



My Big Cat Year – Visit to China and the Tibetan plateau for **several Wildcat species** – 26/07/26 to 13/08/26

As part of **The Big Cat Year**, we made a visit to **China** to the **Tibetan Plateau** with **Royle Safaris**. The original trip was **13 days** and focused at the Kanda Mountain, Zhidoi and its National Park, Kekexli reserve Wild Yak Valley, Gouli Nature Reserve and Bharzai Forest. I booked a **4-day extension** for the Ruoergai area to try and see the Chinese Mountain Cat. Local guides were Sid Francis and ZZ for the main trip and Jay Wu for the extension.

All in all, we managed to see **32 mammal species**, around **118 bird species** and only **1 Reptiles and Amphibians!**

With regard to the mammals, the highlights for me were **Pallas's Cat, Eurasian Lynx, Snow Leopard, Chinese Mountain Cat, Mainland Leopard Cat, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Fox, Red Fox, Tibetan Blue Bear, Altai Mountain Weasel, Tibetan Gazelle, Goitered Gazelle, Tibetan Antelope, White-Lipped Deer, Sichuan Deer, Siberian Roe Deer, Alpine Musk Deer, White Maned Serow, Sika Deer, Asian Badger**.

Bird highlights for me were **Wallcreeper, Tibetan Snowcock, Himalayan Snowcock, White-browed Tit-Warbler, Tibetan Partridge, Prezwalski Partridge, Saker Falcon, Black-necked Crane, Tibetan Bunting, Ibisbill, Giant Laughingtrush, Sliver-eared Pheasant, Bleu-eared Pheasant, Blood Pheasant**.

Top 5 Mammals	Top 5 Birds	Top 5 Wildlife moments
Eurasian Lynx	Ibisbill	Chinese Mountain cat and Leopard Cat in 8 hrs
Pallas's Cat	Three playful Wallcreepers	Watching a Snow Leopard for 20 Minutes
Snow Leopard	Giant Laughingtrush	A Pallas's Cat chasing a Red Fox
Chinese Mountain Cat	Himalayan Snowcock	Three Tibetan Blue Bears high on the mountain
Mainland Leopard Cat	All pheasants!!	A Tibetan Wolf next to the car

The 18-day trip on the Tibetan Plateau in China was a great success. Not only did we manage to see the Snow Leopard, Pallas's cat, Eurasian Lynx, Chinese Mountain Cat and the Mainland Leopard Cat, but also many other interesting wildlife species in stunning landscapes and great habitats. Added to that, the nice people and the great food made it an unforgettable trip. Also very pleased that on behalf of The Big Cat Year, we have made a contribution to the Snow Leopard Trust; [Home - Snow Leopard Trust](#)

Currently I am at 18 Wildcat species for the year and 24 in life. We have been able to contribute financially to 8 Projects and/or Organizations for a total of 12.000 USD. Many thanks to those who have contributed to make this possible! In addition, we have been able to give 12 Conservation Talks, Presentations and Interviews. It is hard work but we are getting there!





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China and four new Wildcat Species for The Big Cat Year!

On the 25th of July, I left Colombo, Sri Lanka, and had a flight to Chengdu in the Sichuan Region in China. I would join a trip by [Royle Safaris in the Qinghai Region](#). The 13-day trip would be led by **local hero and legendary guide Sid Francis**. We would cover **several interesting areas on the Tibetan Plateau** and the main focus would be the famous cats there, i.e. the **Snow Leopard, Pallas's Cat** and with some luck the **Eurasian Lynx**. In addition, we were hoping to observe many of the other interesting Mammals out there, as well as some good birds.

So upon arriving on the 26th in Chengdu, I realized this was one of those new Chinese airports and I was impressed by how smoothly and quickly everything went. I had a few hours at the airport before taking the flight to **Yushu**, in the Qinghai Region, where the trip would start. Upon arriving in Yushu, I checked my phone and apparently there was some confusion about the flight number I was on and they were worried if I would make it on time. I assured them by texting 'I just arrived', and I got some happy smileys!

ZengZeng (ZZ), the co-guide, was there to pick me up from the nice and small airport of Yushu. Richard, one of the fellow travelers was also there, and we checked in, in an authentic Chinese Hotel in the centre of Yushu. The other travelers had already arrived one day earlier and they were out in the afternoon for some relaxed bird watching. That evening we would all meet in the lobby at 19:00 hours to go for dinner.



