep and a few foxes along the way. When we arrived at the scanning spot we heard what Sid assured us was the cough of Snow Leopard, followed by alarm calls from Tibetan Snowcock, but we didn't see the Snow Leopard itself. We did see a large White-lipped Deer stag in a sheltered spot. After scanning for several hours we drove to a site which had held Pallas's Cat during the summer but, in keeping with our general theme of a feline-free day, none were seen. We headed back to the Snow Leopard site for further scanning and then decided to head to town, passing a number of White-lipped Deer, Blue Sheep, Tibetan Gazelles, Plateau Pikas and both species of fox. At one point a McNeill's Deer ran in front of the car, a species which Sid had not previously seen in this area. Back in town we bought some fruit and then headed the other way out of town for a few minutes. We stopped and scanned the hillside and saw a group of seven Argali. We spent the next hour or so driving down a dirt road paralleling a sizable stream but saw little of note before heading back to Zhidoi for yet another delicious meal, hot and sour eggplant, a beef dish and spicy broccoli. Sid and I did a night drive down the same road seeing several Red Fox, Tibetan Fox, White-lipped Deer and the strange looking pale bum of an animal as it disappeared over a little hillock.





In part due to the breathlessness of the altitude we awoke early again the following morning. The power went out while I was having a shower, resulting in perhaps the quickest shower of my life. We picked up steamed buns and drove back to the Snow Leopard site, seeing the same mammal species as the previous day along the way. After scanning for a couple of hours we headed back down the road to the location of a group of Spaniards who were being guided by Sid's brother-in-law. We reached them about 12:00, only to be told they'd seen a Snow Leopard about 15 minutes earlier. Arghhhh. We stopped and watched for a while, seeing lots of Blue Sheep but no Snow Leopard, then drove to another site, a hillside backed by steep cliffs with a large colony of Plateau Pikas, where we saw several Blyth's Mountain Voles and a Tibetan Fox. About 4:00 we drove back to the initial Snow Leopard site for a couple of further hours of scanning, then headed back to the hotel at dusk. Likely because of the combination of altitude and staring through binoculars all day in the high-altitude glare, I felt nauseous. The decor of the dining room, displaying numerous types of raw meat from unidentifiable parts of unidentifiable species did not help. I returned to the room for noodles and mandarin oranges while Tracey and Sid braved the dining room.







After our now standard steamed dumpling breakfast, we headed to Qumerlai and then onto the Kekexili. We saw a number of Kiang, Tibetan Fox, Tibetan Gazelle and several Wolves before coming across our first few groups of Chiru/Tibetan Antelope and then our first Wild Yak. The Wild Yak bulls descend to this area from a protected area to the north to meet with domestic Yak cows, saving the herders the necessity of having bull Yak of their own. Interestingly domestic Yak which we saw around here appeared to be noticeably larger than the ones we had been seeing previously. We stopped for a lunch of noodles and meat in Budongquan. Sid's description of the hotel in the village made me curious to see it, but I had to content myself with visiting the nastiest toilets in China instead. Afterwards we came across our first group of male Chiru, although at a distance not conducive to reasonable photos. We had a good look at a Wolf which was apparently trying to cross the road to scavenge from a little restaurant and was tolerant enough of people to allow for photos, did a short drive into Wild Yak Valley and then continued on to Ge'ermu. This road is the main highway from Xining to Lhasa so the police checkpoint was the busiest of any we encountered, occasioning a half-hour wait. We arrived in Ge'ermu about 8:00 pm and headed to the Vienna hotel and a dinner of fried eggs and toast.











After an unplanned sleep-in in the morning we had a buffet breakfast, packed up and left about 9 o'clock. We drove down the toll road to Dulan which was virtually empty of traffic, as were most of the toll roads we took in China. Dulan may be the largest town in China without a readily apparent public washroom so I had to relieve myself behind one of the six trees to be found in the city centre. Of course after lunch, walking another few blocks we found a nice public washroom of which Tracey was deeply appreciative. The afternoon drive heading to Chaka was off the expressway which allowed us to stop and scan hilltops for Gansu Red Deer. Unfortunately we didn't see any but eventually came out upon a plain where we saw four Kiang and three Yarkand/Goitered Gazelles. The next plain held about 20 gazelles. We drove over a pass and then down to Chaka. Chaka has a surprising number of large hotels which are apparently busy during Golden Week and virtually deserted the rest of the time. We stayed at the Home-Inn Plus for the bargain price of 121.5 yuan per room with a view out over the salt lake. After



having grilled cheese sandwiches and beer for dinner we headed out about 8:15 to look for jerboas. The three of us drove around fruitlessly for a while before it dawned on us that we hadn't checked when the jerboas in this area might be likely to hibernate. Clearly they were in hibernation now and we saw only one Woolly Hare during the entire drive. On the way back we were stopped by the traffic police, which worried me a little as I'm not sure our story of driving around to look at jerboas which clearly weren't viewable at this time of year would have made much sense to them or, really, to anyone, but they seemed quite anxious as to what to do with the foreigners and quickly waved us through.

