

# China 1st - 22nd September 2018

Participants: Tim Bourne & John Wright

Guide: Geraint 'Sid' Francis (Sid from now on)

Trip Report by John Wright: johnpw2@tiscali.co.uk

All photos by Tim Bourne unless otherwise stated

**Background:** A mammal watching trip to the Tibetan Plateau was high on my list of places to visit and fortunately the same was true for my mate Tim who was also very keen to visit the country. Being interested in birds as well as mammals all bird species seen were noted down. However, if you want to see more bird species a trip in the spring would be better. I contacted Sid about a year ahead of travel and booked his services. It was just as well that I booked early as Sid is in high demand as a guide. I can see why, he is an excellent guide and driver. Sid now lives near Chengdu, Sichuan, although he is originally from the UK. We got on like the proverbial house on fire, with lots of stories, banter and bad jokes - to sum it up we had a great laugh. I can thoroughly recommend Sid as a guide and wouldn't hesitate to use him again if I go back to China. He had an intimate knowledge of the sites, knew the best roads/tracks for spotlighting and had great id skills (mammals and birds) and was quick to id mammals when we were spotlighting which helped

immensely at the start of the trip when Tim and I were still getting 'our eye in'. Sid can be contacted by email: chengduuk@hotmail.com.

We flew Air China from London Heathrow via Frankfurt (Lufthansa) to Chengdu on the 31st August. Arriving Chengdu around 06:00 on the 1st September to be met by Sid at the airport. We departed Chengdu on Sunday 23rd September at 01:35 and arrived back at Heathrow (via Frankfurt) the same day at around 08:30.

**Books used:** Mammals of China, Smith & Xie and a Field Guide to the Birds of China, MacKinnon & Phillipps.

**Itinerary:** I worked on an itinerary with Sid but basically we did a circuit that took in sites that Sid had done before but not always in one trip. Many, if not all sites, will be familiar to most mammal watchers who have been to China and the Tibetan Plateau and is a route that many people follow to some degree or other depending on length of the trip and what mammals they might be targeting. We had target species at each location but basically wanted to see anything and everything, although Red Panda, Pallas's and Mountain Cats were a top priority. We did squeeze a lot in and had many hours on the road - but it paid off and worked for us. We were in China for 22 days with one day either side of the 22 days used as travel days getting to/from China. So we had a 20 day itinerary with two additional days as a contingency just in case we missed something and needed to stay an

extra day at a specific site. The itinerary was flexible and dependent on what we saw and where we needed to be on any given day. In the end our actual itinerary starting and ending in Chengdu was thus:



In actual fact we probably did at least 6,000 kilometres as the above itinerary is only the kilometres between places we stayed at, it doesn't take into account our spotlighting sessions or daytime trips out looking for wildlife.

**Accommodation:** All fine and more than adequate, nothing luxurious of course as no need. We did spend one night in a lorry drivers motel in Budongquan which had no toilet or running water but it was comfortable and we all got a good night's sleep. We didn't have to stay there but if we didn't it would have meant an extra 1.5 hours driving to a hotel and then back again the following morning. It suited us for the night and it was where the mammals were - a case of getting your priorities right.

**Food:** Sid and Tim were fine when it came to eating out. To be honest I'm not a great one for Chinese food and being a vegetarian eating out got a bit monotonous. But to be fair I did have some delicious veggie food on more than one occasion. However, Sid takes a hot plate with him and so we ate in (our hotel rooms) the majority of time and it has to be said Sid is a master chef when it comes to the hot plate! He does a good line in toasted egg sandwiches and lovely breakfast pancakes. Although the hotels were bed and breakfast we were more often than not out in the field when the breakfasts were being served. When travelling we stocked up and munched on snacks - biscuits, crisps, cakes.

**Weather:** Apparently it had been a wet summer and the rain continued into the early Autumn. It rained a lot but fortunately rarely interfered with our mammal watching. If it wasn't raining it was usually cloudy or overcast, and we even had some sleet and snow but we did have a few sunny days. It was warm and muggy in the Chengdu area of Sichuan.

**Day/night times:** It got light between 06:30 - 07:00 and got dark between 19:30 - 20:00.

**Vehicle:** We used Sid's Chinese built 4x4 which was certainly needed for 95% of the trip. The last few days we swapped over to his Chinese manufactured people carrier by which time we were driving on decent tarmac roads around Labahe.

**Equipment:** We all had binoculars and telescopes/tri-pods. I know scopes/tri-pods are a bit of a drag to carry around but in my opinion they are an essential piece of the mammal watcher's equipment and I certainly recommend that if you have them take them on any trip you do to China. Having said that if you don't have a telescope Sid would certainly let you have the lion's share of his on a trip. We all had powerful torches/flashlights but Sid also has two spotlights - the type that plug into the car electrics.

## Daily Diary

### Saturday 1st.

We landed at Chengdu an hour late, it took a bit of time to clear immigration etc so it was about 08:30 by the time we met Sid. We then had to negotiate the outer Chengdu area Saturday traffic but it was good to finally be on our way heading for Tangjahe. A couple of stops en route didn't produce any mammal sightings but a few good birds were noted. We arrived at the Tangjahe reserve around 16:00 and slowly drove along the approach road to our hotel. We stopped at a hillside that afforded open views between the wooded hills and were soon watching our first **Chinese Goral**, quickly followed by a **Takin** and then a **Reeves' Muntjac**. All three animals were on view at the same time - an excellent first stop in the reserve.