We had a **nice group** with **Shonene** (from the west coast of the States), **Richard** (lives in New York) and **Jack** and **Simon** (both Dutch). Although it was one of Shonene's first real Mammal trips, she was well prepared and was using her scope all the time and helped finding the mammals. Richard really liked photographing and regularly needed some help to locate the mammals. Jack was a very experienced traveler and had already guided many trips for [Birding](#)

[Breaks](#). He was good with his scope and a very good birdwatcher. Simon had also travelled a lot in his life and after his retirement, he became very serious about mammal watching with Cats being his most important focus. As such, he had already seen over 20 Wildcat species in his life.





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All in all, a nice group with different qualities and we were all looking forward to an amazing two weeks, under the guidance of Sid Francis! During those two weeks **Sid turned out to be an excellent wildlife guide, both for mammals and birds**. Together with his co-guide ZengZeng (ZZ), he went the **extra mile** to show us all the great wildlife out there. Extremely humorous, a blunt style of humor, we as Dutch men would say 'botte humor', but we all appreciated it and it was great fun!

Regarding Sid and ZZ, interesting to note that Sid guided Noah Stryker in his Birding Big Year back in 2015. And ZZ helped the well known Frederic Larrey and his film ['the Frozen Kingdom of the Snow Leopard'](#).

[The Big Cat Year Video and interview that I made with Sid Francis can be viewed here.](#)

Next day, early morning the 27th, we were off in two 4WDs to the **Kanda Mountains**. Stunning scenery, great habitat and lots of wildlife. As soon as we entered the valley and we stopped for some birds, Jack said 'There is something on the right'. We put our binoculars on the spot and **two wolves were moving up the hill**. What a sight. We moved on and a kilometre further on we spotted a **Sichuan Deer**. It was running on the hill, stopped and looked downwards. [I filmed the deer and suddenly I saw 100 meters below, two wolves passing through ... you can hear my voice trembling in the video.](#) They were two different wolves, clearly seen by the different colouring of the fur.

Regarding the birds, we had some good ones like **Tibetan Bunting, Common Cuckoo, Tibetan Partridge, White-throated Dipper, Elliot's Laughingthrush, Blue-fronted -, White-capped – and White-winged Redstart, Streaked Rosefinch and Rufous-breasted Accentor**. Also, raptors like **Golden Eagle, Himalayan Griffon and Bearded Vulture** soared in the sky.



As we moved out of the valley, in one of the bends, we found a **dead wolf**. We stepped out of the car and took some pictures. It was an immature one and Sid explained it was likely killed by other Wolves.





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Next day we **moved from the Kanda Mountains towards Zhidoi**. On our way we would make a few wildlife stops to see if we could scan and spot some interesting wildlife. At our first stop, we had a coffee and scanned the stunning hills around us. **Suddenly Sid, who was 50 meters further, said ‘Snow Leopard’!** We ran towards him and I put my binoculars on the far away ridge he was watching. I saw about 50 Red-billed choughs flying around the ridge but apparently the Snow Leopard just moved over the ridge ... What a pity! You don't have that many chances for a Snow Leopard so missing can be traumatic ... but we all took it well and we were still confident we would see one on the trip.



We continued our ride and went to another valley where ZZ had seen the **Altai Mountain Weasel** earlier. We arrived at the spot where he had seen it earlier and it was a deserted small house with some stone walls. Weasels like to hide and breed between the walls so we understood it must have liked the place. However, to see one is a long shot .. so we thought. Not so for Sid and ZZ. They scanned with their binoculars and suddenly Sid said with some excitement in his voice, **‘there it is, the weasel!’**. Sid made a sound that was recognizable to me on his lips (this is done more often with weasels, mongooses, etc). Surprisingly, the **Weasel had a Pika!** And it took off with the Pika in its mouth and we could make some [amazing images and videos](#). What luck!!





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Good birds along the way were Black-necked Crane, **Saker Falcon**, **Tibetan**, **Black-winged** and **Rufous-necked Snowfinch**.