The next morning we had a hearty porridge breakfast and left about 7:30, heading towards Rubber Mountain and stopping to scan for Gansu Red Deer. Finally on the far side of the mountain we saw 13 of them on a distant hillside. We continued on to Qinghai Lake. To reassure us in we were in the right spot there was a bizarrely garish Gazelle Hotel with towers and mushroom-shaped pods. Past the hotel we turned down a minor side road and started seeing several small groups of Przewalski's Gazelles. It was a bit of an incongruous setting for one of the world's rarest mammals, consisting of industrial-looking buildings scattered randomly around the landscape. I hopped out of the vehicle at one point hoping for a photo that didn't show buildings and electricity poles but was unable to get close enough for a decent shot and only managed to disturb a Woolly Hare.



We then got back on the motorway for a long drive through Xining which, at least from the highway, consisted of endless rows of seemingly empty apartment buildings. We also passed through a town of empty Stalinist-style government buildings before dropping significantly in altitude as we came off the Tibetan plateau. We arrived in Hezu about 7:30 pm and headed to the Taoyouan Plaza Hotel. This was another exceptionally good value hotel at 195 yuan per room per night including free sex aids in a dispenser on the desk. The town was brightly lit up at night and dinner was fantastic - breaded eggplant, chicken with peanuts and green peppers and tofu and a spicy sauce. Returning to the hotel we found a complementary fruit and snack basket in the room, sealing its spot as one of my favourite hotels of the trip. That, and the fact that thanks to the lower altitude I could breathe normally and my lips were no longer as dry as an iguana's.

I woke the next morning for a gloriously hot shower although, in another curious Chinese bathroom quirk, there was no shower door and the whole bathroom turned into an interesting water feature. We left about 9:00 and drove up onto the Tibetan plateau again, at one point driving down a side road to a beautiful lookout called the Zasage scenic spot with abundant Blue Sheep visible on a distant ridge. The trail there culminates with a pagoda surmounted with prayer flags. It seemed a spot heavy with religious history until Sid remarked that this pagoda hadn't been present when he had last visited one month earlier. We reached Ruergai about 3:00 in the afternoon, had lunch and a nap, and then planned to head out about 6:00 pm. By this time it was snowing heavily, to the point we would not have been able to see anything, including possibly the road, so we hung out for another hour and a half. The snow eased up and we headed back to the Zasage scenic spot road. Driving along the road we saw at least a dozen Tibetan Foxes, a couple of Red Foxes and then a Chinese Mountain Cat crouched in the field. A little further, we spotted an Asian Badger being followed by a Red Fox and then a couple of groups of Eurasian Wild Pig. After reaching the highest point of the road and starting to descend through a beautiful wooded valley, we saw two Siberian Roe Deer in the brush and then saw what at first appeared to be a mysterious shape hanging on the cliff until it resolved into an Alpine Musk Deer perched on a ledge on a steep slope. We saw a couple of Chinese Gorals and later, in the forest, came across two flying squirrels. Sid informed us that someone had conducted a survey here and found only Northern Chinese Flying Squirrels although I felt Chinese Giant Flying Squirrel might also be a possibility. On the drive back we saw a couple of Tibetan Gazelles and had another look at the Asian Badger, several more foxes and one possible wolf. We were back at the hotel about 1:30 am.





After what seemed like only a few minutes of sleep we were up at 5:00 and back on the road at 5:30. We drove back down the highway to a turnoff where Pallas's Cat had been seen in the past. Unfortunately, many of the quarries where they were previously findable have now been filled in with dirt as an ecological restoration project, a bit of a baffling one to my mind. We did see four Tibetan Foxes, several Tibetan Gazelle and numerous Plateau Pikas which started to emerge about 7:15 am. Entertainment was provided by some White-rumped Snow Finches squabbling with each other with a tenacity I had only previously experienced with my siblings. We drove back down the road to the now familiar Zasage scenic spot. On the road into the area we saw lots of vultures and other raptors and an occasional Tibetan Gazelle, but few other mammals. We went back to the hotel about noon for Sid's special omelette with onions, tomatoes and mushrooms and a nap before heading out at 3:00 pm on the road to Baxi in the other direction. This led through a nice forested area where we went for a walk and almost immediately saw a Tufted Deer and then a couple of Thomas's Pikas, seen briefly before they scuttled into their burrows at the base of tree roots. We drove back to Ruoergai for dinner and afterwards headed out again down the road to Zasage. Almost immediately after turning off the highway, we had a brief look at a Steppe Polecat running on the right side of the road. Other sightings included 17 foxes, mostly Tibetan ones, one Wild Pig, one Asian Badger, three Chinese Mountain Cats, a few Tibetan Gazelles and 5 to 6 Woolly Hares. We were back at the hotel before 11:30 pm, at which point the temperature was about -6°C, although it felt much colder driving along with the car windows down.

