



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Mongolia: The Gobi Desert, Steppe & Taiga 2018**

May 31, 2018 to Jun 17, 2018

Phil Gregory & Bayanaa

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*Demoiselle Cranes put on a wonderful show for us Elsen Tasarkhai. In all, we saw these beautiful birds on six days of the tour. Photo by participant Laszlo Czinege.*

This was the second Field Guides tour to Mongolia, covering many of the key sites and habitats in central, southern and northern Mongolia, including steppe, desert and boreal forest, and we succeeded very nicely. It was a late, dry and rather cold spring here despite good snowfall over the winter, so water levels in the wetlands were low and some species were scarce, but breeding was certainly in full swing. Staying primarily in ger camps was fun, but you have to get used to the low doorways and starlit nocturnal treks to the bathroom.

Most came in early to get oriented, and also do a cultural tour, which included the National Museum, the brilliant UNESCO World Heritage lama temple at Choisin (with those wonderful metal 18th century sculptures by Zanabazar, the Mongolian Michelangelo), and a fantastic concert that included extraordinary throat singing, skilled musicians with horsehead fiddles, folk dancers and a contortionist, all well worth doing and recommended.

We went to Songino and some riparian habitat along the Tuul River on the first day, when it was atypically hot, albeit with a breeze, and we picked up the first Mongolian birds including Asian Azure-winged Magpie, White-cheeked Starling, a nice assortment of wildfowl and Demoiselle Crane.

Next it was off to Khustai National Park, stopping en route to see some Steppe Eagles with the striking Mongolian and much duller Asian Short-toed Larks being common as well.

Later that day we had a great experience watching the Przewalski's Wild Horses (Takhi) in the park, a remarkable creature that has come back from near extinction and looks just like the cave paintings of those horses with erect manes. Beautiful pale buffy and blonde colouration too, a striking creature that is reintroduced here and looks to be doing quite well.

Other good mammals here were pikas, Red Deer, Mongolian Gazelle and the delightful marmots. Birds included Himalayan and Cinereous Vulture, Golden Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Saker Falcon, Rock Petronia and Meadow Bunting, and it was fun getting used to living in a ger, the large circular felt tents so common in Mongolia.

Heading west, we stopped at Dasinchilen wetland and Tsargaan lakes. Swan Goose, Grey-lag and Bar-headed Goose showed well, also summer plumage Asian Dowitchers, White-naped and Common Crane and the rather distinctive Mongolian Gull as well. Passerines included Pere David's Snowfinch and Eastern Yellow Wagtail as well as Reed Bunting.

Next day, the Ugii Lake area gave us terrific views of White-tailed Eagle, Whooper Swans, White-winged Scoter and Red-crested Pochard plus a good selection of shorebirds including summer plumage Red-necked Stint, Little Stint and Terek Sandpiper. It was unusually cold and windy for this section with some scant rain.

The ancient Mongol capital of Kharkorin had a large temple complex which was home to Red-billed Choughs and Desert Wheatear. A large wetland at Elsen Tasarkhai (Burd marsh) gave us breeding plumage Arctic Loon, a bonus adult Little Gull, a pair of White-naped Cranes, Swan Goose, Bar-headed Geese with goslings, and several Eastern Marsh Harriers. Pallas's Bunting was useful addition too, and some of us saw the first Lammergeier over the valley at the back of the ger camp (we could not use our usual one as the gers had been damaged in high winds).

Next we headed up to Terelj and stayed at a very remote ger camp close to a lovely boreal forest site for Black-Billed Capercaillie which had been lekking here the previous week. Despite the good conditions luck was not with us, but it was a superb area with Red-flanked Bluetail, Siberian Rubythroat and Pine Bunting singing. There is even a chance of wolf here as they often hear them at night by the camp.

Terelj NP had really beautiful Siberian larch and pine forest, with many lovely wildflowers like globeflower, grass of Parnassus and yellow pasque flower. Birds included Gray-headed, Great, Lesser Spotted and White-backed Woodpecker, Common and Himalayan (Oriental) Cuckoo, Pine and Black-faced Bunting, Red-throated Thrush, Nutcracker, Willow and Marsh Tit and Long-tailed Rosefinch.

Back to Ulaanbaatar next day, then our large bags headed south with the vehicles to Dalanzadgad whilst we took the early morning Mongolian Airlines flight and met up with them for the Gobi -Altai sector of the trip.

Khanbogd ger camp had a nice rocky valley behind it that gave us Chukar, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Eastern Black Redstart, Mongolian Finch, Grey-necked Bunting and Godlewski's Bunting. It was also quite nearby the gorgeous Gobi Altai Mountain valley of Yolyn Am (Lammergeier Valley), where we saw Lammergeier, as well as Cinereous and Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Saker, Wallcreeper, Mongolian (Kozlov's) and Brown Accentor, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, and many tame White-winged Snowfinch and Horned Larks. Altai Snowcock drew a blank as usual, you need great luck to see that species here. We also had a fantastic mammal day with Ibex, Argali and an incredible encounter between a Golden Eagle and a Pallas's Cat!

Driving into the edge of the Gobi proper was about 120 km on a dusty corrugated road, and the birding en route gave us a Barbary Falcon, the remarkable Henderson's (Mongolian) Ground-Jay, Asian Desert Warbler and both Desert and Pied Wheatear (including the rare white-throated "vittata" morph). The ger camp was sited nearby to the great Khongor sand dunes, and the saxaul forest there gave us the rare and localized Saxaul Sparrow, Daurian and Great-Grey Shrike and Hill Pigeon next day, with terrific looks at Pallas's Sandgrouse along the river there.

A nocturnal mammal foray here was terrific as we had a fabulous Long-eared Hedgehog, a nice look at a several Gobi Jerboa, (remarkably like a diminutive kangaroo!) plus Siberian Jerboa, Fat-tailed Dwarf Jerboa and Mid-day Gerbil, not bad for a 45 minute tour of the camp perimeter.

Heading back towards Dalanzadgad we took a different more remote route to the famous dinosaur site of Flaming Cliffs, (seeing the rare Black-tailed or Goitered Gazelle and Godlewski's Bunting en route). The ger camp was close to this, and we found summer plumage Oriental Plover with 2 attendant Greater Sand Plover females in the steppe here next day, plus Eurasian Golden Oriole, Steppe Grey Shrike and vagrant Chinese Pond Heron at a plantation when the wind died down. Then it was back to the town, seeing another Oriental Plover and Pallas's Sandgrouse en route, and a nice look at some springs at Dalan Bulag that gave us Paddyfield Warbler as the final addition to the trip.