That evening we arrived at the hotel in Zhidoi and after dinner we went for our first night drive. Just before sunset we tried to get the **Argali Sheep** but unfortunately we could not find it that day and the days thereafter. During the night drive, we found an inquisitive Tibetan Fox which showed well. A young **Eurasian Eagle Owl** at its nest was another good find. When we were watching with our scopes and binoculars, some monks stopped and were very interested to see what we were doing. We showed the bird through the scopes and they were excited! Always nice to show the local community what wildlife is out there, in their own home area!

During our rides I noticed I had some slight headache. All to do with the altitude on the Tibetan Plateau. Basically you continuously move between 4000 and 5000 meters in altitude. Even most of the places we stayed were at around 4000 meters. Your whole body needs to adjust to it and I noticed it took me a few days but then I started to feel better (luckily 😊).

The 29th and 30th of July we would spend in a **National Park in the Zhidoi area**. In my view, the most stunning landscapes of the whole trip. Also, there were very few cars which made it all the more special. Although we didn't see any big carnivores like the **Snow Leopard**, **Tibetan Blue Bear** or **Tibetan Wolf**, the area is extremely promising and Sid and ZZ told us they had seen many of those great mammals before.





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Our highlight came on the second day in Zhidoi, we were in the car with ZZ and Sid was driving further in front of us with the others. Sid mentioned through the walkie-talkie '**Pallas's Cat**'! He had found it with his thermal which still works pretty well in the morning when it is cold out there. We quickly drove on and found their car at a mountain ridge we had been scanning the day before. We got out of the car and I quickly found it through my Binoculars. The cat was sitting about 150 to 200 meters away, on a rock underneath one of these typical religious paintings that you see everywhere painted on the rocks. What a sight! **We could follow the cat moving around and going up the ridge.** As I was filming it, to our surprise, **it suddenly flushed a Red Fox!** The Pallas's Cat went after it for 25 meters showing the Red Fox who is the boss. Amazing and what luck, [I just caught it on video.](#)

The Cat moved up the ridge, passed a few **Red-billed Choughs** and came over the ridge towards us. We then lost sight and we suspected it must have gone down and perhaps passed the road to go to the cliff on the left of us. I kept a clear eye on that cliff and after 5 minutes, I said 'there it is, on the other side of the road!'. We then could watch it for another 20 minutes or so and we saw it playing, jumping, searching, etc, before it went over the cliff and was gone.

After the sighting I went to Sid and gave him a big hug. The **Pallas's Cat was my 15th Wildcat species for the year and 21 in my lifetime** so I was very happy! For more info on the Pallas's Cat, click here to go to the [IUCN website](#).



Other sightings in Zhidoi were the **White-lipped Deer, Blue Sheep, Tibetan Gazelle, Red Fox, Tibetan Fox and many Pikas and Himalayan Marmots.** With regard to the birds, we had good views of **Eurasian Eagle Owls, [White-browed Tit-Warbler](#), Bearded Vultures** but I was

especially happy with my first ever **Tibetan Snowcocks** and a high flying **Wallcreeper**. The latter has eluded me strangely enough all my life and I was delighted to finally see it. Later on the trip, we had three Wallcreepers at 25 meters away showing their typical behaviour on the rocks and spreading their beautiful red, black and white wings.





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From Zhidui, on the 1st we made our way to the **Kekexili Desert**, famous for the endangered **Tibetan Antelope (Chiru)** and the **Kiang (a sort of wild ass)**. We did have good



sightings of all these mammals as well as two **Wild Yaks** which moved through domestic herds. The size difference between a Domestic and a Wild Yak is enormous and they really stand out. **Best sighting** however was a **Tibetan Wolf** who walked

towards our car. I jumped out of the car and got my best images and video ever of a Wolf, what a stunning mammal.

Birding was good and we observed **Black-necked Cranes**, **Tibetan Plovers** and especially a **Red-necked Phalarope** was a rare sighting.

We stayed at the most basic place of the trip, a truckers hotel just outside of the reserve. But as long as it is safe and clean, I am happy! You don't need much. Also, the woman who ran the place was very friendly, like most people we have met, and the food was good. There is a story about this place which I will come back to later.

On the 2nd we moved to **Gouli Nature Reserve**, the centre of the whole trip in terms of its importance of seeing wildlife, but on our way we went through the **Wild Yak Valley**. One of the key places in China where the Wild Yaks occur. It is a stunning landscape and it is also well known as a geology park. We did see two small herds of **Wild Yak** high up on the mountain but not many other mammals. Also, we unfortunately missed out on the **Tibetan Partridge**, a well sought-after bird.

