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Whereas the vast majority of mammal watchers visit the Ladakh region in October or February/March we decided to try our luck in summer, a period not reputed for being favorable to observe cats. Longer days and outside temperatures of 15 degree above zero allowed for easier scanning of ridges and slopes. We missed the snow leopard but were rewarded with observations of nineteen different mammal, 100 bird and three reptile species, including **Argali**, **Eurasian lynx**, **Pallas's cat** and **Himalayan wolf**.

Practicalities

While we focused on mammals, our **July 14 to August 6, 2019** family holiday was multifaceted combining culture, trekking and wildlife watching. It was roughly divided in one-third culture and altitude acclimation, one-third trekking and one-third mammals, birds and herps-watching in Central and Eastern Ladakh (see below for specifics).

We contacted Exotic Travel (<https://www.exoticladdakh.com/>) to organize our trip as it was praised in multiple mammalwatching.com reports. Rightly so, as Phunchok Tsering and his assistant Stanzin did a perfect job at a reasonable price. Everything went extremely smoothly with one exception: the Indian army did not allow us to sleep in Hanle (despite having visiting permits) as we were foreigners. This meant traveling back to Nyoma two hours away, which was suboptimal as it impeded us to be at dawn and/or dusk in Hanle (e.g. we could not stay near a fresh kiang carcass at night).

Lotus Icher was a fantastic guide during the following 100 km trek: Chogdo – Shang Phu – Shang La – Gampoche – Matho La – Mankarmo – Stok La – Rumbak – Gandala. He was both experienced, good humored and contributing to spotting wildlife. During the trek we continuously scanned ridges and slopes at least from 5:15 to 7:30 AM and again from 5 to 7:30 PM with 2 to 3 pointing scopes (these hours were extended further in Rumbak and Gandala). Of note, we were joined by a spotter, Sonam, in Rumbak and upper Gandala base camp (July 24-29).

Despite the semi-desert status of the Ladakh climate, we had rain on several occasions. While often limited to a few drops, we had a few instances of 1-2 hours heavy rain. These precipitations resulted in snowfall above 5000 m (e.g. 15 cm of fresh snow at Wari La, 5298 m, on July 19).

All three guides (Phunchok, Stanzin and Lotus) were fluent in English and French. The food was excellent and abundant throughout, especially when prepared by either Phunchok's wife, Stanzin, in their Choglamsar home stay or by the cook during the trek. We routinely treated our drinking water with chlorine. Our "long" acclimation period (6 days) translated into a quasi-absence of altitude sickness symptoms.

In spite of the abrogation of article 370 at the end of our stay (August 5) that was conferring a special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, it is important to mention that Ladakh is one of the safest places we have ever visited.

Day-to-day schedule:

July 14: flight Delhi - Leh and altitude acclimation in Leh (Phunchok's home stay in Choglamsar)
July 15: visit of Hemis and Thiksey monasteries
July 16: visit of Matho and Stakna monasteries, birding Shey wetland and Indus near Choglamsar
July 17: visit of Likir, Alchi and Lamayuru monasteries
July 18: Leh-Khardung La 5350 m - Nubra valley (Diskit, Hunder, night in Sumur)
July 19: Nubra valley (Sumur)-Wari La 5298 m - Leh
July 20: trek from Chogdo to Shan Sumdho
July 21: trek Shan Sumdo to Shan Phu
July 22: trek Shan Phu – Shan La 4924 m – Gampoche
July 23: trek Gampoche – Matho La 4912 m – Mankarmo - Ruley
July 24: trek Ruley - Stok La 4870 m – Rumbak
July 25: scanning in Rumbak
July 26: scanning in Rumbak
July 27: trek Rumbak – Urutse - upper Gandala base camp 4528 m
July 28: scanning around upper Gandala base camp 4528 m
July 29: trek upper Gandala base camp 4528 m – Urutse – Rumbak – Choglamsar
July 30: Choglamsar – Tanlang La 5328 m – Thukse (Tso Kar)
July 31: Tso Kar area: Tso Kar itself (salt lake) and Tso Startspuk (fresh water lake).
August 1: Thukse – Pologongka La 4955 m – Puga Sumdho – Namshang La – Karzok (Tso Moriri)
August 2: Karzok – Puga Sumdho – Loma – Hanle – Nyoma
August 3: above Nyoma and Muth
August 4: Nyoma – Loma – Hanle – Nyoma
August 5: Nyoma – Upshi – Choglamsar
August 6: flight Leh – Delhi