Our bags met up with us the hotel in UB that night, and we had an enjoyable farewell dinner at a Mongolian barbecue restaurant. Many thanks to our very hard working and careful drivers Odhoo and Tumruu, and to Bayanaa, our local guide and organizer who did a terrific job. We are grateful to them for making the tour so memorable and for many small kindnesses to a demanding group. Also thanks to Sue and Rowan of Sicklebill Safaris who basically arranged things in Mongolia, and to Mandy at Field Guides who co-ordinated the whole enterprise and did a great job.

Thanks also to the group for coming along, I am glad we shared this adventurous trip with generally good humor, and enjoyed so many memorable sightings, I hope the photos turn out nicely. Safe travels and I look forward to seeing you again on future trips.

Mongolia is a great trip for landscapes in a very unusual country, with some rare and seldom-seen birds, and an unexpectedly good selection of mammals- why not join us for another memorable adventure there in 2019?

Phil Gregory, UB, Hong Kong and Kuranda, June 2018.

#### Itinerary

- Wed May 30 Arrival in Ulaanbaatar (UB) for those doing the cultural option. Zuchi Hotel overnight.
- Thursday May 31 Optional tour of Ulaanbaatar for early arrivals, including National Museum, Choisin Lama temple and the Mongolian culture troupe of singers, dancers and a contortionist. Highly recommended! Overnight Zuchi Hotel
- Friday Jun 1 Tuul River riparian habitat at Songino and damp thickets near the Kuwait-Mongolia Research Centre at Bogd Mt. Overnight at Zuchi Hotel. Warm to hot
- Sat Jun 2 Steppe areas en route to Khustai NP, overnight Khustai ger camp. Very cold, some rain
- Sun Jun 3 Khustai NP: Baishant dry valley area and Tuul River plain. Overnight Khustai ger camp. Warm and sunny
- Mon Jun 4 Depart Khustai NP for Dashinchilen wetland, overnight Ugii Lake ger camp. Warm but windy
- Tues Jun 5 Ugii Lake and wetlands, then to Kharkorin, overnight Anja ger camp. Very cold and windy, some rain

- Wed Jun 6 Kharkorin temple then to Burd marsh/Elsen Tasarkhai and Khugnu Khan ger camp. Cold and wet early but cleared off nicely
- Thurs Jun 7 Khugnu Khan to Ulaanbaatar via Tuul River bridge, overnight at Khadag ger camp in Terelj NP. Fine conditions
- Fri Jun 8 Early morning to Shar Guy, afternoon Tuul River near Terelj and overnight Tumen Khaan ger camp. Warm and sunny
- Sat Jun 9 Tuul River at Terelj riparian and boreal forest above Tumen Khaan, sunny with no wind
- Sun Jun 10 Tumen Khaan area then Tuul River riparian; journey to Ulan Bataar and overnight Grand Hill Hotel. Fine.
- Mon Jun 11 Mongolian Airlines flight to Dalanzadgad (1 hr.) then steppe en route to Khanbogd ger camp, and nearby valley, Fine.
- Tues Jun 12 Yol Am valley to 2600m (8200'), overnight Khanbogd ger camp. Fine.
- Wed Jun 13 Khanbogd to Gobi Erdene, 120 km on dusty corrugated road, birding en route. Overnight Gobi Erdene ger camp. Fine
- Thurs Jun 14 Saxaul forest habitat and Khongor River and sand dunes. Overnight Gobi Erdene ger camp. Fine
- Fri Jun 15 Gobi Erdene to Flaming Cliffs, fine early but wind rising and very windy at that site with a little sprinkle of rain! Overnight Gobi Tour ger camp.
- Sat Jun 16 Steppe around Flaming Cliffs, then Dalan Bulag Springs in Dzalangadza. Mongolian Air from Dalanzadgad to UB at 1400, overnight Grand Hill Hotel
- Sun Jun 17 Departures home

#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

## BIRDS

### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

- BAR-HEADED GOOSE** (*Anser indicus*) – Lovely looks from Khustai, Dashinchilen, Ugii and Elsen Tasarkhai/Burd marsh, with several broods of goslings seen. Highest totals were about 50 birds at Ugii and 30 at Khustai and Dashinchilen.
- GRAYLAG GOOSE (SIBERIAN)** (*Anser anser rubrirostris*) – 14 at Dashinchilen and 4 at Ugii, this is the eastern race.
- SWAN GOOSE** (*Anser cygnoides*) – 15 at Dashinchilen wetlands, 60 at Ugii Lake and 4 at Elsen Tasarkhai. This rare species only breeds in Russia, Mongolia and China with the border zones between these countries being their key breeding location. They winter in North and South Korea and central China. The world population is about 60–90,000 birds and is declining as a result of habitat loss and unsustainable levels of hunting.
- MUTE SWAN** (*Cygnus olor*) – 4 at Ugii Lake were a good sighting, being wild birds here.
- WHOOPEE SWAN** (*Cygnus cygnus*) – 2 at Songino, then 40 at Ugii Lake including one on a large mud nest, and 5 at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- RUDDY SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – Quite widespread, starting at Songino, then with 120 at Ugii wetlands and several pairs at Khongorin Els.
- COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – 30 at Tsargaan Lakes and 40 at Ugii.
- GARGANEY** (*Spatula querquedula*) – 20 at Dashinchilen, 6 at Ugii and 4 at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – Small numbers at the marsh at Dashinchilen, Ugii (6) and Elsen Tasarkhai (10).
- GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – 50 at Songino, 4 at Khustai then 20 at Dashinchilen and 30 at Ugii.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Mareca penelope*) – Small numbers at 3 wetland sites from Songino, Dashinchilen and Ugii.
- EASTERN SPOT-BILLED DUCK** (*Anas zonorhyncha*) – 3 at Burd marsh/Elsen Tasarkhai were the only record.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Five day records, with 2 at Songino, 60 at Dashinchilen then up to 80 at Ugii.
- NORTHERN PINTAIL** (*Anas acuta*) – Just two late birds on the Tuul R wetlands at Songino.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca crecca*) – Just 5 at Dashinchilen and a single at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- RED-CRESTED POCHARD** (*Netta rufina*) – 10 drakes of this handsome species at Ugii; quite an uncommon bird and nice to see it.
- COMMON POCHARD** (*Aythya ferina*) – 40 at Songino, 15 at Dashinchilen, 90 at Ugii and 30 at Elsen Tasarkhai. Now sadly a declining species classified as Vulnerable.
- TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – 30 at Songino, 8 at Dashinchilen, 20 at Ugii and 12 at Elsen Tasarkhai. Always a nice bird to see, the drake is quite striking.
- WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (SIBERIAN)** (*Melanitta fusca stejnegeri*) – 7 on Ugii Lake were the only ones we saw; sometimes split these days as Stejneger's Scoter.
- COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – A couple at Songino, 7 at Ugii and a female with 6 goslings at Terelj.
- SMEW** (*Mergellus albellus*) – A single female at Ugii Lake was a surprise.
- COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – 3 at Songino, 2 distant drakes on the Tuul River at Khustai NP and a male at Terelj. Better known as Goosander in the Old World.

### Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

- CHUKAR** (*Alectoris chukar*) – 3 at Yol Am were seen nicely and were calling well, and 2 near Khanbogd next day.

### Gaviidae (Loons)

- ARCTIC LOON** (*Gavia arctica*) – A lovely summer plumage pair at Burd marsh/Elsen Tasarkhai.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

**GREAT CRESTED GREBE** (*Podiceps cristatus*) – 2 with a nest at Songino, 6 at Ugii which included two displaying, and 2 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

**EARED GREBE** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – 15 at Ugii Lake, and one at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

**GREAT CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – 150 at Ugii Lake, mobbed by a White-tailed Eagle that was trying to get them to disgorge fish.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns).

**GRAY HERON** (*Ardea cinerea*) – 4 day records from the central wetlands, max 15 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

**LITTLE EGRET** (*Egretta garzetta*) – One at Khongoryn Els wet meadows was a vagrant to Mongolia, my first egret of any sort here, and a lifer for Bayanaa. The dark bill and head plumes were quite distinctive, plus the small size.

**CHINESE POND-HERON** (*Ardeola bacchus*) – One at Flaming Cliffs plantation was a surprise and a vagrant to Mongolia, then we had another 2 birds also in breeding dress at Dalan Bulag, I wonder if this species is colonizing?

**BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (EURASIAN)** (*Nycticorax nycticorax nycticorax*) – Two immatures at the Tuul R in Khustai, a vagrant to Mongolia.

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills).

**EURASIAN SPOONBILL** (*Platalea leucorodia*) – 5 at Dashinchilen, 2 at Elsen Tasarkhai then 2 at Khongoryn wet meadows.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

**BEARDED VULTURE** (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Some of us saw one over the dry valley at Khugnu Khan ger camp one evening. The next was an amazing pale adult perched on a cliff face at Yol Am, and greatly puzzling initially as it was variously suggested as a laundry bag, then a sheep, before it turned and we identified it properly, looking enormous too. We saw it flying over several times here, then that afternoon had a pair with a very large, black, nearly-fledged juvenile on the nest at Muhert Shivert valley. Fantastic birds, and Mongolia, with all the livestock, must be a great place for the specialized bone marrow diet needs of this species.

**CINEREOUS VULTURE** (*Aegypius monachus*) – We saw 21 of this huge vulture around a carcass at Khustai, a good count, then odd birds at Terej, Khadag ger camp and Yol Am. Surprisingly widespread for what is overall a rare bird, with a total population of > 20,000. They seem to be often used in hawk displays too, with several forlorn birds on perches for the tourists en route to Terej.

**HIMALAYAN GRIFFON** (*Gyps himalayensis*) – Five at Khustai around the carcass with Cinereous Vultures. One was puzzling, as it was much smaller than that species, but apparently they do vary quite a bit in size, so my thoughts of Eurasian Griffon could not be confirmed. We also saw 8 at Yol Am, a huge and impressive species.

**STEPPE EAGLE** (*Aquila nipalensis*) – Five day records, three singles and two days with 2, the first being on the way into Khustai. Nancy photographed an eagle over Khadag ger camp that may be one of the Spotted Eagles, hopefully photos will resolve it

**GOLDEN EAGLE** (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – Great views of an adult and a subadult hunting low over a hillside in Khustai NP. The tour-de-force, however, was the stooping adult at Yol Am that descended upon a Pallas's Cat and had to rethink very fast, as the cat would have been a very problematic prey item! Neither seemed to be harmed and it was one of those great serendipitous sightings that are unforgettable.

**EASTERN MARSH-HARRIER (EASTERN)** (*Circus spilonotus spilonotus*) – A male at Dashinchilen, then another at Elsen Tasarkhai wetland, with a couple of female plumage birds too. The male is very striking.

**BLACK KITE (BLACK-EARED)** (*Milvus migrans lineatus*) – The default raptor, seen almost every day except around the Altai, but no large numbers at all. This is the Black-eared taxon which is sometimes suggested as a split.

**WHITE-TAILED EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – Two birds at Ugii Lake, one of which was a fine adult harassing the cormorant flock, no doubt after fish. The other was a subadult, and it seems quite scarce in Mongolia.

**EASTERN BUZZARD** (*Buteo japonicus*) – Just one seen, flying over calling at Shar Guy forest.

**LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD** (*Buteo rufinus*) – 4 individuals as we went through the remote desert en route to Flaming Cliffs, complete with bare tarsi and reddish tails.

**UPLAND BUZZARD** (*Buteo hemilasius*) – Nesting at Khustai, and a striking species with those big white primary patches and the dark belly patch. Also seen at Ugii, whilst a nesting bird at Khongoryn looks to be a hybrid between this and Long-legged Buzzard. The 3 chicks in the nest are presumably of mixed parentage too, good we saw unequivocal Long-legged Buzzard next day.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

**EURASIAN MOORHEN** (*Gallinula chloropus*) – One at Elsen Tasarkhai, thanks Laszlo.

**EURASIAN COOT** (*Fulica atra*) – 10 at Dasinchilen, 30 at Ugii and 10 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Gruidae (Cranes).

**DEMOISELLE CRANE** (*Anthropoides virgo*) – Some 9 day records starting near Songino, then 3 at Khustai and up to 6 around Elsen Tasarkhai. Two by a gas station in Kharkorin were noteworthy, and we got some good photos of this beautiful bird.

**WHITE-NAPED CRANE** (*Antigone vipio*) – 4 at Dashinchilen, and 2 at Elsen Tasarkhai, a rare bird. A fabulous bird, with a population estimated at c. 6,500 individuals and probably declining.

**COMMON CRANE** (*Grus grus*) – 3 at Dashinchilen, 2 at Kharkorin and 2 near Elsen Tasarkhai, not common here.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets).

**BLACK-WINGED STILT** (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Three day records from Dashinchilen and Ugii, max 10 birds

**PIED AVOCET** (*Recurvirostra avocetta*) – 70 at Dasinchilen, 10 at Ugii and a single at Dalan Bulag springs.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

**NORTHERN LAPWING** (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Seen in the wet meadows at Dashinchilen, Ugii and Khongoryn, where they look to be nesting.

**GREATER SAND-PLOVER** (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – One female at Khongoryn, one in the steppe en route to Flaming Cliffs, and 2 females consorting with a male Oriental Plover near Flaming Cliffs, though they eventually flew off and left him!

**LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (CURONICUS)** (*Charadrius dubius curonicus*) – Seen on 4 days, starting at Ugii, and with a maximum of 5 at Dalan Bulag springs. These are the western taxon with the "peeooo" call, eastern birds call quite differently.

**ORIENTAL PLOVER** (*Charadrius veredus*) – We dipped twice, but got lucky on the third effort near Flaming Cliffs, with a fine male in the steppe there, weirdly consorting with 2 female Greater Sand Plovers! The we had another male in the steppe en route to Dzalangadzad, great to see this species in summer plumage, as I only see them in winter dress in Australia. It was one of the birds of the trip for sure.

*Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)*

**BLACK-TAILED GODWIT** (*Limosa limosa*) – One at Tsargaan, then about 20 at Ugii Lake, all in breeding dress and quite vocal, with 5 at Burd marsh too.

**RED-NECKED STINT** (*Calidris ruficollis*) – Two lovely summer plumage birds at Ugii Lake.

**LITTLE STINT** (*Calidris minuta*) – 8 at Tsargaan and 5 at Ugii.

**ASIAN DOWITCHER** (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*) – We did well for them with a couple at Dashinchilen, then 9 at the lakes at Tsargaan, all in summer plumage too.

**TEREK SANDPIPER** (*Xenus cinereus*) – One at Ugii Lake was a pleasing find.

**RED-NECKED PHALAROPE** (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Two birds dropped into the lake at Dashinchilen but flew off before I could get the scope on them, clearly in a hurry!

**COMMON SANDPIPER** (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – 3 on the Terej River with one the day before.

**COMMON GREENSHANK** (*Tringa nebularia*) – Just 4 at Dashinchilen.

**MARSH SANDPIPER** (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – One at Dashinchilen and 2 at Elsen Tasarkhai/Burd marsh.

**WOOD SANDPIPER** (*Tringa glareola*) – 3 day records from Tsargaan lakes and Ugii, max 3 birds.

**COMMON REDSHANK** (*Tringa totanus*) – A few at Songino, Tsargaan, Burd marsh and Khongoryn, they seem to nest in the wet meadows but losses to stock trampling must be high!

*Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)*

**BLACK-HEADED GULL** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – 16 at Dashinchilen, sadly with no Relict Gull for comparison this year, then 60 likewise at Ugii Lake.

**LITTLE GULL** (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) – A beautiful spring plumage adult was at Burd marsh, apparently pretty rare in Mongolia and one Gombo had not seen! It was my first for many years, a century tick in fact.

**PALLAS'S GULL** (*Ichthyaeus ichthyaeus*) – A subadult was perched beside Ugii Lake, the large bill and white eyelids conspicuous, when it flew it had a partial black tail band. A pity it did not linger a bit longer.

**HERRING GULL (MONGOLIAN)** (*Larus argentatus mongolicus*) – The first was an immature flying over the steppe near Khustai, then we had 30 at Tsargaan lakes and 60 at Ugii. The whole taxonomy of the “Herring Gull/Yellow-legged Gull” group is horribly complex, and *mongolicus* is now often treated as a subspecies of Vega Gull. Others assign it as a subspecies of Caspian Gull, *Larus cachinnans*, or as a separate species (Mongolian Gull *L. mongolicus*), or even as part of American Herring Gull (HBW/BirdLife). Personally I found them rather distinctive in both adult and immature plumage; it has a long heavy bill and very dark flight feathers in some plumages. The new Gulls Photoguide splits it as Mongolian Gull, which seems eminently sensible.

**GULL-BILLED TERN** (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – We had 3 at Tsargaan lakes, a good record.

**CASPIAN TERN** (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Two at Ugii Lake were the only sighting.

**WHITE-WINGED TERN** (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) – Quite common at various wetlands, with over 250 at Ugii and similar at Burd marsh, most in lovely summer plumage. The old name of White-winged Black Tern is so appropriate, I don't know why it was ever dumbed down to the far more confusing and less suitable White-winged Tern.

**WHISKERED TERN** (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – A single gorgeous breeding plumage adult was at the river at Khongoryn marsh.

**COMMON TERN (LONGIPENNIS)** (*Sterna hirundo longipennis*) – The birds seen were quite variable, with most belonging to the race *longipennis*, with a black bill and much greyer plumage compared to European birds, almost resembling Whiskered Terns. A few had some red on the bill as well. The first were at Songino.

*Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)*

**PALLAS'S SANDGROUSE** (*Syrnhaptes paradoxus*) – The first were 2 at Ugii Lake, which did not linger! Happily, over the next few days we got some great sightings from the river by Khongor dunes and in the steppe near Flaming Cliffs. Several major irruptions took place in western Europe, notably in 1863, 1888 and 1908, when thousands of birds were seen, and it even bred in countries as far apart as Great Britain, Sweden and Poland. This has always been something of a legendary bird for British birders and it is great to see them well.

*Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)*

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Frequent in all the urban areas, and associates freely with Hill Pigeon.

**HILL PIGEON** (*Columba rupestris*) – Don saw one at Khustai, then we had another at Terej, before a small group at Khongoryn. The voice seems quite distinctive and I was able to record it, but they clearly hybridize with Feral Pigeons and all our birds were associating with them.

**EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE** (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – This species is a new arrival in Mongolia, we saw half a dozen at Khongoryn where we did not see them last year, Also 5 at Flaming Cliffs plantation and heard at Dalan Bulag springs, so it may be spreading fast.

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**COMMON CUCKOO** (*Cuculus canorus*) – Great to hear this so often, and we saw them around Terej where one was sat on someones veranda railing!

**ORIENTAL CUCKOO** (*Cuculus optatus*) – Frequent by voice in the riparian habitat and boreal forest, and we saw them well at Shar Guy. Voice is really the only practical way to separate from Common Cuckoo.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**LITTLE OWL (LITTLE)** (*Athene noctua plumipes*) – Don spotted one sat on the sandstone cliff near Shar Guy, whilst we were checking for Eagle Owl. We got good views of this pale form, but a shame the bigger relative was absent today!

**LONG-EARED OWL (EURASIAN)** (*Asio otus otus*) – One was flushed from the riparian woodland at the Tuul River at Khustai, but we all missed it, however, luckily, it was back again that afternoon and we got brief flight views. I had not seen one for decades, and it is also a potential split from the American one.

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**COMMON SWIFT** (*Apus apus pekinensis*) – Seen near Khongoryn, and at Flaming Cliffs, very small numbers. I wonder if they nest here?  
**PACIFIC SWIFT** (*Apus pacificus*) – Quite frequent around Ulan Bataar, and also looked to be nesting in the sandstone cliffs near Shar Guy.

*Upupidae (Hoopoes)*

**EURASIAN HOOPOE** (*Upupa epops*) – 4 at Songino, and seen at the Dalan Bulag springs on the last day.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos minor kamtschatkensis*) – Great looks at a female at the Terelj poplar woods, and another at the riparian site further out next day, also a female.

