

# Uzbekistan



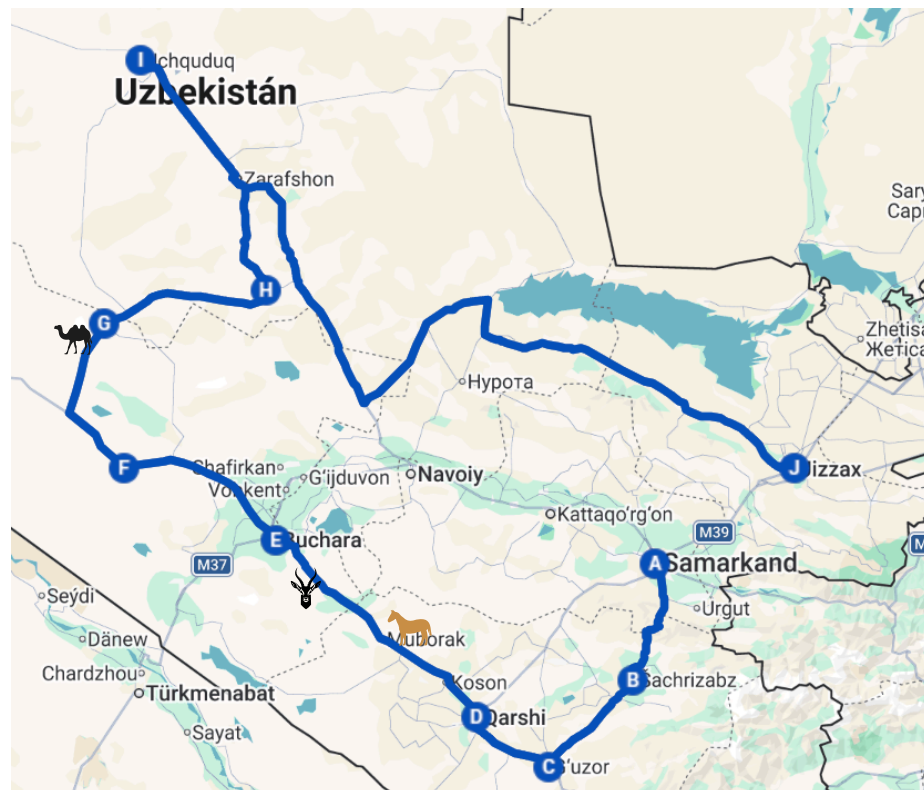
Long-clawed Ground Squirrels  
(*Spermophilopsis leptodactyla*)



domestic camels  
(*Camelus dromedarius* and *Camelus bactrianus*)



I originally did not plan to write a report about Uzbekistan, mainly because our mammal sightings were very limited. However, I realized that there are surprisingly few mammalwatching reports from Uzbekistan available. So, even though this report may not contain huge numbers of sightings or major rarities, I thought it might still be useful to contribute our small piece of information for future visitors interested in the country.



My main dream species for the trip was the Caracal, so before travelling I contacted a local biologist to see whether there might be any realistic way to improve our chances. Her reaction was generally quite sceptical. Although there are actually a reasonable number of Caracal records from the Kyzylkum Desert, most of them come from camera traps rather than direct observations, which gives a good indication of how difficult the species is to see in the field. Opinions about Pallas's Cat were even more pessimistic. According to her, the species is essentially absent from Uzbekistan nowadays, or at least so rare that searching for it would be unrealistic.

She did, however, give me several very useful practical tips before the trip - for example regarding Uzbekistan's **registration requirements** for foreign visitors. Officially, foreigners staying in the country for more than three days must be registered, usually through hotels or guesthouses, which automatically provide registration slips that should theoretically be kept throughout the trip. In practice, the system seems somewhat inconsistent nowadays, but since stories about checks and fines still occasionally appear online, it is definitely something worth being aware of when travelling independently in Uzbekistan.

tracks of Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)Great Gerbils (*Rhombomys opimus*)

In our case, however, I seriously doubt that we were properly registered for most of the trip. The first hotel openly told us they would not register us, the second place also did not seem entirely official, and afterwards we spent most of the trip out in remote desert areas with no realistic possibility of obtaining registration at all. Fortunately, this never caused us any problems, but I would hesitate to recommend relying on this approach, as enforcement may well depend on luck, timing, and the particular officials involved.

We rented our car directly in Samarkand from SamCarRenta. One particularly useful detail was that, at least at the time of our visit three years ago, they allowed us to arrange the deposit in US dollars. This helped avoid ending the trip stuck with a huge amount of leftover Uzbek som in cash, which then seemed to be a fairly common issue with other rental companies. Of course, this information may no longer be fully up to date.