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Commented Mammal list

Lagomorpha

- **Cape Hare** (*Lepus capensis tibetanus*): rather common in the Nubra valley, among seabuckthorn bushes (*Hippophae*).
- **Woolly Hare** (*Lepus oiostolus*): commonly seen in the alpine zone (e.g. near Wari La and during the trek in the Upper Rumbak valley) and in *Caragana* bushes along the Indus and Hanle River; up to 11 counted in a single meadow near the Ganda La base camp.
- **Large-eared pika** (*Ochotona macrotis*): a small colony among large boulders below the Rumbak village; another colony in a similar habitat above Nyoma village.
- **Ladakh Pika** (*Ochotona ladacensis*): ID of this species in Ladakh is difficult due to the possible confusion with the Plateau or Black-lipped pika (*O. curzoniae*). Both species have a blackish nose-to-lip coloration that apparently extends to the sides of the nose in the later species. We identified all examined and photographed individuals as Ladakh pika because they were sandy-colored, had limited nose-to-lip black coloration and no rusty color behind the ears. Animals were observed on Shan La, the southern portion of the Tso Kar basin, and on the Pologongka La.
- **Nubra Pika** (*Ochotona nubrica*): found only twice; once in the *Hippophae* bushes below Sumur in the Nubra valley, and once in the *Caragana* bushes near the Shan Sumdho camp.

Rodentia

- **Himalayan Marmot** (*Marmota himalayana*): common above 4000 m. Despite thorough examination, we found no evidence of Long-tailed Marmot (*M. caudata*) in the visited areas, although it is occurring in central Ladakh (west of Khardung La).
- **Silver Mountain Vole** (*Alticola argentatus* s.l.): 1 pregnant female captured at about 4600 m in an abandoned sheep pen, near Gampoche, on the way to the Matho La. The *A. argentatus* identification is based on the long, thick and greyish fur, and a relatively long and white tail. We are aware that other taxa in this group (*albicauda*, *montosus*) and occurring in NW India are now considered as distinct species, so ID needs further scrutiny.
- **Blyth's Vole** (*Phaiomys leucurus*): abundant and easily seen by day around lakes and marshes in the Tso Kar and Hanle basins. Stoliczka's Mountain Vole (*Alticola stoliczkanus*) were also supposed to occur in this area, but we did not see any.
- **House Mouse** (*Mus musculus*): one seen in a restaurant in Karu.
- **Ladakh Hamster** (*Cricetulus alticola*): one rodent seen at night crossing the road and stopping briefly between Loma and Nyoma, could belong to this species. We were unable to capture it to formally check its ID.