**WHITE-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos leucotos*) – Bayanaa and Don saw one fly over on the first day, and Laszlo made a brave attempt at a quite plausible tree protrusion substitute later. Luckily we got a good look at a female at the Terelj poplar woods, it was a morning for female woodpeckers as all 4 species we saw were of this sex!

**GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos major*) – Seen well at Terelj, with several females on our morning by the river. One was markedly buffish beneath, but a bird seen later at another riverine site was whitish, so this is a tad puzzling.

**EURASIAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides tridactylus*) – This was heard briefly when we were concentrating on Black-billed Capercaillie, and my playback attempt drew no response, it seems to be a very tricky species unfortunately. [\*]

**GRAY-HEADED WOODPECKER** (*Picus canus*) – Great views of some 3 female birds at the Terelj riparian on our morning there, this is sometimes split as Grey-faced Woodpecker.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**LESSER KESTREL** (*Falco naumanni*) – Great looks at 3 males at Khongorin Els, and we then had a total of 9 birds hunting along the edges of the Gobi dunes here, where they nest.

**EURASIAN KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Small numbers on the first few days around Khustai, where we saw a nest; also seen at Khugno Khan ger camp and some saw it in Terelj.

**AMUR FALCON** (*Falco amurensis*) – This beautiful bird showed very well at Songino and then in Khustai NP, with some lovely views of both sexes, the males being particularly striking.

**EURASIAN HOBBY** (*Falco subbuteo*) – A single on the first day in the Songino River valley, seen perched atop a tree.

**SAKER FALCON** (*Falco cherrug*) – We saw some 3 active nests in Khustai, with one nest having 2 chicks and another 4, and lovely views of the adult perched nearby. A single seen briefly at Yol Am was the only other record. These are very valuable birds these days, in great demand for falconry in Arabia where they fetch thousands of dollars. That Kuwait-Mongolia research place we saw is something to do with all this it seems, and Mongolia is now the stronghold for this threatened species.

**PEREGRINE FALCON (RED-CAPPED)** (*Falco peregrinus babyloicus*) – Great views of a second year bird perched on a pole as we headed towards Khongoryn Els. It was lightly built, had flank bars and fine streaks below, and seems to fit Barbary Falcon. Sadly, our masters have now decreed that these are a part of Peregrine, but the whole complex needs re-evaluation as it's obviously not a single species. Barbary Falcon is rare in Mongolia, but has now been found breeding on the margins of the Gobi, not too far from where we saw this bird.

*Laniidae (Shrikes)*

**RED-TAILED SHRIKE** (*Lanius phoenicuroides*) – A single very nice distinctive greyish bird with a red tail was at Dalanzadgad airport, more usually called Turkestan Shrike.

**ISABELLINE SHRIKE (DAURIAN)** (*Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*) – 3 at Khongoryn Els, and 2 at Flaming Cliffs plantation, much browner than Turkestan Shrike.

**BROWN SHRIKE** (*Lanius cristatus*) – Just a pair by Tumen Khaan ger camp.

**GREAT GRAY SHRIKE** (*Lanius excubitor*) – One at Khongoryn Els, a large billed form. Grey shrike taxonomy is in flux so not quite sure what this will end up being called, best left for the moment in Great Grey!

**SOUTHERN GRAY SHRIKE (STEPPE)** (*Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*) – One at Flaming Cliffs plantation, a distinctive pale bird with no black on the forehead and a yellowish base to the bill. Another one of uncertain placement, it is split by the IOC as Steppe Grey Shrike.

*Oriolidae (Old World Orioles)*

**EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE** (*Oriolus oriolus*) – A fine female in the poplar belt at Flaming Cliffs plantation, rare in eastern Mongolia.

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**EURASIAN JAY (BRANDT'S)** (*Garrulus glandarius brandtii*) – Just one single along the river at Terelj, this is a dark-eyed race that also occurs in Hokkaido, and the whole complex is long overdue for splitting up.

**AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE (AZURE-WINGED)** (*Cyanopica cyanus cyanus*) – We saw 4 at the Tuul River at Songino on day one, and no more.

**EURASIAN MAGPIE (EURASIAN)** (*Pica pica bactriana*) – This taxon has greenish or purplish on the wings depending on the light, and is placed with Eurasian Magpie in the recent break-up of the complex, though the race is usually given as leucoptera here.

**MONGOLIAN GROUND-JAY** (*Podoces hendersoni*) – We worked hard for this, some of us combing a patch of steppe bushland for ages in the heat of the day without success, though Bayanaa saw 2 which promptly vanished! Happily there was another site not too far away, and we got 2 fine birds here from the bus after lunch, with the more hardcore members going after them for more scope views. A great bird, it'd be nice but very hard now to see all 4 members of the genus.

**EURASIAN NUTCRAKER** (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*) – Just one single called in up in the Siberian larch forest above Tumen Khaan, it gave good views.

**RED-BILLED CHOUGH** (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) – Unexpectedly common, noisy and commensal with humans, even in Ulaanbaatar. Most ger camps had a few around.

**DAURIAN JACKDAW** (*Corvus dauuricus*) – Quite common around Shar Guy and Terelj, with many pied adults and dark-eyed immatures, also seen at Songino on day one.

**ROOK** (*Corvus frugilegus pastinator*) – 10 at Songino on day one, where they were nesting, and 2 near Khustai. A potential split too.

**CARRION CROW** (*Corvus corone orientalis*) – Small numbers from UB and Khustai and Ugii, then again at Terelj, and another potential split.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – Widespread in small numbers, with some nice looks from Khustai, the Gobi and Terelj.

Alaudidae (Larks).

**HORNED LARK (BRANDT'S)** (*Eremophila alpestris brandti*) – This was one of the commonest larks in the desert areas. A recent genetic study sampled numerous individuals from across this species very wide range and concluded that it should be split into six species with *brandti* becoming a monotypic species, Brandt's, Steppe or Mongolian Horned Lark.

**MONGOLIAN LARK** (*Melanocorypha mongolica*) – One spectacular species, with huge white wing patches and black chest band, they were common around Khustai and Ugii.

**ASIAN SHORT-TOED LARK** (*Alaudala cheleensis cheleensis*) – The default small lark of the tour, a split from Lesser Short-toed but the taxonomy is still unsettled so it may be changed. Often seen and heard in display flight at Khustai and Ugii, and also seen at Khongoryn. Gombo tells me these latter Gobi birds are a different race with a different song, and a looming split.

**EURASIAN SKYLARK (ASIAN)** (*Alauda arvensis kibortii*) – 4 at Dashinchilen lakes, and again at the grassland at Khongoryn.