Halfway between Qarshi and Bukhara (39.384776, 65.149604), we encountered a rather strange pair consisting of a **Kulan** (*Equus hemionus kulan*) and a **Przewalski's Horse** (*Equus ferus przewalskii*). The animals were not fenced in and appeared completely free-ranging. My assumption is that they were somehow connected to earlier reintroduction or breeding efforts in the region. Uzbekistan historically maintained a semi-wild population of Przewalski's Horses near Bukhara, where animals had been introduced as part of international conservation programs at the Bukhara Breeding Center. Not far from our sighting location (roughly 40 km) lies the Ekosentr Dzejran, which is involved in breeding and conservation projects for several desert ungulates and other species, so the presence of these animals in the wider area was probably not entirely accidental. That evening we made the mistake of going for a night walk too close to the ecocenter. Fortunately, by some miracle we managed to explain that we were only looking for reptiles and taking photographs, and that wandering around during the daytime would make very little sense for us. After several phone calls, they finally agreed that we could stay in the area for a short while, although only under the condition that the guards accompanied us the entire time.

After a day in Bukhara, we moved on towards the surroundings of Gazli. Unfortunately, mammal activity there turned out to be rather limited. Apart from a **Long-eared Hedgehog** (*Hemiechinus auritus*) at 40.129971, 63.449108 and several **Great Gerbils** (*Rhombomys opimus*) around 40.214973, 63.790855, we did not see very much else. One thing that genuinely surprised us was how disorienting the Uzbek desert could be. Normally I have a fairly decent sense of direction and my partner's orientation skills are usually almost flawless, but after wandering through the empty landscape for a while, we completely lost any ability to determine direction without GPS navigation.

We then decided to continue towards Uchkuduk, mainly inspired by an older report by Michel Gervais (2016), who apparently saw a Pallas's Cat in the area. The region also looked promising for several interesting *Phrynocephalus* agama species, which was another strong motivation for visiting. The first several kilometres of the road were heavily corrugated, making driving rather miserable. Although the map suggested there should be at least a few settlements along the route, in reality we encountered almost nothing and ended up spending more than two days in an almost completely empty landscape. Along the way we came across a mixed herd of **camels**, and in one particular area there were surprisingly large numbers of **Long-clawed Ground Squirrels** (*Spermophilopsis leptodactyla*) crossing the road, especially around 40.724075, 63.224224.

Great Gerbils (*Rhombomys opimus*)

At night we cruised through the desert searching for Wonder Geckos (*Teratoscincus scincus*) when suddenly a pair of eyeshine appeared in the darkness. Both of us immediately convinced ourselves that it simply had to be a desert cat of some kind, and we spent several very long minutes waiting for the animal to reappear so we could finally photograph it. In the end, the mysterious predator turned out to be nothing more exotic than a **Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)** at 41.501122, 63.186974. Later during the day we also found additional fox tracks in the area. Apart from the fox, the only mammals we encountered were **Great Gerbils (*Rhombomys opimus*)**. Another recurring issue was navigation - once again we found ourselves getting hopelessly disoriented, and to make matters worse the GPS also started behaving unreliably. Because of that, we avoided venturing too deeply into the desert. Considering how many hours we had already driven without encountering a single other person, getting seriously lost there could easily have turned into quite an unpleasant story.

Long-eared Hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*)

On the way back, we drove from [Zarafshon](#) around Aydarkul Lake back towards Samarkand, but apart from birds we made very few additional observations.

I realise this report is probably not the most exciting mammalwatching report out there, because our mammal records were honestly rather poor. At the same time, though, I still think that Uzbekistan has a lot of potential to offer. Hopefully we will return in the future and manage to push further west towards the Ustyurt Plateau.