After sorting the hotel stuff out we went for a night drive, from 19:45 - 22:45, along the reserve road we came in on earlier in the day. It was dusk as we set off and saw quite a few bats (unidentified) flying around the car park. We sorted out our spotlighting positions that worked well and which we stuck to for the rest of the night drives on the trip. Sid drove and used a powerful torch/flashlight his side, I sat in the front and used a proper spotlight my side and Tim sat in the back to quickly get onto any mammals using his binoculars, as well as having his camera at the ready as he was nominated trip photographer. Both myself and Tim also had powerful

torches with us in case we needed to get out of the vehicle for a mammal. We had a good first night session with the following seen: 15 **Takin**, 8 **Chinese Goral**, 10 **Reeves' Muntjac**, 3 **Masked (Himalayan) Palm Civets**, 2 **Hog Badgers**, 5 **Confucian Niviventer**.



**Takin**







**Hog Badger**

**Sunday 2nd.**

Tangjahe, spotlighting session 04:00 - 06:00. Heavy rain.

**20+ Takin, 2 Chinese Serow, 7 Chinese Goral, 10 Reeves Muntjac, 2 Wild Boar, 2 Hog Badger, 1 Masked Palm Civet, 1 mouse (unidentified).**

Following a Sid special breakfast we departed Tangjahe at 08:00. Just as we left the reserve we had a **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel** in the road and a little further on a **Pere David's Rock Squirrel**. We then settled in for a long drive up onto the Tibetan Plateau as we made our way to Ruergai.

On the drive we came to a road tunnel with the entrance cordoned off - probably due to repairs but there was nothing to indicate this - a very, very long detour was on the cards. But instead we took a chance and drove through the service tunnel which was a bit narrow but ok. After a couple of kilometres we emerged out the other end - no problem! The only mammal we saw en route was a **Himalayan Marmot**.

Arriving at our hotel in Ruergai at 18:00 Sid sorted all the necessary hotel requirements necessitated by the authorities. We then had something to eat (Sid cooked again) and then went out spotlighting from 20:00 - 23.50. We went west of the town and down a bumpy track that leads to a quarry. We came across our first **Tibetan Foxes**, 6 in total, before getting out of the vehicle to look for Pallas's and Chinese Mountain Cats in the quarry. We didn't find any but did have good views of an Eagle Owl - which potentially could have both species of cat on the menu! As we left the track and onto the road to go further west along the road we came to an abrupt halt by a horrendous traffic jam that had very quickly built up. Our westbound side of the road was gridlocked as a line of hundreds of east bound lorries continued to have priority over the line of traffic we were stuck in. As far as the eye could see it was just headlights of slow moving lorries eastbound, lorries and more lorries. After 20 minutes of waiting we knew it was hopeless so we turned around and joined the moving eastbound line. Sid knew of a track east of Ruergai we could try as he had had success

there with spotlighting before. It was a good move as we found 2 **Red Foxes**, 2 **Woolly Hare** and best of all had super views of a foraging **Asian Badger**. Back at the hotel we fell into our beds tired but happy.



**Chinese Serow**

### **Monday 3rd.**

We started out from the hotel at 04:00 and headed west to a track off the main road to do some spotlighting.

Unfortunately it was windy and raining quite a bit.

Nevertheless, we came across a 3 **Tibetan Foxes**, 1 **Woolly Hare**, a **Tibetan Gazelle** and best of all a **Wolf** which Sid picked up on his side of the vehicle. It didn't hang around but

fortunately it was quite close to the vehicle so showed well. As it started to get light we went to another quarry east of where we were that is also known for both Pallas's and Chinese Mountain Cats - both species last seen here by Sid back in the summer. However, it was now very windy and raining heavily not the weather to look for cats in. We did see a **Tibetan Fox**, 2 **Tibetan Gazelles**, 3 **Himalayan Marmots** and numerous **Plateau (Black-lipped) Pikas**. We had to retreat to the car due to the bad weather and decided to give the track we were spotlighting from earlier a quick go. Viewing from the car we had at least some shelter from the wind and rain. All we saw though was 2 **Himalayan Marmots** before giving up and heading back to the hotel.



**Chinese Goral**

In the afternoon, following lunch in a local restaurant, we headed back to the quarry we got rained out of this morning to look for cats. We arrived at 17:00 in much brighter conditions, even the sun shone. We stood about 200 metres or so from each other to be able cover a wider area when scanning the quarry, surrounding rocky outcrops and grassy hills. After about an hour Sid waved us over - he had seen a **Chinese Mountain Cat** distantly and briefly on a far hillside. Despite our best efforts we couldn't relocate it. At about 18:30 myself and Tim went back to the quarry and staked it out with Sid joining us a bit later. At 19:20 I suddenly spotted **2 Chinese Mountain Cats** - a mother and well grown kitten at the top of the quarry - brilliant, we were very happy. We watched them playing for at least 10 minutes and just as Tim was going to get a photo the mother and kitten decided at that moment to walk out of the quarry and over a ridge out of sight. Nevertheless, it was smiles all round. That afternoon as well as the Mountain Cats we chalked up: **10 Tibetan Foxes, 3 Red Foxes, 15 Tibetan Gazelle** around **20 Himalayan Marmots** lots of **Plateau Pikas** and Sid had a brief sighting of an **Asian Badger**. On the way back to our hotel, as it was now dark, we tried the first quarry again where we had seen the Eagle Owl the night before but only found **4 Tibetan Foxes**.