**CRESTED LARK** (*Galerida cristata magna*) – Seen at Khongoryn and then at Dalan Bulag at Dalanzadgad, only very small numbers. This race has a large crest.

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – Just 6 from the Tuul River bridge on the way to Khustai, very uncommon here it seems.

**PALE SAND MARTIN** (*Riparia diluta*) – Another taxonomic puzzle, this taxon lacked any marking below and was rather distinctive, but is clearly very localized. We saw a single at Burd marsh near Khugnu Khan ger camp.

**EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN** (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Small numbers from the dry valley at Khanbogd, then at Yol Am.

**BARN SWALLOW (TYTLER'S)** (*Hirundo rustica tytleri*) – Small numbers from D Songino on to Khustai and Ugii, with some nesting at the ger camps there. There was considerable variation in the intensity of the rufous underparts, some birds strongly coloured, others much more diffuse, and I wonder if it might be sexual dimorphism? I also think the birds with whitish underparts at Flaming Cliffs plantation were not this taxon.

**COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (EASTERN)** (*Delichon urbicum lagopodum*) – 20 at Tuul River bridge, 2 at Burd marsh and small numbers from the dry valley at Khanbogd, Yol Am and Muhert Shivert valley. This eastern taxon is split by HBW/BirdLife.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

**COAL TIT** (*Parus ater*) – Just two from Terelj, this race has a small crest.

**MARSH TIT** (*Poecile palustris*) – Two from Terelj riparian, the glossy black cap and a single quiet call distinguish from the very similar Willow Tit.

**WILLOW TIT (WILLOW)** (*Poecile montanus baicalensis*) – Small numbers around Terelj in the poplar woods there.

**AZURE TIT (AZURE)** (*Cyanistes cyanus yenisseeensis*) – We struggled initially, not seeing it at Songino then failing on the first visit at Khustai.

Happily the afternoon saw better conditions and we were able to lure in a splendid pale bird for great views.

**GREAT TIT** (*Parus major*) – Small numbers were vocal in the poplar woods at Terelj.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits).

**WHITE-CROWNED PENDULINE-TIT** (*Remiz coronatus*) – Great views of a male at the Tuul River in Khustai, and we saw the lovely pouched felt-type spout nest hanging in a willow there.

Sittidae (Nuthatches).

**EURASIAN NUTHATCH** (*Sitta europaea*) – Seen a couple of times in the poplar woods at Terelj, this form is very white below.

Tichodromidae (Wallcreeper).

**WALLCREEPER** (*Tichodroma muraria*) – We had good luck with this elusive species, seeing 2 as we entered the gorge at Yol Am, then 2 flying over later down by the ice. A monotypic family too, and always a great bird to see.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers).

**DUSKY WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) – 4 at the riparian sites near Ulan Bataar, and one at Baishant dry valley in Khustai.

**SULPHUR-BELLIED WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) – One was singing atop a boulder on a slope in Yol Am, very odd to see a *Phylloscopus* warbler behaving like this, and actually a lifer for Phil.

**PALLAS'S LEAF WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus proregulus*) – Great looks at 2 at Baishant dry valley in Khustai, and singing well at Shar Guy.

**YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) – A single at the Terelj River valley.

**HUME'S WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus humei*) – One fine bird at Shar Guy, calling and behaving as if nesting in the forest there.

**ARCTIC WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus borealis*) – One from the riparian at Songino, and another at Baishant dry valley.

**GREENISH WARBLER** (*Phylloscopus trochiloides trochiloides*) – Singing very well in the poplar woods at Terelj valley, I got a nice tape of it, now posted at IBC and XC.

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies).

**THICK-BILLED WARBLER** (*Iduna aedon*) – Three singles, from Baishant dry valley, then at Burd marsh and finally one at the Saxaul forest at Khongoryn.

**PADDYFIELD WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus agricola*) – I had almost given this up, as the reeds at Dashinchilen were too low this year, but a check of some reeds at Dalan Bulag (70 Springs) near Dalanzadgad revealed two birds that responded well to tape.

**ORIENTAL REED WARBLER** (*Acrocephalus orientalis*) – Three day records of this big Acro, from Dashinchilen, Burd marsh and Muhert Shivert.

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies).

**PALLAS'S GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER** (*Locustella certhiola*) – Brief views of one skulking in herbage at Terelj valley and being very flighty.

Sylviidae (Sylvia Warblers).

**ASIAN DESERT WARBLER** (*Sylvia nana*) – A single singing at a patch of arid bushes en route to Khongoryn, and heard at the bridge there next day, recording now on the IBC site.

**BARRED WARBLER** (*Sylvia nisoria*) – Two birds at Muhert Shivert valley, one in good barred summer plumage and new for many folks.

**LESSER WHITETHROAT (CURRUCA/BLYTHI)** (*Sylvia curruca blythi*) – Another species with a vexatious taxonomy, the birds singing at Terelj sure don't sound anything like those in Western Europe.

**GREATER WHITETHROAT** (*Sylvia communis*) – Seen at Songino, than at Baishant and finally from Yol Am and Muhert Shivert, where they were singing loudly.

*Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)*

**DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER** (*Muscicapa sibirica*) – A single in the pine forest at Shar Guy, lightly streaked on the chest and with a pale eye-ring.

**ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER** (*Muscicapa dauurica*) – Singles at Songino, Baishant dry valley and then Terej.

**SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT** (*Calliope calliope*) – One from the riparian thicket near UB, then a great songster that showed beautifully in the forest at Shar Guy, a video is on the FG website and at the IBC, as is the song recording. Sully was lucky too as we got another lovely male near Terej later.

**RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL** (*Tarsiger cyanurus*) – A fine singing male in the forest at Shar Guy, recording on the IBC site.

**TAIGA FLYCATCHER** (*Ficedula albicilla*) – Great views of males in the riparian woods at Terej.

**COMMON REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – Just one seen in the riparian woods at Terej.

**BLACK REDSTART (EASTERN)** (*Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*) – A distinctive eastern form that is way overdue for splitting, they don't look or sound like the European birds. Seen well at Yol Am and near Khanbogd. Recording on the IBC site.

**DAURIAN REDSTART** (*Phoenicurus aureus*) – A fine pair at Baishant dry valley in Khustai, then a few in the poplar woods at Terej.

**RUFIOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH** (*Monticola saxatilis*) – Seen in the valley by Khugnu Khan by those of us who did an evening explore there, then nice looks in the dry valley at Khanbogd and at Hoolt dry valley where we got stuck!

**SIBERIAN STONECHAT** (*Saxicola maurus*) – A single female in the scrub in the riparian near UB, my first in Mongolia and of uncertain taxon, most likely *stajnegeri*.