That evening we arrived at our hotel in a small village close to **Gouli Nature Reserve**. Close meaning, we had to drive every morning 1 ½ hours before arriving at the Reserve and obviously the same in the evening. However, the hotel was nice and a comfortable place to stay for 5 nights as we had four full days in Gouli Nature Reserve.





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The rhythm for the next four days was as follows:

05:30 – breakfast in Sid's Hotel room where we had coffee and he cooked some eggs with toast

06:00 – Leave towards the reserve.

07:30 – Arrive at the reserve at Sunrise, exploring different valleys and scanning

12:00 – Lunch and rest at the protection center, run by local guide Roubao and his wife

15:30 – Exploring the different valleys and scanning

19:30 – Drive back towards the hotel

21:00 – Arrive at the hotel and every night some excellent noodles were brought to the rooms from the restaurant next to the hotel.

The first morning into Gouli was the **most epic day of the trip**. We were only half an hour into one of the valleys, when Roubao spotted a group of [4 juvenile Pallas's Cats](#) on the hill side. We could watch them for over 30 minutes, playing with each other, climbing the rocks and one even caught a pika. Roubao and six cars or so continued and we stayed behind with our two vehicles. Only after 5 minutes, **Sid said 'Snow Leopard'!** He found one on the mountain with his thermal some 500 meters to the left. What a find. Sid said to ZZ, 'contact



Roubao and tell him we found the Snow Leopard'. Only a few minutes later, the cars came back and everybody could enjoy the [view of a beautiful male Snow Leopard, climbing the mountain](#). We

could watch it for over 20 minutes before he disappeared over the hill to the other side.





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I remember taking a selfie video in which I explained the whole situation of having **4 Pallas's Cats on one mountain and a Snow Leopard on the other mountain**. Bizarre!!! Click here for more info of the [Snow Leopard on the IUCN website](#).

We were excited and it was only 9 o'clock in the morning and we had the whole day ahead of us. And what a day it would become! During the rest of the morning, we had some great birds like **2 juvenile Eurasian Eagle Owls resting near their nest, a big group of at least 15 Himalayan Snowcocks, 2 Tibetan Snowcocks on a ridge and Przewalski's Partridges everywhere**.

Around 12 o'clock we made our way to the protection centre for a lunch and after lunch I dropped myself into one of the beds in the Dormitories and had a good 1 ½ hours of well needed sleep.



Around 15:30 we continued and in one of the valleys towards the end, Roubao spotted a **Tibetan Blue Bear** very high up on the mountain. It was digging something, very likely it was trying to grab a **Himalayan Marmot**. While I was making a video, I saw one other bear coming down from the mountain and you hear me saying in the video '**There are two Bears!**'. But just when I said that, a **third bear** ran down from the mountain. Both were young bears and were running towards their mother who indeed got a Marmot out of the hole. We were all excited, this was a very rare spectacle.





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After 30 minutes or so the Bears disappeared over the mountain and we continued our drive. Just before sunset, we saw a **Tibetan Wolf** with two young and we could watch it for over 15 minutes.

We were thrilled to see on one day a **Snow Leopard, 4 Pallas's Cats, 3 Tibetan Blue Bears and 3 Tibetan Wolves, indeed an epic day!**

That evening, one of my fellow travelers told us he lost his wedding ring. He explained that every night, he puts the ring on a cabinet next to the bed (as the ring is too tight and hinders blood flow). He searched everything but he could not find it. He thought that maybe, he left it that night, next to the bed, at the truckers hotel at the end of the Kekexili Desert. Sid asked ZZ to make a call to the hotel. 10 minutes later ZZ informed us that the ring had been found!

For me this is symbolic to the culture I experienced, very friendly and honest people and a very safe environment. You can leave cameras, etc, in the car without any problem, we all felt **extremely safe** during the trip at all places where we arrived or when we encountered people in the most remote places, **everybody greeted us warmly** and were **very friendly**.