## Plateau Pika

**Tuesday 4th.** Heavy rain before first light, light rain showers in the afternoon.

We arrived at the quarry where we had seen the Mountain Cats the day before at first light just as the rain stopped and the weather brightened. Myself and Tim staked out the quarry, Sid moved on about 200 metres to scan and I went about 50 metres further up the slope behind Tim to scan - so all angles covered. I'd only just got in position when I saw Tim waving frantically at me - I got down the slope and back to Tim a darn site quicker than I got up there. Tim had found 2 **Pallas's Cats** at the bottom of the quarry - a mother with a well grown kitten. Sid quickly joined us as we watched the

cats go about their business for the next 35 minutes before they melted away behind the rocks and out of sight. A fantastic sighting and one we were obviously very happy about.



### **Pallas's Cat**

Whilst there we also picked up a **Tibetan Fox**, 2 **Red Foxes**, 4 **Tibetan Gazelle** and of course many **Plateau Pikas**. We headed back to the hotel at 08:30 as it was time to grab some breakfast load the suitcases and get on the road to Zekog. Just as a matter of interest the plan (itinerary) was to go to Baxi this morning if we had seen both species of cat before today. At Baxi we would have been looking for Tufted

Deer and Siberian Roe Deer but we blew it out as we had a chance for those species elsewhere. The advantage of a flexible itinerary and built in contingency time is what it's all about.

We had a long slow drive stopping occasionally to have a scan but only seeing **Himalayan Marmots** and **Plateau Pikas**. We also got delayed for nearly an hour as we were held up due to road works. Finally arriving at our hotel in Zekog around 19:30.



**Tibetan Fox**



**Wednesday 5th.** Rain showers, some heavy. We left Zekog at 06:45 it being only a stepping stone night stop on our way to Xinghai - where we arrived at 13:00 and booked into our hotel. A quiet day for mammals as all we saw en route was a single **Tibetan Fox**, a few **Himalayan Marmots** and **Plateau Pikas**. We did try a little spotlighting on a road just outside Xinghai but it proved pretty useless with only a **Red Fox** and an unidentified bat being seen.



**Tibetan Fox.** Probably the strangest looking of the vulpine clan - fantastic Mr Fox.

## **Thursday 6th.**

We left the hotel in Xinghai at 06:00 making our way to Yushu via the Erla Shan Pass. We travelled on the fast G214 motorway at the beginning, came off onto the old G214 in the middle as it was easier to stop on the side of the road to look for mammals, before going back on the motorway towards the end of our journey. We got to the top of the Erla Shan Pass (road height above sea level 4,999 metres) at 08:00 and walked up the rocky slopes so we were up over 5,000 metres. Walking and scanning the mountain side we found 1 **Red Fox**, 1 **Tibetan Fox**, 8 **Tibetan Gazelles**, 2 **Himalayan Marmots** and many **Plateau Pikas**. As Tim was watching the gazelles he suddenly caught sight of a **Pallas's Cat** moving down a rocky slope and was quick to get me onto it before it was lost to view due to the contours of the slope. A relatively brief view but very nice and more than welcome. We stayed around the Pass until about 10:30 before moving on. As we headed closer to Xinghai we started encountering our first **Kiangs**, in small groups we eventually had a count of approximately 107 animals. We also had a **Tibetan Fox** at least 50 **Tibetan Gazelle** and of course **Himalayan Marmots** and **Plateau Pikas**.

Eventually arriving in Yushu around 17:30 for an overnight stay.



## Kiang

**Friday 8th.** We departed the hotel in Yusha at 05:00 and made our way to the Kanda Shan mountain range where we started spotlighting. Before it got light we found a **Red Fox** and 3 **Blue Sheep**. Once it got light we scanned a wooded mountain side for **McNeil's Red Deer** and it wasn't long before Sid found the first of 4 animals. We then took a side road into a beautiful steep sided gorge where we stayed for the rest of the morning and into the early afternoon. The area holds Snow Leopards and although we looked hard we didn't find any. We did okay though finding 3 **Glover's Pika**, a few **Himalayan Marmots**, another **McNeil's Red Deer**, an **Alpine Musk Deer**, which we were very pleased to find, and