Carnivora

- **Red fox** (*Vulpes vulpes montana*): one dead in Rumbak; several seen in the Tso Kar and Hanle regions, and between Loma and Hanle.
- **Himalayan Wolf** (*Canis lupus chanco*): two seen briefly on a ridge above Ganda La base camp; one possible seen at night between Loma and Hanle, along the Hanle river, but too far to confirm species ID.
- **Eurasian Lynx** (*Lynx lynx isabellinus*): seen on three occasions around the Ganda La base camp; two isolated individuals (one of which was identified by our guide as a male) and one female with a yearling kitten. The later family was observed for 7 hours at about 4900 m, while they were resting and playing among boulders and *Caragana* bushes, or hunting for marmots (female alone). We anticipated seeing essentially greyish animals, but all observed individuals were uniformly reddish in color and almost without spots on the coat (except for some on the legs).
- **Pallas's Cat** (*Otocolobus manul nigripictus*): one individual seen hunting for mountain voles in the extensive green grass area bordering the southern banks of the Tso Startsapuk (south of Tso Kar). The animal was shy and kept a distance of ca. 500 m. Note that the longish, barred tail had a conspicuous black tip. The underside of the fur near the front legs appeared also largely black when seen in a distance, as is typical of that subspecies. This species is apparently very rarely seen during summer time.
- **Mountain weasel** (*Mustela altaica*): four single and bold individuals seen at close range in Hunder, Shan Phu, Shan La and Puga Sumdho.

Perissodactyla

- **Tibetan Wild Ass** (*Equus kiang*): commonly seen in small groups (1 to 4 individuals) in Tso Kar, along the Upper Indus and in Hanle; one lone male observed at 5400 m on the Tanglang La. Only very few fawns observed; males were fighting fiercely over territories.

Artiodactyla

- **Ladakh Urial or Red Sheep** (*Ovis orientalis vignei*): one large herd coming to drink in a canal near Shey; two behind the Alchi Monastery drinking in the Indus River; over 35 on a slope in front of the Lamaruyu Monastery, one above Kalchi.
- **Tibetan Argali** (*Ovis ammon hodgsoni*): one female with juvenile seen very far on a ridge above Hanle.
- **Bharal or Blue Sheep** (*Pseudois nayaaur*): regularly seen during trek in herds of up to 50 animals in Rumbak area; few spotted near Tso Kar, Nyoma and a group of 27 on the Wari La.

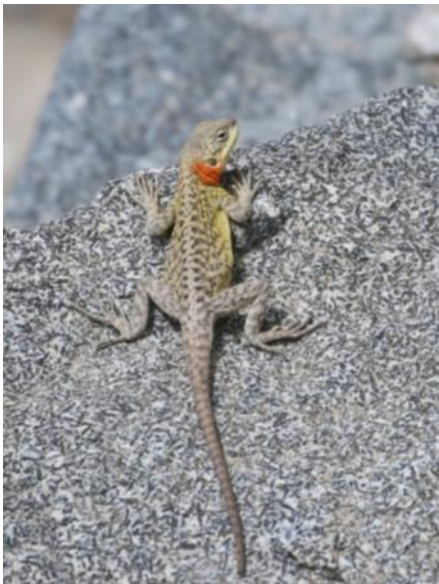
Reptiles

- Ladakh Ground Skink (*Asymblepharus ladacensis*)
- Himalayan Agama (*Paralaudakia himalayana*)
- Toad-headed Agama (*Phrynocephalus reticulatus*)

Birds

- Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)
- Goosander (*Mergus merganser*)
- Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)
- Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*)
- Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)
- Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*)
- Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)
- Garganey (*Spatula querquedula*)
- Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*)
- Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*)
- Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
- Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)
- Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*)
- Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)
- Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)
- Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)
- Rock Dove (*Columba livia*)
- Hill Pigeon (*Columba rupestris*)
- Oriental Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*)
- Tibetan Sandgrouse (*Syrhaptes tibetanus*)
- Alpine Swift (*Tachymarptis melba*)
- Common Swift (*Apus apus*)
- Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*)
- Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
- Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)
- Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*)
- Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
- Ibisbill (*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*)
- Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)
- Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
- Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*)
- Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*)
- Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*)
- Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
- Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*)
- Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*)
- Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*)
- Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
- Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*)
- Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)
- Brown-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*)
- Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*)
- Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*)
- Himalayan Vulture (*Gyps himalayensis*)
- Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
- Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*)
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*)
- Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)
- Upland Buzzard (*Buteo hemilasius*)
- Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)
- Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*)
- Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
- Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*)
- Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)
- Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*)
- Red-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*)
- Alpine Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus*)
- Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)
- Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)
- Alpine Accentor (*Prunella collaris*)
- Robin Accentor (*Prunella rubeculoides*)
- Brown Accentor (*Prunella fulvescens*)
- House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
- Black-winged Snowfinch (*Montifringilla adamsi*)
- Blanford's Snowfinch (*Pyrgilauda blanfordi*)
- Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
- Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)
- White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
- Common Rosefinch (*Erythrura erythrina*)