The following day we headed down some new roads, seeing a number of Plateau Pikas and a couple of Tibetan Foxes. At one spot we saw a flock of what must be a significant proportion of the global population of Black-necked Cranes. The most entertaining sighting was a truck trying to weave its way between anti-vehicle barriers on an extremely narrow road, getting stuck and then being faced with the even more laborious task of backing up. On that note, this trip report could have been filled with as many sightings of accidents as mammals, including vehicles overturned on the side of the road, a vehicle that had just struck a yak, an upside-down transport truck and so on. Driving in China is not for the faint of heart.

After dinner back in town we tried the road to Zasage yet again, seeing Tibetan Gazelles, many foxes, five or so Woolly Hares and three Chinese Mountain Cats. The highlight was the sighting of a Stone Marten on a rocky outcrop shortly before we turned around for the night and started heading back down the access road. We saw two Wolves and a Eurasian Wild Pig as well as a nice sighting of an eagle owl.

After a somewhat longer night's rest we picked up some lovely meat buns with chili sauce and headed to Baxi, scanning for Sika Deer. We saw no Sika Deer but had a brief glimpse of a Siberian Roe Deer on a hillside. After driving through herds of domestic sheep and yak we then passed through the Huanglong Nature Reserve near Jiuzhaigou National Park on a rough but incredibly scenic road replete with stunning mountain views. We had a lunch of double-fried pork and green peppers in soy sauce in a small village about 50 km from Pingwu and then drove to the nearby site with habituated Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys. After climbing up an elaborate walkway we came upon a troop of greater than 30 monkeys which we essentially had to ourselves for an hour or so. Shortly after leaving, we came to a spot in the road that was blocked because of construction and would not be open for a couple of hours. We were directed to an alternate route and managed to get fairly lost, resulting in a stunningly scenic drive up and over a mountain. We eventually made it to Pingwu where we stocked up on gas and snacks and, after a couple of missteps, found the motorway to Qingqi. We arrived at the Tangjiahe Reserve about 8:00 pm. Driving in to the hotel deep in the reserve we saw at least 15 or 20 Takins, Reeve's Muntjacs, one Wild Pig, one Northern Hog Badger and a Confucian Niviventer. The Tangjiahe hotel feels over-the-top for the surroundings but certainly has comfortable rooms. I went for a short walk and got close looks at a couple of Takins near the hotel.













The next morning we were up at five and on the road shortly thereafter. A Mainland Leopard Cat was seen running across the road followed by sightings of Wild Pig and multiple Takins. A large black blob on the other side of the river turned out to be an Asiatic Black Bear, likely feeding on fallen acorns and other nuts. The bear did a remarkably good job of keeping his head hidden behind some green leaves with the unfortunate result that it would be hard to tell from my photographs if the subject were a bear, a yak or a yeti. Additional mammals seen on the drive included many Reeve's Muntjacs, a Masked Palm Civet which ran across the road, Chinese Goral and a bat which remains unidentified. We arrived back at the hotel about 7:30 for breakfast and saw several Red-billed Blue Magpies around the grounds. After breakfast we took a walk by the river and found a couple of Pere David's Rock Squirrels before driving down the entrance road, a drive which provided sightings of further Takins, Reeve's Muntjacs, and Tibetan macaques. We hiked up a ridge to scan for bears, discussing Sid's grim story of father and son yak herders who had encountered a Takin on a narrow mountain path and been charged by it, resulting in both father and son falling to their deaths. To my mind, that meant the odds of us also being charged by a Takin and falling to our deaths was now reduced to essentially zero, but perhaps not everyone interpreted the statistics in the same way.





After lunch we did a brief hike and then drove down the entrance road and back. The only new mammal was Rhesus Macaque, two of which were found near to the park entrance. After supper I set out some traps and then we did a late night drive on which we saw only previously-seen species apart from a bat on a rock face close to the road.