around 150 **Blue Sheep**. Mid afternoon we drove on reaching the Kanda Pass at around 15:00. Stopping and scanning we found about 50 **Blue Sheep**. Back in the summer one of Sid's co-guides saw a Eurasian Lynx here so we found some high ground where Sid thought it had been seen and set up our scopes for some scanning. After about an hour Sid drove off to find a phone signal to phone ahead about our hotel stop that night. Then to my amazement and deep joy I spotted a **Eurasian Lynx** walking along a path amongst the bushes in the valley below. Tim was soon onto it and we watched it making its way along the path slowly going up the side of the valley. At one point it disappeared behind some bushes only for it to reappear in hot pursuit of a **Woolly Hare** - both animals zigzagging and jinking down the path before the hare made its escape. The Lynx turned and made its way up the path again to the top of the valley. Fortunately Sid then returned to join us watching the Lynx. It was definitely still in hunting mode as it looked as if it chased a Pika around some rocks and bushes but we couldn't quite see what it was chasing this time. It also eyed up a couple of Hill Pigeons that alighted on rocks just above it but made no attempt to get at them. After lying down for a few minutes the Lynx got up and we watched it for the last time as it walked off out of view behind some thick cover. In all we watched it for 40 minutes. With all three of us buoyed up by the Lynx sighting we got in the car and drove the 1.5 hours to our hotel in Nangqian, arriving around 20:30.



**Blue Sheep**

## **Saturday 8th.**

We left the hotel at 05:00 and went back to the approaches to the Kanda Pass for some spotlighting and some first light mammal searching. We encountered a total of 18 **Woolly Hares** - 11 of them whilst spotlighting, a few **Blue Sheep** and a **Glovers Pika**. We departed the area around 10:00 to make our way to Zhidoi where we were staying for two nights.



**Glover's Pika**

En route we saw **Plateau Pikas**, **Himalayan Marmots** and singles of both **Tibetan Fox** and **Tibetan Gazelle** before

arriving in Zhidoi at 16:00. Once the hotel administration was done it was late afternoon but we wanted to get out to look for **White-lipped Deer**. It was getting a bit late and the weather was closing in but we wanted to see them today just in case - well you never know what tomorrow might bring do you. As it happened it wasn't too difficult and we found a herd of 25 high up on a hill, not the best of views but job done.

### **Sunday 9th.**

We left the hotel at 05:00 but only got a few hundred metres when we realised we had a puncture. The spare wheel was quickly put on and we were on our way again in 20 minutes. We started spotlighting and found a **Red Fox**, 6 **Tibetan Foxes** and 12 **Tibetan Gazelle**. Once it was light we scanned the surrounding grassy and rocky hills from various points along the road. This is another area that holds Snow Leopards but we didn't find any. However, we did have much better views of **White-lipped Deer** - 61 in total, 164 **Blue Sheep**, 5 **Tibetan Gazelle**, a single **Tibetan Fox**, 2 **Himalayan Marmots** and lots of **Plateau Pikas**. We drove back to the hotel around 12:30 to get the puncture fixed and have something to eat - cooked by Sid the chef.

We went back out to the hills at 16:45 for more scanning and found 55 **White-lipped Deer** and around 100 **Blue Sheep** - no doubt though some were the same animals we saw in the morning. We started spotlighting at 20:30 as we headed back towards Zhidoi and had 11 **Tibetan Foxes**, 11 **Tibetan Gazelles** and 2 Eagle Owls.



**White-lipped Deer**

### **Monday 10th.**

We departed Zhidoi at 07:00 to make our way to Budongquan. It was raining when we left and there was sleet over higher ground. On the way we saw a few **Tibetan Gazelle**, a **Tibetan Fox** a few **Himalayan Marmots** and a colony of **Blythe's Mountain Voles**. The area we were now



entering held a special animal - Tibetan Antelope and the males were high on our list of must see animals. We stopped and scanned at various points the flat plains of the Kekexili area and found the following: at least 90 **Tibetan Antelope** - including some fine looking males, 120 **Tibetan Gazelle**, 4 **Tibetan Foxes** and over 100 **Kiang**. We arrived at Budongquan around 15:30 and checked in to a very convenient lorry/truck drivers motel. Although the motel had no running water or toilet facilities it was remarkably comfortable (and very cheap) and we all got a good night's sleep. The next 'decent' hotel was a long way further on so we had no qualms about spending a night here. In the late afternoon, after some food, we went out to a different area that we had been in earlier in the day. Seeing a few more **Kiangs**, **Himalayan Marmots** and **Plateau Pikas** before Tim spotted a beautiful pale coloured **Wolf** trotting along the side of a low hill. We had it under observation for around 10 minutes before it went out of sight over the hill top. It looked fabulous in the early evening sunshine and although didn't appear in hunting mode certainly spooked a small group of **Tibetan Gazelles**. We didn't see much else after that and got back to the truckers motel in Budongquan just after dark.



