

China  
October - December 2019  
40 days



### Sophie and Manuel Baumgartner

China was the last part of our 5-month mammal watching journey. We already had a great time in Borneo and South America and even though we were not sure how it would be here - we already appreciated a lot what nature had ready for us. What we experienced in China blew us away!

When we started to organise our trip to China our idea was to travel independently once again and put a focus on also discovering new places (contributing in style of citizen science) but we quickly realized that this was going to be complicated here. It started with the fact that we were not allowed to drive, neither with our driving license, nor with the international one. Once we were there, we were really grateful to have a Chinese speaking travel companion, we barely met anyone speaking English and since one cannot use Google (no Facebook, Wikipedia and WhatsApp only partially as well by the way) here... well. No Google Translate and only Bing which leads to translations such as this on the picture besides. Even if you are travel experienced, everything seems to be different here in China and discovering new places was a great challenge to us. There are no Apps or anything like that where nature reserve and accommodations are visible, most interesting roads (small roads) are not visible on Google Maps (maps.me was sometimes more accurate). So, we always basically had to drive



anywhere and discover there. Accommodations were sometimes hard to find and there is also the possibility that you do find an accommodation but that they don't take "westerners" because they don't know how to report to the police or one time the police kindly told us to leave the whole county as we would have needed a special permit to visit. We highly recommend installing WeChat to be able to contact people. We encountered many other obstacles most of the time it was being told that we were not allowed to enter this or that place but like usual it was also very rewarding and worth the effort!

We had a massive help from **Roland Zeidler** ([wstourix@gmail.com](mailto:wstourix@gmail.com)) who acted both as an excellent mammal watching travel agency and a mammal watcher coach. We are very grateful for the amount of time he spent helping us with our trip, which would certainly have been very different without him. We met Roland in our first 24 hours in China und shortly again in Tangjiahe and we are certain that he is an excellent guide: Passionate, incredibly energetic, motivated, knowledgeable and very kind. **Roland no longer works as a guide in China. We can highly recommend Sid Francis who we also met, his email is: [chengduuk@hotmail.com](mailto:chengduuk@hotmail.com).**

We mainly travelled with **Fugui Wan** ([wolongpandatour@163.com](mailto:wolongpandatour@163.com)) who is usually Sid and Roland's driver. Fugui is very knowledgeable of the places Sid and Roland use to visit in Sichuan. He also knew from the beginning what kind of tourist mammal watcher are and is fluent in English. A word about his car: It's a van and it's not possible to open the windows on the back. We therefore either spotlighted with open doors when the road was in a good condition or one of us would stand and look outside the roof window. Also, the car is pretty low and Fugui wouldn't drive anywhere and wouldn't feel confident driving on snow. This was no problem in most places in Sichuan, but it might be good to travel with a 4x4 in Qinghai and Qilianshan.

For our time in Qinghai we booked an 8 days programme through **Terry Townshend** from Birding Beijing as described below.

Finally, we travelled though the Ganze region with Rolands friend **Zhaxi** ([himalayakquesthouse@hotmail.com](mailto:himalayakquesthouse@hotmail.com)). Zhaxi never accompanied mammal watchers before and didn't know what this would mean. Considering this he did a fantastic job! Zhaxi is a Tibetan who fluently speaks English. He patiently drove us around on the most difficult roads sometimes with his small Nissan that became a real safari car with us. He got really interested in mammals and would sometimes say things like "we only turn around when we spot the next animal" late at night after a whole day of driving. He is obviously no guide but was a great travel companion and we felt like we were a team of explorers with him.

For us who try to observe all wild cats and bears in the world – in 5 months having found 15 wild cat species, 3 bear species and the bearcats (binturong and red panda – panda means bearcat) next to many more fabulous mammals is more success than we would have ever dreamed of. 7 species of wild cats, 3 bear species and the red panda made this part of China very special for us – we really hope that the construction boom doesn't overcome conservation efforts in China and that more efforts help to protect these and all other animals there!



## Wolong

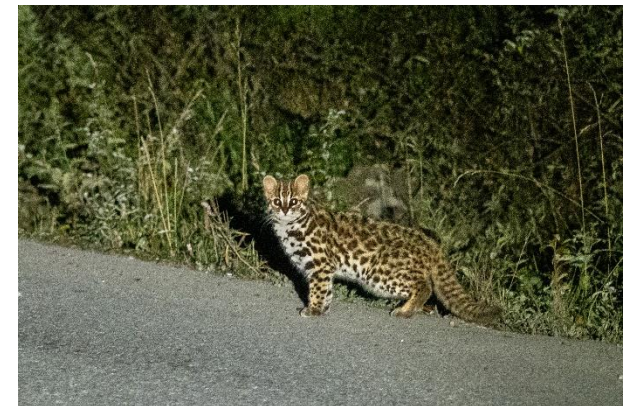
16. – 19.10.2019

*Accommodation:* We stayed in Fugui's Hotel called "Wolong Memory Hotel" and payed 120 Yuan per room per night but I'm pretty sure we had a big discount on this. The rooms were good and comfortable with a good heater. There was also a bed heater, but this was the case in almost every hotel we went. We had very good food in Wolong. It costed about 40 Yuan for both with meat. For you to have an idea it's at an elevation of about 2000m.