**NORTHERN WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – A nest at Songino, then a few records from Khustai and Terej.

**PIED WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe pleschanka*) – Lovely views at Baishant dry valley, than at Khugnu Khan and en route to Khongoryn. Laszlo found us a beautiful white-throated male of the rare "vittata" morph at Hoolt dry valley, and there was another later further down that valley. These were my first records of this variety, an exciting find.

**DESERT WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe deserti*) – Small numbers in the Gobi around Khongoryn and Gobi Erdene, where I taped one singing at dawn, cut on the IBC site.

**ISABELLINE WHEATEAR** (*Oenanthe isabellina*) – One of the default birds of the trip, seen most days.

*Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)*

**RED-THROATED THRUSH** (*Turdus ruficollis*) – Great looks in the riparian at Terej, where we saw a female, then a first year male with a red breast band, and finally a fine adult male. Also heard singing by Tumen Khaan, recording on the IBC site.

*Sturnidae (Starlings)*

**WHITE-CHEEKED STARLING** (*Spodiopsar cineraceus*) – A nest at Songino in a tree hollow, with 3 birds nearby, and a single at Dalan Bulag springs on the last day.

*Prunellidae (Accentors)*

**BROWN ACCENTOR** (*Prunella fulvescens*) – Very good looks and photographs at Yol Am, with one bird singing atop a ridge in the dawn light, and another later.

**MONGOLIAN ACCENTOR** (*Prunella koslowi*) – This is basically a Mongolian breeding endemic, with a few winter observations in China. We saw one very well at Yol Am, also called Kozlov's Accentor.

*Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)*

**EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (MANCHURIAN)** (*Motacilla tshutschensis macronyx*) – The form *macronyx* is placed with Eastern Yellow Wagtail, though the call does not sound like other taxa in that group and the entire placement of the various subspecies remains uncertain. We saw just 2 at Dashinchilen.

**CITRINE WAGTAIL (GRAY-BACKED)** (*Motacilla citreola citreola*) – Two of the grey-backed nominate taxon at Khongoryn marsh, a beautiful and striking bird. There was a female at Dalan Bulag springs on the last day too.

**CITRINE WAGTAIL (BLACK-BACKED)** (*Motacilla citreola calcarata*) – One male of this black backed race was at Khongoryn marsh.

**GRAY WAGTAIL** (*Motacilla cinerea*) – Good views on some 3 days of pairs along the Terej River, or near Tumen Khaan.

**WHITE WAGTAIL (TRANSBAIKALIAN)** (*Motacilla alba baicalensis*) – Widespread in small numbers, a white faced and grey backed form. Long overdue for splitting out into the component species.

**RICHARD'S PIPIT** (*Anthus richardi*) – Seen at Khustai and Khongor, and best told from Blyth's by the loud "schreep" call, the two are otherwise very similar though there are breeding habitat differences.

**BLYTH'S PIPIT** (*Anthus godlewskii*) – This tricky species was seen at Songino, then in Khustai and in display flight at Yol Am.

**OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – Vocal and evidently nesting at the boreal forest around Terej.

*Emberizidae (Old World Buntings)*

**PINE BUNTING** (*Emberiza leucocephalos*) – Great views of males around Khadag ger camp, then at Tumen Khaan where it was nesting. I made a nice tape of a male in song which is now on the IBC and xenocanto.

**GODLEWSKI'S BUNTING** (*Emberiza godlewskii*) – Phil saw one one in the valley by Khanbogd which flew as everyone got onto it, but happily we got another in the Western Beauty dry valley en route to Flaming Cliffs, and I recorded the song. It is a low density species and quite elusive.

**MEADOW BUNTING** (*Emberiza cioides*) – A couple of sightings from Khustai, with a fine male being very striking in summer plumage, and then two singing well in the dry valley behind Khugnu Khan ger camp.

**GRAY-NECKED BUNTING** (*Emberiza buchanani*) – Good views and singing well in the valley by Khanbogd, the greyish head and no grey on the chest is quite distinctive in good light. Also one at Muhert Shivert later.

**BLACK-FACED BUNTING (SPODOCEPHALA/SORDIDA)** (*Emberiza spodocephala spodocephala*) – Seen in the poplar woods along the Terej river on two days, quite shy but I think everyone got it eventually.

**PALLAS'S BUNTING** (*Emberiza pallasii lydiae*) – None at Dashinchilen this year, but happily the low dry bushy steppe near Khugnu Khan ger camp gave us two good sightings of males of this small billed species with the whitish underparts and pale rump.

**REED BUNTING** (*Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhulina*) – Just two in the vestigial reeds at Dashinchilen



*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).*

**HAWFINCH** (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – Two at Songino, a couple around Terelj and then 2 in the town park at Dalanzadgad.

**COMMON ROSEFINCH** (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) – A male at Songino, and often heard around Terelj with 2 males in the riparian there.

**HIMALAYAN BEAUTIFUL ROSEFINCH** (*Carpodacus pulcherrimus argyrophrys*) – Several females and a couple of fine males seen at Yol Am.

This subspecies *argyrophrys* is now regarded by both Clements and the IOC as a race of the present species rather than, as previously, of Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *C. davidianus*. They were formerly considered conspecific as Beautiful Rosefinch *C. pulcherrimus*.

**LONG-TAILED ROSEFINCH** (*Carpodacus sibiricus*) – We played some tape, and Don luckily got us onto a fine male in the riparian at Terelj.

**MONGOLIAN FINCH** (*Bucanetes mongolicus*) – Great views of up to 16 in the Khanbogd dry valley, then again 6 at Hoolt valley and a few around Khongoryn and Gobi Erdene cabins.

**TWITE** (*Linaria flavirostris*) – Just one in the Baishant dry valley at Khustai, it perched but flew before we could scope it.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).*

**SAXAUL SPARROW** (*Passer ammodendri*) – This species is only found where the Saxaul tree (*Haloxylon ammodendron*, *Amaranthaceae*) survives.

It occurs in some six disjunct desert areas across Central Asia, favouring shrubs such as Saxaul near rivers and oases. We saw them very well at Khongoryn, where they seemed to be nesting under the bridge.

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Small numbers from UB, Khustai and Kharkorin.

**EURASIAN TREE SPARROW** (*Passer montanus*) – The default sparrow in Mongolia and seen almost every day.

**ROCK PETRONIA** (*Petronia petronia*) – Good views from Khustai ger camp then the Tuul River bridge, Khanbogd and Yol Am. The white tail tips are distinctive.