**Tibetan Gazelle**



**Tibetan Antelope males**



**Tibetan Antelope female**

**Tuesday 11th.**

We departed the motel at 07:00 ultimately heading for Dulan but had a few stops to make en route. It was a cold, breezy morning and ice had formed on the puddles. We had a **Kiang** by the side of the road before our first stop which wasn't too far down the road from Budongquan - the Kunlun Mountain Park. Recently the reserve entrance had been blocked to cars but you could manoeuvre a vehicle around the barrier if you were careful. This morning there was no barrier so we drove in and it wasn't long before we found our target - **Wild Yak**. Three of them in fact, including a magnificent huge bull. All a

bit distant I have to say but great views in the scope. We drove on up the road to where we could get a slightly closer look. Moving on again we were stopped after about a kilometre by a manned barrier. Sid had a conversation with the 'guard' who apart from confirming the Wild Yaks said that the reserve was closed to vehicles but he would let us continue if we wanted. It was tempting to carry on but with Wild Yaks now on our list and a long journey ahead of us we decided to turn back. Whilst in the reserve we also saw 8 **Tibetan Antelope**, 12 **Tibetan Gazelles** and of course **Plateau Pikas**. Just as we were leaving the reserve and joining the main highway we saw a group of 7 **Yaks** quite close to the road, we only had a brief view but they looked good for Wild Yak as far as their colour and size was concerned so it could have been a group of Wild Yak cows but we couldn't rule out domestic/feral Yaks due to their proximity to a busy road.

We drove on and noticed large numbers of Chinese Red Army trucks and Army tented camps along the road. Our plan was to drop in at Yak Valley although the pressure was off as far as seeing Wild Yak was concerned we thought it would be worth a try for Argali and if we saw any more Wild Yaks that would be a bonus. Also the scenic landscape and geology of the valley made it well worth a visit. We knew however that we couldn't spend too long there as we had to make progress on our drive to Dulan. As it turned out we had less time there than we envisaged. We got about 2 kilometres into the valley and stopped to scan a rocky hillside when an Army vehicle

pulled up, four soldiers jumped out and the man in charge - a Colonel made it quite clear (friendly but firm!) that we had to leave as Army manoeuvres were taking place in the valley and foreigners weren't allowed to be there. So we left Yak Valley and headed for Dulan, noticing as the kilometres went by that we were going into a much drier, semi-desert habitat with Yaks being replaced by sheep and Bactrian Camels. We stopped and walked a few places en route but didn't see any mammals. Eventually arriving at our hotel in Dulan at 17:30.



**Kiang**



**A Wild Yak in its wilderness home**

## **Wednesday 12th.**

We left the hotel in Dulan at 07:00 and took the old road towards Chaka. After about 30 minutes driving we stopped to scan a hillside and found a few small groups of **Blue Sheep** totalling around 40 animals and 3 **Himalayan Marmots**.

Moving on we scanned a flat semi-desert type plain in the hope of **Goitered Gazelle**, we did well as we got decent views of about 30 animals. Further on still we stopped to scan the terrain - rocky hillsides with Junipers trees interspersed with grassy meadows. After quite a bit of searching we struck lucky and found 5 **Gansu Red Deer** stags. Further along the road we scanned a wetland area which held lots of sheep and had at least 20 **Tibetan Gazelles**. All before 10:00, so we were happy as we continued our drive to Chaka where we arrived at midday.

In the afternoon we had a look along the shore of the huge salt lake adjacent to the town but didn't come across any mammals. We went out spotlighting from 20:15 to 22:50 on a track adjacent to the salt lake west of the town, that went through a semi-desert, salt marsh type habitat. Sid has seen Jerboas here when he was last here two years ago. We found the following: 5 **Northern Three-toed Jerboas**, 1 **Mongolian Gerbil**, 31 **Woolly Hare**, 2 **Red Foxes**, 4 **Tibetan Gazelle**.



## **Thursday 13th.**

An 06:30 start to the strangely named Rubber Mountain not far from Chaka. We saw 3 **Woolly Hare** on the way. At Rubber Mountain we walked through a very picturesque side valley following a small stream as we made our way up hill. It was very good for birds but the only mammals we saw were **Plateau Pikas** and about 10 **Himalayan Marmots**. Just as we were about to turn back and leave the valley when an old Yak herder said we weren't supposed to be there and that we must leave. His son on the other hand didn't seem to mind us being there and was interested in what we were doing - a generational thing we suspect. Anyway we left the valley and Rubber Mountain and returned to our hotel about 12:30.

In the afternoon we drove west out of Chaka and had a quick scan of a rocky hillside just off the main road but only seeing a few **Himalayan Marmots** and a **Woolly Hare**. Moving on we then walked up yet another picturesque valley which looked good for wildlife. We came across at least 75 **Blue Sheep** a few **Himalayan Marmots** and a **Woolly Hare**. As we started back down the valley at 18:30 I spied 2 **Wolves** on the top of a ridge. We had them in view for about 10 minutes as they trotted along together, stopping every now and again to scent mark. Although some way off they were a very evocative sight outlined against the skyline - a true encapsulation of what wilderness and mammal watching is all about.

Later in the evening, after a Sid special food extravaganza we went out spotlighting. We started at 21:30 and this time went to the east of Chaka through habitat similar to last night's and again adjacent to Chaka salt lake. We were after Jerboas and did well seeing the following: 8 **Five-toed Jerboas**, 4 **Northern three-toed Jerboas**. We also saw 7 Jerboas which we were unable to identify as Five-toed or Northern three-toed as the views were poor. We also had a small mouse which went unidentified. We ended the session at 23:00.