Our drive the next morning didn't reveal any new species, but, by way of compensation, four out of five traps contained mammals – 2 extremely smelly Chevriér's Field Mice, 1 Confucian Niviventer and a Chinese Birch Mouse. Our walks and drives later in the day revealed only previously-seen species. The most interesting sightings were of a Wild Pig feeding on a dead goral and a Masked Palm Civet feeding on a dead pig by the side of the road.









We left the next day, seeing the now familiar species on the way out of the reserve. This was the end of the wildlife section of the trip as we headed to Xi'an to see the terracotta warriors. We parted with Sid in Guangyuan to catch a high-speed train to Xi'an. Although one often reads about the Chinese investment in infrastructure, to see it in action is incredible. The train between Chengdu and Xi'an takes less than four hours to cover about 900 km, with departures every 10 to 12 minutes throughout the day.

In all, we had a great trip. The food was delicious, the wildlife profuse, and the scenery breath-taking. Late October and early November was cold on the Tibetan Plateau, but seeing the fall colours in Labahe and Tangjiahe more than compensated. Many thanks to Sid for his guiding and to John Wright for his brilliant trip report which inspired us to follow in his footsteps. I'm making plans to return.

Ian Thompson

Victoria, BC

List of mammals seen:

1. Tibetan Macaque – *Macaca thibetana*
2. Rhesus Macaque – *Macaca mulatta*
3. Golden Snub-nosed Monkey – *Rhinopithecus roxellana*
4. Plateau Pika – *Ochotona curzoniae*
5. Glover's Pika – *Ochotona gloveri*
6. Thomas's Pika – *Ochotona thomasi*
7. Woolly Hare – *Lepus oiostolus*
8. Red-and-White Giant Flying Squirrel – *Petaurista alborufus*
9. Northern Chinese Flying Squirrel – *Aeretes melanopterus*
10. Chindwin Flying Squirrel – *Petaurista sybilla*
11. Pallas's Squirrel – *Callosciurus erythraeus*
12. Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel – *Tamiops swinhoei*
13. Pere David's Rock Squirrel – *Sciurotamias davidianus*
14. Chinese Birch Mouse – *Sicista concolor*
15. Blyth's Mountain Vole – *Phaiomys leucurus*
16. Confucian Niviventer – *Niviventer confucianus*
17. Chevrier's Field Mouse – *Apodemus chevrieri*
18. Chinese Mole Shrew – *Anourosorex squamipes*
19. Greater Japanese Horseshoe Bat – *Rhinolophus nippon*
20. Sichuan Myotis – *Myotis altarium*
21. Myotis sp.
22. Eurasian Wildcat – *Felis silvestris*
23. Mainland Leopard Cat – *Prionailurus bengalensis*
24. Chinese Mountain Cat – *Felis bieti*
25. Masked Palm Civet – *Paguma larvata*
26. Grey Wolf – *Canis lupus*
27. Tibetan Fox – *Vulpes ferrilata*
28. Red Fox – *Vulpes vulpes*

29. Asiatic Black Bear – *Ursus thibetanus*
30. Northern Hog Badger – *Arctonyx albobularis*
31. Asian Badger – *Meles leucurus*
32. Steppe Polecat – *Mustela eversmanii*
33. Stone Marten – *Martes foina*
34. Red Panda – *Ailurus fulgens*
35. Kiang/Tibetan Wild Ass – *Equus kiang*
36. Eurasian Wild Pig – *Sus scrofa*
37. Alpine Musk Deer – *Moschus chrysogaster*
38. Forest Musk Deer – *Moschus berezovskii*
39. Siberian Roe Deer – *Capreolus pygargus*
40. MacNeill's (Asian) Red Deer – *Cervus wallichii macneilli*
41. Gansu Red Deer – *Cervus canadensis kansuensis*
42. Tufted Deer – *Elaphodus cephalophus*
43. Reeves's Muntjac – *Muntiacus reevesi*
44. White-lipped Deer – *Cervus albirostris*
45. Sambar – *Rusa unicolor*
46. Goitered (Yarkand) Gazelle – *Gazella (subgutturosa) yarkandensis*
47. Tibetan Gazelle – *Procapra picticaudata*
48. Przewalski's Gazelle – *Procapra przewalskii*
49. Wild Yak – *Bos mutus*
50. Takin – *Budorcas taxicolor*
51. Chinese/White-maned Serow – *Capricornis milneedwardsi*
52. Chinese Goral – *Nemorhaedus griseus*
53. Tibetan Antelope/Chiru – *Pantholops hodgsonii*
54. Greater Blue Sheep/Bharal – *Pseudois nayaur*
55. Argali (Tibetan Argali) – *Ovis ammon hodgsoni*