**WHITE-WINGED SNOWFINCH** (*Montifringilla nivalis*) – Common and tame at Khanbogd dry valley and Yol Am.

**PERE DAVID'S SNOWFINCH** (*Montifringilla davidiana*) – We saw this nicely at Tsargaan lakes then near Ugii Lake. Dumbed down by the PC crowd to Small Snowfinch in some checklists, this species is always associated with *susliks* or *pikas*, as they breed in their burrows. It is named after the famous Abbé Père Armand David, a 19th century French missionary to China, who was also a naturalist, intrepid explorer and author.

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## MAMMALS

**LONG-EARED DESERT HEDGEHOG SP.** (*Hemiechinus auritus*) – A great one at Gobi Erdene on our night foray.

**DAURIAN PIKA** (*Ochotona daurica*) – A couple at Khustai.

**MONGOLIAN (PALLAS'S) PIKA** (*Ochotona pallasii*) – Seen around Khanbogd.

**TOLAI HARE** (*Lepus tolai*) – One from Khugnu Khan ger camp and a couple seen later, with Eleanor getting one in the Gobi steppe.

**SIBERIAN CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias sibiricus*) – Great looks at one in the riparian at Terelj. This is the only Old World representative of the genus *Tamias* (25 species).

**SIBERIAN MARMOT** (*Marmota sibirica*) – Common in Khustai NP, a quite large animal and no doubt very tasty for Golden Eagles.

**LONG-TAILED GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus undulatus*) – The common ground-squirrel, seen in all the steppe areas and very common in Khustai.

**DAURIAN GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus dauricus*) – This shorter tailed version was seen briefly as we came out of Khanbogd.

**RED-CHEEKED (PALLID) GROUND SQUIRREL** (*Spermophilus pallicauda*) – Seen at Khanbogd and Yol Am.

**EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – Some very dark animals were in the boreal forest at Terelj, and we got nice looks at them with their white bellies and tufted ears.

**BRANDT'S VOLE** (*Lasiopodmys brandtii*) – This year was an irruption year and we saw many scurrying over the roads at Khustai.

**MONGOLIAN GERBIL (JIRD)** (*Meriones unguiculatus*) – Seen at Khustai near Khugnu Khan.

**MID-DAY GERBIL (JIRD)** (*Meriones meridianus*) – Don saw one in the Gobi, and we had nice look at one on the night walk at Gobi Erdene.

**GREAT GERBIL** (*Rhombomys opimus*) – There were many burrows in the Saxaul at Khongor, with one showing very nicely for some.

**GOBI JERBOA** (*Allactaga bullata*) – Great looks at 3 on the night walk at Gobi Erdene, fabulous and very fast running long-tailed big-eared creature, very like a diminutive rat-kangaroo.

**MANCHURIAN ZOKOR** (*Myospalax psilurus*) – Many mounds in riparian areas at Terelj, this is one of those odd fossorial burrowers like a mole. I wish Laszlo luck with his Zokor viewing and ranching scheme, an idea whose time may not have come as yet.

**RED FOX** (*Vulpes vulpes*) – Two seen at Khongoryn Saxaul forest by those who went for the longer walk there.

**CORSAC FOX** (*Vulpes corsac*) – Great looks at one at Tsargaan lakes. Shorter legged and paler than Red Fox, and more of an arid country species.

**PALLAS'S CAT** (*Felis manul*) – THE sighting of the trip for the mammals, the Golden Eagle stooped on it at Yol Am and it leapt out from beneath the talons, seemingly unhurt. We watched it via the scopes for some minutes as it worked its way upslope, a huge great fluffy tabby cat with a bushy black-tipped banded tail and an odd flat face. A very rarely seen species, and almost always on spotlighting efforts.

**WILD HORSE** (*Equus caballus*) – Wonderful views of 13 of these great creatures in Khustai, some with foals and with a stallion keeping guard of his herd. The erect mane is very striking, as is the pale colouration. The reintroduction seems to be working well with about 220 animals now in the park.

**RED DEER** (*Cervus elaphus*) – A magnificent stag was at the Tuul River in Khustai, with a great rack of antlers.

**GOITERED GAZELLE** (*Gazella subgutturosa*) – This is also known as the Black-tailed Gazelle, the black tail distinctively erect when they run. We saw 3, then 1 and then 2 singles on three days in the Gobi. They showed a distinct dark brown flank stripe and sides to the rump in some lights, and reminded us of Thompson's Gazelle. This is actually also the one we have seen in the UAE, although that may have been split by now.

**ZEREN** (*Procapra gutturosa*) – Four day records of 3 at Khustai, 3 near Khugnu Khan, 7 at Gobi Erdene and 2 near Flaming Cliffs. The big white rump is distinctive, and it is also called Mongolian or White-tailed Gazelle. 4 gazelle sp. were also seen distantly in the Gobi, probably this species.

**IBEX** (*Capra ibex*) – Three up at Yol Am, and then a female with a kid at Hoolt dry valley, with another later.

**ARGALI** (*Ovis ammon*) – We got lucky and saw 6 walking up a sunlit slope at Yol Am, a fortunate sighting of what is quite a rare species.

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## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

For the first time ever we had almost no duplication for the favourite birds, and the following all rated highly:

Arctic Loon, Oriental Plover, Swan Goose, Demoiselle Crane, Chukar, Himalayan Griffon, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle, Hoopoe, Mongolian Lark, Taiga Flycatcher, Azure Tit, the vittata morph of Pied Wheatear, Siberian Rubythroat, Mongolian Finch, Pine Bunting and Saxaul Sparrow

The favourite sighting was almost unanimously the Golden Eagle stooping on the Pallas's Cat (*Felis manul*), one of those once in a lifetime occurrences.

Additional mammals:

Fat-tailed Pygmy or Dwarf Fat-tailed Jerboa (*Pygeretmus pumilio*) On the night walk at Gobi Erdene, a small greyish jerboa with a long, bare and quite fat tail.

Siberian Jerboa (*Allactaga sibirica*) One on the night walk at Gobi Erdene, it has shorter ears than Gobi Jerboa.

Sand dwarf hamster Nancy saw one of these on her night walk with Bayanaa at Gobi Erdene

Herps

Gobi racerunner (*Eremias przewalskii*) The dark stripy lizard from the Gobi

Mongolian racerunner (*Eremias argus*) Seen near Khustai

Toad-headed agama (*Phrynocephalus versicolor*) Common in the Gobi, this is the variably patterned one with the pink armpits and curled up tail

Siberian toad (Radde's Toad) *Bufo raddei*. Seen well at Ugii Lake and Burd marsh, quite well-patterned above.

Butterflies

Quite a good spring for them but mostly awaiting photo identification, I saw over a dozen species. There was something very like a Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) and a Mourning Cloak /Camberwell Beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*) type, also Small White (*Pieris rapae*). The large Lycaenid type blue butterfly at Dzalangadzad was intriguing but no-one got a photo!

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**Totals for the tour: 190 bird taxa and 25 mammal taxa**