Next day we were out in Gouli again. The problem with such a great first day is that you expect all days to be like that and that we would see **Snow Leopards every** single day. Not so. It was very warm and that even makes it more difficult to see the animals out there. It was a bit slow and we decided in the afternoon to split the cars, one would be scanning in the valleys for **Snow Leopards** and one would be staying in one certain area good for the **Eurasian Lynx**. I was in the latter one as the Lynx would be a real bonus for me.

We sat one afternoon from 15:30 to 20:00 in one place, just scanning the area, except for



a **Tibetan Wolf** which suddenly showed up in my Binoculars, we could not spot much wildlife. But then just after 20:00 hours, I heard Sid over the walkie-talkie talking to ZZ. Hearing the excitement in ZZ's voice, I knew there was something going on. As soon as Sid hung up he said with a firm voice, **'Alright, pack up everybody, we have a Lynx sighting'**. Apparently ZZ got a message from

Roubao who was higher up on the mountain with a group that they had a lynx in view.





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Shonene, Richard and myself jumped in the car and 10 minutes later **we were viewing a Lynx**, lying on a small hill, its face hidden by the bushes at about 150 meters. We could watch it for about 10 minutes but then it stood up. I managed to get some shots in the fading light. They were not good, but so what, I had seen a Eurasian Lynx!!

The Eurasian Lynx was my 16th Wildcat species for the year and 22 in my lifetime. Please see here the [IUCN info on the Lynx](#). I was extremely happy with this one as it is the most difficult Wildcat species to see in the areas we were visiting in China. Also, by seeing it here, I did not have to plan a visit to Estonia in October or November, saving me money and time.



The next two days in Gouli were a bit slow. Although you don't accept it, I think also your own energy, motivation and sharpness is not as in the beginning when you still needed to see your big targets. We still got some nice mammals like **Blue Sheep, Sichuan Deer, Altai Mountain Weasel, Tibetan Fox, Red Fox** and many **Himalayan**

Marmots, Plateau Pikas and Woolly Hare. Good birds were the **Pine Bunting, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Ala Shan Redstart, Tibetan and Himalayan Snowcock, Giant Shrike, Tibetan** and **Przewalski's Partridge.**

Gouli Nature Reserve was exciting and well known for the potential of the different Wildcat species and other Carnivores. I liked it very much, although I missed the tranquillity of Zhidui. There were around 8 other cars, many were Chinese photographers, and although Sid managed it so that we could go separate ways with our own two vehicles, at times I found it a bit busy, also in the protection centre when you are there with over 25 people. The upside of it all is that we were in contact with Roubao, which meant that whenever they had a great sighting we could go there. The other way around it worked as well, i.e. when we had a great sighting we informed Roubao.





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Richard and Shonene stayed with ZZ in Gouli as they wanted to try if they would see another Snow Leopard. Sid, Simon, Jack and myself left on the 6th for a long **8 hour drive to Yushu**. Before going to the hotel, we drove to the location at the river where they had seen on the first day an **Ibisbill**. As I wasn't there yet, I had not seen it and I was really eager to get this bird as it is

monotypic, i.e. the only bird in its family. When we arrived there, Jack spotted it. [What a stunning and special bird!](#)

We would stay in Yushu for the night and on the 7th we drove another 4 hours to the **Barzai Forest, a totally different habitat** with lush forest. Especially for birding it was great and we got a whole new set of birds like **Three-toed Woodpecker, Giant Laughingthrush (my favorite one), Daurian Jackdaw, Common Crossbill, etc, etc**.

We stayed in **Nangchen** and next day we would go up the **Kanda Mountain top** to get **another try for the Eurasian Lynx**. We didn't get it and only saw a Red fox and luckily, high up on the ridge, **two Tibetan Wolves**. Birdlife was better with **White-eared Pheasants, Golden Eagle and Tibetan Babax**. At around 12:00 we slowly made our way back to Yushu where we would team up again with ZZ, Shonene and Richard.

When we arrived on the 8th in the **Hotel in Yushu** late in the afternoon, we said goodbye to Sid and thanked him warmly for his great guiding and the excellent way he has taken care of us. Sid would leave that afternoon to drive home, a 15-hour journey ... he promised us he would rest in time so that he would arrive safely home to his wife and son.