- Streaked Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rubicilloides*)
- Great Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rubicilla*)
- Plain Mountain Finch (*Leucosticte nemoricola*)
- Brandt's Mountain Finch (*Leucosticte brandti*)
- Twite (*Linaria flavirostris*)
- Red-fronted Serin (*Serinus pusillus*)
- Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*)
- Hume's Ground-tit (*Pseudopodoces humilis*)
- Great tit (*Parus major*)
- Tibetan Lark (*Melanocorypha maxima*)
- Hume's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella acutirostris*)
- Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)
- Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)
- Northern House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*)
- Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
- Eurasian Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*)
- Kashmir Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus sindianus*)
- Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*)
- Tickell's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus affinis*)
- Hume's Whitethroat (*Sylvia althaea*)
- Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*)
- Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)
- Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*)
- Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*)
- Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*)
- Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
- Güldenstädt's Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythrogaster*)
- Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*)
- Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*)
- Pied Wheatear (*Oenanthe pleschanka*)
- Variable Wheatear (*Oenanthe picata*)



Himalayan Agama
(*Paralaudakia himalayana*)
Thiksey Monastery
15.07.2019.



Citrine Wagtail
(*Motacilla citreola*)
Choglamsar
16.07.2019



Ladakh Urial (*Ovis orientalis vignei*), near Shey, 16.07.2019.



Ladakh Urial (*Ovis orientalis vignei*), near Shey, 16.07.2019.



Mountain Weasel (*Mustela altaica*), Hunder, Nubra Valley, 18.07.2019.



Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis tibetanus*), Hunder, Nubra Valley, 18.07.2019.



Himalayan Marmot (*Marmota himalayana*), Wari La, 19.07.2019.



Ladakh Ground Skink (*Asymblepharus ladacensis*), Chogdo, 20.07.2019.



Nubra Pika (*Ochotona nubrica*), below Sumur, Nubra Valley, 22.07.2019.



Ladakh Pika (*Ochotona ladacensis*), Shan La at 4950 m, 22.07.2019.



Silver Mountain Vole (*Alticola argentatus* s.l.): abandoned sheep pen near Gampoche, on the way to the Matho La, at about 4600 m, 23.07.2019. ID uncertain.



Large-eared Pika (*Ochotona macrotis*), below Rumbak, 26.07.2019.



Eurasian Lynx (*Lynx lynx isabellinus*), female with her kitten (left) or while hunting alone for marmots (right); Ganda La base camp, 28.07.2019.



Woolly Hare (*Lepus oiostolus*), Ganda La base camp, 28.07.2019.



Hume's Ground-tit (*Pseudopodoces humilis*), Tso Kar, 30.07.2019.



Blyth's Vole (*Phaiomys leucurus*), Tso Kar, 30.07.2019.



Blyth's Vole (*Phaiomys leucurus*), Tso Kar, 30.07.2019.



Ladakh Pika (*Ochotona ladacensis*), Tso Kar, 31.07.2019.



Pallas's Cat (*Otocolobus manul nigripectus*), Tso Startsapuk, 31.07.2019.



Tibetan Wild Ass (*Equus kiang*), Tso Kar, 31.07.2019.



Ladakh Pika (*Ochotona ladacensis*), juvenile individual, Pologongka La, 01.08.2019.



Large-eared Pika (*Ochotona macrotis*), above Nyoma, 03.08.2019.



Tibetan Wild Ass (*Equus kiang*), males fighting along the Indus River, 04.08.2019.