**Northern Three-Toed Jerboa**



## **Mongolian Five-Toed Jerboa**

**Friday 14th.**

We departed Chaka at 06:45 heading ultimately to Huzhu Beishan but via Qinghai Lake and the Gangcha area. It rained most of the journey and there was sleet on high ground near Xining. A quick stop at Qinghai Lake produced only **Plateau Pikas**. We arrived in the Gangcha area and were soon watching our target animal of the day - **Przewalski's Gazelle**. Before we left the area we saw 60 to 70 of these rare Gazelles. The only other mammal we saw at the site was a **Woolly Hare**. It was still raining!

We arrived at our hotel in Huzhu Beishan at 18:45.



## Przewalski's Gazelle

### Saturday 15th.

A tragic start to the day. We left our hotel at 05:00 to do some spotlighting. Before we had even started, and only five minutes down the road, a cat ran into the road and straight under the car. Sid didn't even have a chance to break it was all over in a second. We stopped and walked back and there dead in the road was a **Leopard Cat**. We were all devastated and poor Sid didn't even get out of the car. There was no blood, it wasn't crushed so we guessed its neck or back was broken and thankfully must have died instantly. After taking some photos we drove on in silence. A short while later we

picked up eye shine in the spotlight and were onto a cat - unfortunately despite being reminiscent of a Eurasian Wild Cat - it was a domestic. As was a second cat that was sharing the same grass field with it. However, our next mammal in the spotlight was one we had come here to look for after blowing out Baxi back on the 4th - a **Siberian Roe Deer**. As we gained altitude into the Gansu Mountain range it started raining and was quite misty so we didn't bother going up too high. But we did find a **Gansu Red Deer** stag before heading back to the hotel at 08:00. After breakfast we were on our way again, going back over the Gansu Mountain and heading for Tian Shui. We spent some time looking for Red Pikas on the mountain as we traversed it but with the constant rain and sleet all we saw were 2 bedraggled **Himalayan Marmots**. It rained most of the way to Tian Shui which was a stepping stone night stop on our way to Foping. We arrived at our hotel in Tian Shui at 20:30 and were now off the Tibetan Plateau.

The following 3 photographs are of the Leopard Cat we sadly ran over and killed.





## Sunday 16th.

We left Tian Shui at 07:15 for the long drive to Foping. It rained most of the journey. On the journey we saw a couple of **Perny's Long-nosed Squirrels** but that was all. We arrived at Foping at 16:00, the journey taking longer than expected because of a blocked road due to a landslide forcing us to take a 1.5 hour diversion. We were here to see **Golden Snub-nosed Monkey** which being an habituated troop was easy. we saw at least 45 animals. Sid also saw a **Pere David's Rock Squirrel**. We stayed overnight in a hotel in Foping.







**Golden Snub-nosed Monkey**

## **Monday 17th.**

We departed Foping at 06:00 for Wolong, it was a rainy start but it did warm up and the sun shone in the afternoon. On the approach road a kilometre or so outside Wolong we sighted a medium sized, dark brown mustelid at the side of the road which quickly darted into the verge side vegetation. It was smaller than a Stone Marten but bigger than a Stoat (Ermine). Stopping quickly we managed to squeak it into view, albeit brief views, twice - but enough to identify it as a **Yellow-bellied Weasel**. We arrived at our hotel at 17:45. At dusk there were quite a few Pipistrelle type bats flitting around the hotel. We went out spotlighting at 19:45 and found 2 **Parti-coloured Flying Squirrels** and 1 **Complex-Toothed Flying Squirrel** before we packed it in at 21:45.

## **Tuesday 18th.**

We went out spotlighting at 04:00 till first light. We had an **Asian Grey Shrew** show well in the headlights and a larger rat like rodent that went unidentified. We then had great views of a **Leopard Cat** just sitting on a slope close to the road. We watched it for nearly 5 minutes before it slinked off into thick cover. We also had 1 **Chinese Goral** and a **Red Fox**. Once light enough we scanned the high mountain slopes and valleys seeing 11 **Takin** and 5 **Sambar**. Driving down to a lower elevation we had a very brief view of a Pika which was almost certainly a Moupin Pika being as it seems they are the only

species found at this location. We then walked the Dengshan Valley trail for an hour. Right at the start of the trail on the rocky footpath a **Moupin Pika** gave itself up and posed nicely for a few photos. Further along the trail we found 2 **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrels**. We got back to the hotel at 13:30. Low cloud and mist descended in the afternoon so we didn't go out. However, it cleared by the evening and so we went back to the Dengshan Valley trail and started walking it at 19:50 using hand held torches. The plan was to hopefully find a Tufted Deer and the only mammal we saw in 1.5 hours of walking was a **Tufted Deer** - can't be bad. We spotlit our way back (in the car) to the hotel but only saw a single **Complex-tooth Flying Squirrel**.



**Leopard Cat**



**Moupin Pika**



## Wednesday 19th.

We were leaving for Labahe today but first we drove back to the Dengsham Valley trail and walked it from 07:00 - 09:15. Red Pandas are seen occasionally on the trail so we had nothing to lose giving it a go. We didn't see any Pandas but did see a **Tufted Deer** briefly and 1 or 2 **Swinhoe's Squirrels** but that's all. We then went back to the hotel, had something to eat, packed and left Wolong for Labahe at 11:45.



### Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel

After a pretty uneventful journey we arrived at Labahe at 19:15. After sorting ourselves out at the hotel we had a

decent spotlighting session (in the rain) from 21:15 to 23:30. Finding the following: 6 **Confucian Niveventer**, 3 **Red and White Giant Flying Squirrels**, 1 **Parti-coloured Flying Squirrel**, 3 **Hog Badgers**, 1 **Masked Palm Civet**, 10 **Sambar** and 6 **Chinese Goral**. Of interest we also saw a small Pipistrelle sized Bat that landed briefly on a cliff face before alighting upside down on a leaf. Unfortunately it had settled around the other side of the leaf so we couldn't get a clear view of it but I did see its face and it was 'Pipistrelle' like as opposed to Horseshoe type. So, if anyone knows what this leaf hanging Bat species might be by its behaviour please let me know.



We also saw one of the tame Gansu Red Deer that have been introduced recently to the reserve from a Deer farm - to enhance the enjoyment of visiting tourists apparently! I don't think these Red Deer were ever at this location historically so it's not a re-introduction. Anyway not countable in our opinion.



**Masked Palm Civet**

**Thursday 20th.**

It was raining but we were out at 07:00. The barrier was down across the road that takes you into Mount Erlang National Forest Park so we first visited a cave not far from

the hotel. In the cave we found a **Pearson's Horseshoe Bat**. Outside on the roadside we watched a **Pere David's Rock Squirrel**. A short while later as we drove back towards the barrier there was at least 12 **Tibetan Macaques** raiding some dustbins/trash cans. Once through the barrier (at 08:00) the road started climbing and annoyingly we were soon into mist and a fine drizzle but fortunately there wasn't a breath of wind. We were here to look for Red Pandas so we walked the road looking in the trees nearest to the road - no choice due to the mist. We spotted a young **Chinese Goral** and up to 6 **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrels**. I then noticed some branches moving on the side of a tree in an otherwise totally still tree so I raised my binoculars and there in the tree was a fabulous **Red Panda**. I called Tim over and we were soon joined by Sid as we watched it for the next hour eating berries or grooming before it curled up and went to sleep. Three tame and approachable Gansu Red Deer fed by the side of the road as a group of tourists walked over to them and began snapping photos with their mobile phones - definitely not tickable! The weather remained misty and wet so we drove back to the hotel at 13:30 where we stayed all afternoon due to the now continuous heavy rain.

In the evening we went spotlighting from 21:00 to 22:00 cutting it short due to the rain. In that hour we saw 12 **Sambar**, 4 **Chinese Goral**, 1 **Masked Palm Civet** and an unidentified rodent.





**Red Panda**



**Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel**



**Pearson's Horseshoe Bat**



**Pearson's Horseshoe Bat**



## Chinese Goral

### Friday 21st.

We went out spotlighting from 05:00 to 06:30 and saw: 5 **Confucian Niviventer**, 2 **Greater Horseshoe Bats** hanging from the roof of the rock fall shelter over the road, 1 **Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel**, 1 **Hog Badger**, 21 **Sambar** and 13 **Chinese Goral**. After breakfast, back at the hotel, we watched about 20 **Tibetan Macaques** scavenge around the bins for food. We drove back up the mountain road once the barrier was open which, this morning, was about 08:45. It was a fine warm and sunny morning as we began walking the same stretch of road that we had done the morning before scanning the trees as we went. It wasn't long before I found a

**Red Panda** up a Pine tree a couple of hundred metres from the road. We watched it for about 30 minutes, as it washed and groomed itself before it was lost to view when it curled up amongst the branches and went to sleep. As this Panda was about 400 metres from where yesterday's was we speculated whether it was the same animal or not. However, I remembered that yesterday's one had a torn right ear whereas today's one had a perfect right ear. This was later borne out in the photographs - so 2 Red Pandas for definite.

We drove back up the mountain and stopped for lunch on a side track. After lunch Tim walked off back down the road and off piste to see if he could get better photos of the Panda. Myself and Sid were going to meet him further down the road in the vehicle after about 20 minutes. So eventually Sid and myself backed out of the track and onto the road, we had only gone about 100 metres when I saw a **Red Panda** walking down the side of the road. Sid drove very carefully as we followed it along the road for some way before it moved off the road and into thick bamboo.



**Roadside Red Panda**

John Wright

It looked quite old and grizzled unlike the Panda we saw earlier in the day - so definitely the third Red Panda of the trip. When we caught up with Tim he was understandably a bit miffed about our sighting as he had no luck himself with more Panda photos. The only other mammals we saw were a **Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel** and a troop of around 20 **Tibetan Macaques** before driving back to the hotel in the afternoon.



**Greater Horseshoe Bats**



The 'town' troop of **Tibetan Macaques** were still investigating bins and generally just loafing around the roadside and buildings. We saw a **Pere David's Squirrel** in the same place as yesterday's, near the bat cave, so probably the same animal. Apart from a walk along a river we didn't do much in the afternoon and apart from the macaques didn't see any mammals. Besides by now it had clouded over and had began to rain.