That evening we had a nice dinner with ZZ and all others in our favourite (we don't know any other ...) restaurant in Yushu where we have had great food. Next morning we would leave the hotel at 07:30 AM to catch the 09:40 AM flight to Chengdu. Although Yushu is a small airport, Sid warned us to be there on time as checking in does not always go as smoothly as possible. And we found out! The ticket Richard booked was not recognizable in the system





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We waited for half an hour but we then left to go through to the boarding area. ZZ was still with Richard and helped him solve the problem. Half an hour later, just in time for the flight, Richard made it and joined us at the gate.

Arriving at Chengdu, we said farewell to each other and each of us had a different continuation of the flights and travels. After picking up my luggage, I **met my guide for the next 4 days, Jay Wu**. Easily recognizable as he is 2 meters tall. The two of us left around 13:00 hours for a 10 hour drive to Zoige in Ruoergai. **My mission for this extension was the Chinese Mountain Cat!** In my view a stunning cat with a limited distribution in China. A cat from the grasslands, see here the info on the IUCN website. In my head I also thought that in case we would have the Chinese Mountain Cat very quickly, perhaps there would be a **chance to get the Mainland Leopard Cat** as well. A cat I missed in Eaglenest in India. I already discussed this with Sid a few days earlier however we agreed that it would be extremely difficult as the good area where the Mainland Leopard Cat occurs would be another 6 to 8 hours drive ... I put it out of my head and concluded that I would already be extremely happy with the **Chinese Mountain Cat** as this cat is regularly also missed in Ruoergai.

During our 10-hour car trip, I quickly realized Jay Wu is a great guy. Very experienced in guiding, knowledgeable about the areas, the cats, the other mammals and especially an excellent birdwatcher. He is very involved with conservation, he writes books, he is connected to the IUCN, etc, etc. And also just a nice guy. During our talks, I found out that he yearly guides for [Birding Breaks](#) and that he recently completed the Birding Breaks trip in Sichuan with **Eddy Nieuwstraten**. He also knew **Laurens Steijn** as he did a trip somewhat longer ago with Laurens. As so often ... the world is small!

We arrived at 22:00 in the hotel, quickly checked in and went for 2 hours of spotlighting and using the thermal. The road we drove on was very busy and it was not easy to be spotlighting and/or using the thermal. Also, the grasslands were quite big and you could only cover 100 to 150 meters next to the road. Although we saw some **Red Foxes** and **Siberian Roe Deer**, I was a bit worried. If this road was the only road where we could find the cat, it wouldn't be easy at all. At 24:00 we returned for a short night as the next morning we would leave at 05:30 again.





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Next morning, we took the same road, already quite busy and with 30 kilometres an hour, we were a bit of a danger for the traffic. However, Jay Wu paid good attention and we never ran into a problem. After 70 kilometres, we left the road and went onto a small sand road into a valley. I was relieved to be off the big road and back into nature again.

After a kilometre or so, we stopped to have our breakfast and a coffee. All from the back of the car and Jay Wu had all in there, fruit, bread, cookies, etc, etc. We stood on a great spot and had a good view on the mountain to the left of us. During breakfast we started scanning and quickly found some **Blue Sheep high on the ridges**. A moment later, I said '**there are foxes on the ridge, no, they are two wolves**'! And yes, they were wolves. They are not often seen there so we were both delighted. We could follow them for 40 minutes or so and saw them going down in the valley. While we stood there, to our surprise, we spotted a **Wild Boar** high on the mountain. Also present was a **Tibetan Gazelle**, another unexpected mammal. To finish it off, two **Red Foxes** appeared on top of one of the ridges and we could nicely see them through the low bushes.

The valley was amazing, stunning landscapes and only tents belonging to Yak and Sheep herders. We did not see many other mammals or surprising birds, so after ending up at the end of the valley, we made our way back to Zoige and had lunch. I was extremely pleased that after lunch, I could have some rest and do a lot of work for the rest of the day. We would meet up again at 19:00 to go for a quick dinner and afterwards we would continue with a **night drive in search of the Chinese Mountain Cat**.



So at around 20:00 hours we went on the same busy road again, trying to do some spotlighting and using the thermal. I was relieved again when we arrived at the valley and left this busy road. We drove into the valley and we saw some **woolly hares and Red Foxes**. At around 21:40 while driving deeper

into the valley, suddenly Jay Wu said '**There is something on the rock, I think it's a cat**'. We slowly drove another 25 meters and Jay Wu put his flashlight on the mammal which was sitting on the rock, '**A Chinese Mountain Cat**'!!!! What a Cat! It just looked at us and remained at ease for another 10 minutes, giving me the time to take some photos and videos. It then left the rock and slowly moved up the hill, out of sight.