We either scanned along the road towards the pass during the day or entered the national reserve to scan around there. The reserve is open from 9am-5pm. We did night drives on the two first nights but were stopped by the police on the second. Apparently, they have some poaching going on and somebody called them telling that somebody was spotlighting and that they heard shootings. Needless to say, that it was not a very pleasant encounter and we were told that spotlighting was forbidden. We therefore decided to move place which was a pity since Wolong is absolutely beautiful and the night drives were very promising.

### Mammals:

We saw a **Tufted Deer** three times in the forest of the National Reserve and missed a Red Panda crossing the trail by 20 minutes once. Other than that, we spotted a couple of **Sambar** scanning from the road and saw a **Moupin Pika** next to the road nearby the pass. On the night drives we spotted a young and beautiful **Mainland Leopard Cat**, one Tufted Deer, one **Hog Badger**, four **Chinese Gorals**, a **Gray-headed Flying Squirrel** and most probably a **Complex-toothed Flying Squirrel**.







“Place X” was THE Panda place for us. Not only for the Giant Panda but also concerning the Red Panda. As others before we won't tell the exact place in the report in order to protect this place from big scale tourism and therefore hopefully prevent it from closing at some point like other places before. We planned to stay there for at least 7 days, scanning all day, to have a chance to spot the Giant Panda. Based on the experience so far one should plan at least a week of scanning. We were incredibly lucky to have spotted the Giant Panda already on the second day, but that seems to be an exception. If you are interested in visiting the place feel free to contact Roland for more details ([wstourix@gmail.com](mailto:wstourix@gmail.com)).



There are two good scanning points and that's what we did during the daytime. If we would have been a bigger group, we would have probably split in two groups and kept contact via Walkie Talkie. At night we were allowed to spotlight from the hotel to the parking lot in the reserve, which was great.

### **Mammals:**

As described above we found the **Giant Panda** already on the second day. We spent the first days scanning from the area which is higher up and went up there again the next morning. We decided to look at the second scanning area lower down in the afternoon. Fugui would usually leave to walk after a while and that's how he discovered a very big beehive from about 100m further up. We looked through the scope and found out that the white ball was... furry? We didn't allow ourselves to get too excited yet but when it started moving and we saw black part we were getting really excited. When we finally saw the two little black ears that was it, wonderful: A young panda in the tree about 300-400 meter away from us! We observed the Panda until the sun went down and went back again the next



morning. He was still there, and we were fortunate enough to observe it for hours. He was mainly sleeping as one expects but we could observe it climbing down the tree to eat bamboo right next to the tree (what a lazy animal!) and then climb up again to continue to sleep. What a success!

We spotted **Red Pandas** both day and night. We spotted one next to the road on the first night of spotlighting and two on the second. When observing the Giant Panda, we could observe a Red Panda running down the trail just in front of us the second day. On the last morning finally, we spotted six (!) Red Pandas next to the road driving up.

On the first night drive we spotted a **Yellow-throated Marten** running across the road in the reserve, further down, we saw four **Sambar** on the first parking lot and finally, we had a good view of a **Hog Badger** right before exiting the reserve and going to the main road. On the second night drive we saw the two Sambar at the same place as the day before and a **Leopard Cat** shortly before leaving the reserve. Next to the main road we had the surprise sighting of both a **Masked Palm Civet** and a **Siberian Weasel**.







Labahe

22. – 24.10.2019

Labahe was probably our least favourite place of the trip. Not that we didn't like it, but after almost a week in two most beautiful and peaceful places with excellent food it was a bit of a shock to us to discover the massive resort, we were going to spend our nights in. It was huge and the food was good, but we already knew how much better it could be. We paid 260 Yuan per room per night, breakfast included, and the rooms were comfortable and good.

During the day one would take the bus to go up the mountain and then walk down the concrete road and scan around. Since there was "four colour tourism" there were far too many buses and people around for our taste but apparently far less than in the weekend. But there is an escape: As soon as you leave this main road for trails, we would find out that we were almost alone. The night drive along the road from the entrance of the reserve to the hotel on the other hand were great with many animal sightings.