**Tibetan Macaque**





**Tibetan Macaque**

We had an evening meal in the hotel restaurant and through the back windows we watched 14 **Sambar** and a **Masked Palm Civet** wandered past. We went spotlighting from 21:45 to 23:50 and the first mammal we saw was a **Masked Palm Civet** not far from the restaurant so almost certainly the same individual we had seen when we were having our evening meal. Further on we found 7 **Red and White Giant Flying Squirrels**, 1 **Complex-Toothed Flying Squirrel**, 12 **Sambar** and 5 **Chinese Goral**, plus 3 Gansu Red Deer. Up to now we had spot lit the road after turning left out of the hotel so we decided to drive past the hotel and do the other part of the road which ends anyway after a couple of kilometres. At the end of the road over the artificial lakes about 6 bats were flying, watching them in the spotlight I would have said they were the perfect match for Daubenton's Bats a species I was very familiar with in the UK and Europe. A quick bit of research later that night nailed their id as **Chinese Water Myotis**. Depending on the authority they are a good species or a race of Daubenton's Bat/Myotis.



**Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel**



**Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel**



**Complex-Toothed Flying Squirrel**

## **Saturday 22nd.**

We packed and left Labahe around 10:00 saying farewell to the **Tibetan Macaques** that were all around the hotel scrounging food off the tourists. We had to be at the airport tonight so decided to spend our time around the hills and parks in Dujiangyan, not far from Chengdu. A park Sid knew well near where he lived held Pallas's Squirrels so we thought we might as well try for them. We were in the park from late afternoon, it was warm and muggy so there was very little activity to begin with, at around 18:00 when we guessed the squirrels would be more active we scored finding 2 **Pallas's Squirrels**. We then had a very nice evening meal with Sid, his wife and son. After dark Sid drove Tim and myself to a river, still in a busy part of town, and here we watched a good number of **Japanese Pipistrelles** flitting about - the last mammals of our trip. Sid then drove us to the airport where we said our farewells and thanked Sid for a fantastic trip.

## **Sunday 23rd.**

We got the 01:35 flight back to London Heathrow, via Frankfurt, arriving at Heathrow 08:30 the same day.

**Mammal List: 54 species.**

Tibetan Macaque *Macaca thibetana*;

Golden-Snub-Nosed Monkey *Rhinopithecus roxellana*

Particoloured Flying Squirrel *Hylopetes alboniger*

Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista alborufus*

Complex-Toothed Flying Squirrel *Trogopterus xanthipes*

Pallas's Squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus*

Perny's Long-Nosed Squirrel *Dremomys pernyi*

Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel *Tamiops swinhoei*

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

Pere Davids's Rock Squirrel *Sciurotamias davidianus*

Mongolian Five-Toed Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*

Northern Three-Toed Jerboa *Dipus sagitta*

Blythe's Mountain Vole *Phaiomys leucurus*

Mongolian Gerbil *Meriones unguiculatus*

Confucian Niviventer *Niviventer confucianus*

Plateau Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

Moupin Pika *Ochotona thibetana*

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

Asian Grey Shrew *Crocidura attenuata*

Greater Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*

Pearson's Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus pearsonii*

Japanese Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus abramus*

Chinese Water Myotis *Myotis laniger*

Chinese Mountain Cat *Felis bieti*

Pallas's Cat *Felis manul*

Eurasian Lynx *Lynx lynx*

Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*

Masked Palm Civet *Paguma larvata*

Grey Wolf *Canis Lupus*

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Hog Badger *Arctonyx collaris*

Asian Badger *Meles leucurus*

Yellow-bellied Weasel *Mustela kathiah*

Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*

Kiang *Equus kiang*

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

Alpine Musk Deer *Moschus chrysogaster*

Siberian Roe Deer *Capreolus pygargus*

Asian (MacNeill's) Red Deer *Cervus wallichii macneilli*

(also 'Gansu' Red Deer a Ssp of *C. c. macneilli*)

The Handbook of Mammals of the World have 3 species of Red Deer: Western Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*; Asian Red Deer *Cervus wallichii* which includes *C. w. macneilli* and Wapiti *Cervus canadensis*, subspecies here include Alashan Red Deer and Siberian Red Deer.

Tufted Deer *Elaphodus cephalophus*

Reeves' Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi*

White-Lipped Deer *Przewalskium albirostris*

Sambar *Rusa unicorn*

Goitered Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*

Tibetan Gazelle *Procapra gutturosa*

Przewalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii*

Wild Yak *Bos grunniens*

Takin *Budorcas taxicolor*

Chinese Serow *Capricornis milneedwardsii*

Chinese Goral *Naemorhedus griseus*

Tibetan Antelope *Pantholops hodgsonii*

Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur*



**Selected Birds List:** Przewalski's Partridge, Tibetan Snowcock, Lady Amherst's Pheasant, Temminck's Tragopan, Blue Eared Pheasant, White Eared Pheasant, Koklass Pheasant, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Snow Pigeon, Black-necked Crane, Saker Falcon, Red-billed Blue Magpie, Asian Azure-winged Magpie, Henderson's Ground-Jay, Collared Crow, Swinhoe's Minivet, Kessler's Thrush, Chestnut Thrush, Grandala, Little Forktail, Wallcreeper, Giant Laughingthrush, Tibetan Lark, Przevelski's Finch, Henri's Snowfinch, Blandford's Snowfinch, Pine Bunting.



John Wright

**The End**