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Wow, my 17th Wildcat species for the year and 23 in my lifetime!!! . Click here for more info of the [Chinese Mountain Cat on the IUCN website](#).

I was euphoric and thanked Jay Wu warmly for his great spotting skills! It was already around 22:30 so we decided to call it a day and make our way back to the hotel as it was still over an hour drive back. During the ride back, Jay Wu suggested that the **next morning we should go to the Baxi Forest, a totally different habitat** with many different mammals and bird species. Also, we would have **a small chance there for the Mainland Leopard Cat**. Excellent, what a guide!!!

Next morning we left at 05:00 hours and I could work on my laptop for half an hour or so, before arriving at the borders of the Baxi Forest. As soon as we made our way up into the forest, I closed my laptop and focused on the road. It is a great timing to see mammals crossing, so we had to be on high alert.



At around 05:40, Jay Wu saw some eyeshine on the left of the road. He stopped and put his flashlight on the mammal and there it was '[A Mainland Leopard Cat](#)' sitting 25 meters on the side of the road, about 4 meters high. We had great views and could make some good pictures and video.

I could not believe it, in less than 8 hours, spread over two days, we saw both the **Chinese Mountain Cat** and the **Mainland Leopard Cat**. **The latter is my 18th Wildcat species for the year and 24 in my lifetime.** I was astonished and extremely **thankful to Jay Wu for another excellent spotting!** More info of the [Mainland Leopard Cat on the IUCN website](#).





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We continued our drive to the top of the mountain and it turned out to be an **epic morning drive!** We managed to see **Sika Deer**, **Alpine Musk Deer**, **White Maned Serow** and a **Moupin Pika**. Birdlife was also great with a family of **three Wallcreepers**, **five blue-eared Pheasants**, **at least fifteen Blood Pheasants**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **Rufous-vented Tit** and some **playful Gray-headed Bullfinches**.

Together with the day in Gouli Nature reserve when we saw Snow Leopard, Pallas's Cat, Tibetan Blue Bear and Tibetan Wolf, this evening/morning in Ruoergai and Baxi Forest are the most memorable days of my trip in China. What a privilege to be here and experience this great wildlife in the most stunning habitats and landscapes!

In the evening we went for our **last night drive in the Baxi Forest**. I noticed my motivation and energy was down but Jay Wu was pushing it like every single day we had been together



on this trip. We moved up the mountain and reached the top and only there did we spot our first **Siberian Roe Deer** that night in a thermal. What a difference with the morning drive ...! We made our way down and slowly we were picking up mammals, several **Sika Deer**, a **Red Fox** and to our shock we found a **dead juvenile Mainland Leopard Cat on the road**. A

roadkill. Not surprising as we noticed that night several cars and trucks using the road. What a loss, such a beautiful young cat. We moved on and finished off by flushing a **mother White-maned Serow with her calf!** At 24:00 we arrived at the hotel, a nice 6 hours sleep before hitting the road back to Chengdu!

It is the 13th of August and today I have a whole day for myself, finishing up things before leaving at 02:00 AM at the airport for a 30-hour stretch (stops in Doha and Sao Paulo) to **Santa Cruz in Bolivia for the next 3 to 4 week trip** for some other great Wildcats and other unique wildlife.





My Big Cat Year – Visit to China and the Tibetan plateau for **several Wildcat species** – 26/07/26 to 13/08/26

Finishing off, I am extremely thankful to Sid, ZZ and Jay Wu for a great trip!! Also thanks to my fellow travelers **Jack, Simon, Shonene** and **Richard** for keeping up with me.

Many thanks to **Peter Glas** and **Renee Bolk** for adopting and sponsoring the Pallas's Cat, it is greatly appreciated. Not only the **financial sponsoring of the conservation projects** but especially the **moral support**. Thanks again!

I am also very happy to share [an article about my Mission in the Daily Express \(Malaysian Newspaper\)](#) , it is from a recent presentation I gave to the Sabah society in Malaysia. Many thanks to Shavez Cheema from OnestopBorneo!