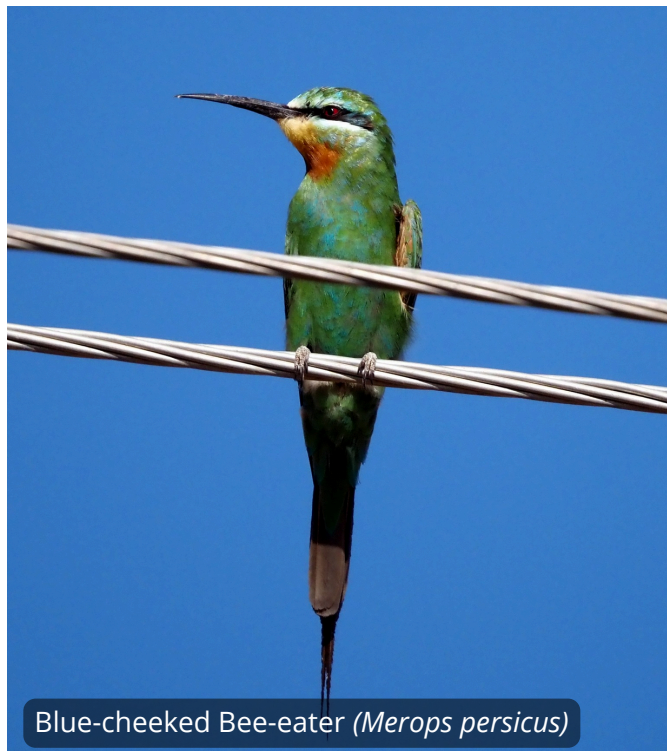
Przewalski's Horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*)Kulan (*Equus hemionus kulan*)



Wonder Gecko (*Teratoscincus scincus*)



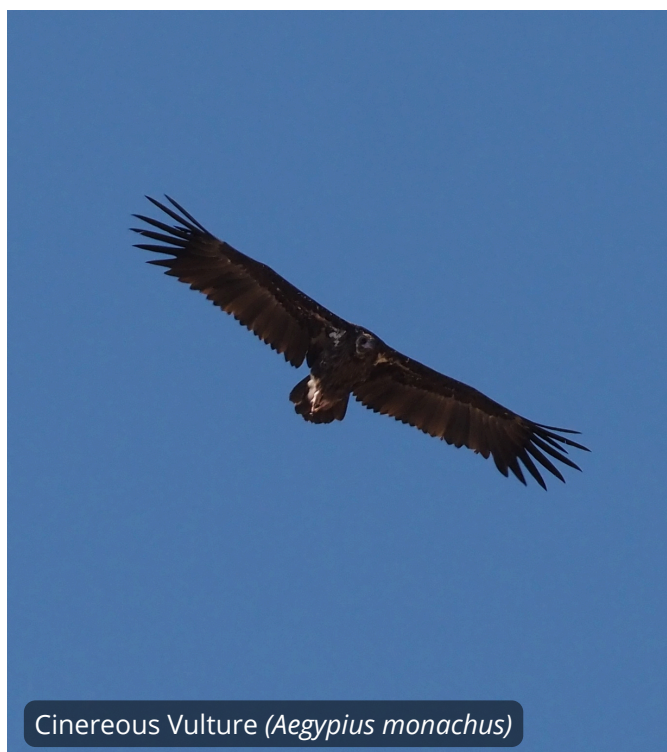
Reticulate Toad-headed Agama (*Phrynocephalus reticulatus*)



Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*)



Steppe Agama (*Trapelus sanguinolentus*)



Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*)



Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)

## Mammals

- Kulan (*Equus hemionus kulan*)
- Przewalski's Horse (*Equus ferus przewalskii*)
- Long-eared Hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*)
- Great Gerbil (*Rhombomys opimus*)
- Long-clawed Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilopsis leptodactyla*)
- Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

## Birds

- Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
- Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*)
- Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)
- Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*)
- Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)
- Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
- Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*)
- Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)
- Lesser Whitethroat (*Curruca curruca*)
- Menetries's Warbler (*Curruca mystacea*)
- Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)
- Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
- Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*)
- Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*)
- Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*)
- Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
- European Bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*)
- Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*)
- White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
- Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
- Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*)
- Pied Wheatear (*Oenanthe pleschanka*)
- Rosy Starling (*Pastor roseus*)
- Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)
- Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)

## Reptiles

- Rapid Racerunner (*Eremias velox*)
- Reticulate Racerunner (*Eremias scripta*)
- Ravergier's Whip Snake (*Hemorrhoidis ravergieri*)
- Caspian Thin-toed Gecko (*Tenuidactylus caspius*)
- Steppe Agama (*Trapelus sanguinolentus*)
- Stripe-tailed Racerunner (*Eremias grammica*)
- Wonder Gecko (*Teratoscincus scincus*)
- Eversmann's Bent-toed Gecko (*Crossobamon eversmanni*)
- Northern Toad-headed Agama (*Phrynocephalus interscapularis*)
- Reticulate Toad-headed Agama (*Phrynocephalus reticulatus*)
- Dotted Racerunner (*Eremias lineolata*)
- Desert Monitor (*Varanus caspius*)
- Russow's Gecko (*Mediodactylus russowii*)
- Bent-toed Gecko sp. (*Tenuidactylus sp.*)