Also at 59, I managed to be for the first time in a podcast! Grateful to **Jon Hall** and **Charles Foley** of [Mammal Watching.com](#) for being part of their latest podcast. Extremely grateful that they show so much interest in my big cat Year initiative and my efforts to contribute positively to conservation. [Mammal Watching.com](#) is the worldwide leading **platform** regarding the combination of mammal watching, eco-tourism and conservation. Normally there are only famous and well known people from the conservation, science, and guiding worlds on the podcast, so it is an absolute honour for me to be in the latest one!

[The podcast can be listened to here \(S4 E9: Brett Hartl, Environmental Lawyer -my part is from minute 3:30 to 20\); <https://www.mammalwatching.com/podcasts/>](#)

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to China we have contributed to the [Snow Leopard Trust](#).

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by [buying the projects a coffee](#)





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China - 26 Juli to 13 August																
Mammal List					26	27/28	29/30	31	1	2-5	6/7	8	9	10	11	12
		Seen	New/Bef ore	Yushu (1N)	Kanda Mount ain (1 N Yushu	Zhidoi (2N)	Budon gquan/ Kekexi li Desert (1N)	Yak Valley to Gouli (1N)	Gouli & Surrou ndings (4N)	Yushu (1N) and Nanch en/Bar zha	Yushu (1N) - mainly travel	Cheng du/Zoi ge (1N) - mainly travel	Rouerg ai (1N)	Rouerg ai - Baxi Forest (1N)	Rouerg ai/Che ngdu (1N) travel day	
Family	Species															
Bear	Tibetan Blue Bear	1	New						1 x (3 ex)							
Cats	Snow Leopard	1	Before		(1 x)				1 x							
Cats	Eurasian Lynx	1	New						1 x							
Cats	Pallas Cat	1	New			1 x			1 x (4 ex)							
Cats	Chinese Mountain Cat	1	New										1 x			
Cats	Mainland Leopard Cat	1	New										1 x + 1 x dead			
Dogs	Red Fox	1	Before			6 x	3 x		5 x	1 x		1 x	5 x	1 x		
Dogs	Tibetan Fox	1	New		2 x	9 x	1 x		1 x				1 x			
Dogs	Tibetan Wolf	1	New	2 x + 1 x dead			1 x		4 x	1 x						
Hares and Rabbits	Woolly Hare	1	New			3 x		1 x	> 40 x				2 x	2 x		
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Sika Deer	1	Before											5 x		
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Tibetan Antilope (Chiru)	1	New				4 x									
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Blue Sheep	1	New		2 x	7 x	2 x		20 x	2 x			2 x			
Hollow-horned Ruminants	McNeil's Wapiti (Sichuan Deer)	1	New		1 x				4 x							
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Tibetan Gazelle	1	New		2 x	4 x	6 x	2 x		2 x			2 x			
Hollow-horned Ruminants	White-lipped (Thorold's) Deer	1	New		1 x	1 x										
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Wild Yak	1	New				2 x	2 x								
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Goitered Gazelle	1	New				3 x	3 x								
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Kiang (Wild Ass)	1	New				> 20 x									
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Siberian (Eastern) Roe Deer	1	New									1 x	2 x	2 x		
Hollow-horned Ruminants	Alpine Musk Deer	1	New											1 x		
Hollow-horned Ruminants	White-maned Serow	1	New											2 x		
Marmots	Himalayan Marmot	1	New		4 x	>20 x	. 10 x	2 x	> 100 x	15 x			> 50 x	3 x		
Pigs	Wild Boar	1	Before										1 x			
Pika	Chinese Red Pika	1	New		1 x	1 x										
Pika	Glover's Pika	1	New		1 x											
Pika	Moupin Pika	1	New											1 x		
Pika	Plateau (Black-lipped) Pika	1	New		> 10 x	> 50 x	> 20 x		> 50 x	5 x			> 50 x			
Vole	Blyth's Mountain Vole	1	New				3 x									
Vole	Smokey Mountain Vole	1	New		2 x											
Weasals and Relatives	Mountain (Altai) Weasel	1	New			1 x			1 x							
Weasals and Relatives	Asian Badger	1	New											1 x		
Total		32														

* Between (), the observations I missed.