### Mammals:

On the day of our arrival we quickly saw **Tibetan Macaques** basically everywhere where there were tourists including next to the windows of the hotel trying to enter the rooms. People are still feeding them, and we guess it's soon going to cause problems as we already saw one Macaque grabbing a lady's handbag to get to food. After checking in we decided to walk the trail that goes behind the hotel and saw one **Pallas's Squirrel**. Other than that, the only other animals we saw during the day were three **Red Pandas** next to the concrete road described above and one **Sambar** while scanning. On the way back sitting in the bus we had a glimpse of another Pallas's Squirrel crossing the road.







On the night drives we saw a lot of **Red and White Giant Flying Squirrels** (20+ the first night and about 10+ the second night) and it was bit of a pain to analyse every single squirrel but at least this one is easy to identify. Other than that, we spotted two **Particolored Flying Squirrels** in one tree and one **Complex-toothed flying Squirrel**. We have also seen both the **Malayan Porcupine** and the **Masked Palm Civet** once each night. **Sambar**s were seen a lot in the first night but then not a single one on the second night, same goes for **Reeves' Muntjac**. We saw a lot of **Chinese Gorals** on both night on the other hand. As for **Chinese Serows** we saw two on the first and three on the second night.







Tangjiahe  
24. – 28.10.2019

Tangjiahe is at an altitude of about 1500m. There is a single big resort in the park and one day there costed about 425 Yuan per room. The food was the worst we had in the trip, which again, doesn't mean it was bad but ok compared with the other meals we had. The rooms were spacious and comfortable although our heater was working only half of the time. A short note on the laundry: We ended up washing our clothes ourselves on the entire trip because the hotels would either not wash them or ask for a ridiculous price for one underwear which was the case of this resort.

There are two different bus stations that both go in direction to the core areas of the park. We didn't go there since it was again full (but less full than Labahe) of 4-colors tourists and only possible to go there from 9am-5pm. There are a quite a lot of basically unused trails and infrastructure along the road that leaves the park and we focused on those during the day. During the night we drove along the road in direction to the exit and back. **Unfortunately, night drives have been severely restricted now.**

### Mammals:

Our main target in Tangjiahe was the **Asiatic Black Bear** as it seems to be the best place to see them so far. We didn't have to wait long: We found a young bear on our day of arrival on our first night drive just next to the road. We had a magnificent long view of this little (bat-) bear and decided to leave him alone after a while. When we drove back, he was still there sleeping. After a very successful first night drive we didn't wanted to end (but Fugui sure did after the long drive we did during that day from Labahe to Tangjiahe) we decided to have another look the next morning to see if the bear was still around. He was not there anymore and we were discussing that we wanted to







focus on the **Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys** for the rest of the time on the way back to the hotel when suddenly a guide friend of Fugui called “golden monkey”! There he was: An old male next the river which is next to the road. We were speechless and still are a bit. The morning we saw the Golden Snub-nosed Monkey we spotted a group of **Rhesus Macaques** also next to the road going towards the hotel. We didn’t see as much **Tibetan Macaques** as in Labahe but they were around the hotel on some days (mostly on the weekend, some seem to wait for the buses). Otherwise we spotted one group sleeping on the trees next to the road on one night drive and one group scanning from the Defense Pass.

We saw one **Père David’s Rock Squirrel** every day most of the time next to the road but also walking in the forest. One night we spotlighted on a what was most probably a **Chinese Jumping Mouse** running in a bush next to the road. The mouse was kind enough to stop for a while and we could look closely at it’s bicolor tail with a white tip at the end. **Confucian Niviventer**s were seen on almost every night while spotlighting. We saw surprisingly several **Malayan Porcupines** on every night drive we did.

We probably saw a **Eurasian Least Shrew** on one night drive. This miniscule gray shrew was too small to have been anything else in our opinion.

We also saw one or two **Mainland Leopard Cats** on every night drive we did. Another big surprise was the sighting of a **Eurasian Otter** in the

river pretty close to the hotel at about 1am. Manuel did spot this one very well as the eyes did almost not shine. It was beautiful to watch it swim away with a fish in its mouth! We saw several **Hog Badgers** every night but had only two very quick sightings of a **Chinese Ferret Badger**.

We also saw a lot of **Takins** (20+) every night and every day. Same goes for **Reeves’ Muntjacs**. We would also see at least 10+ **Chinese Gorals** every night and also several individuals scanning during the day. We spotted two **Chinese Serows** only once at night but then an individual in the forest everyday walking and scanning around. **Wild Boars** were seen only twice in the morning next to the road.







Rhododendron Pass

Wang Lang

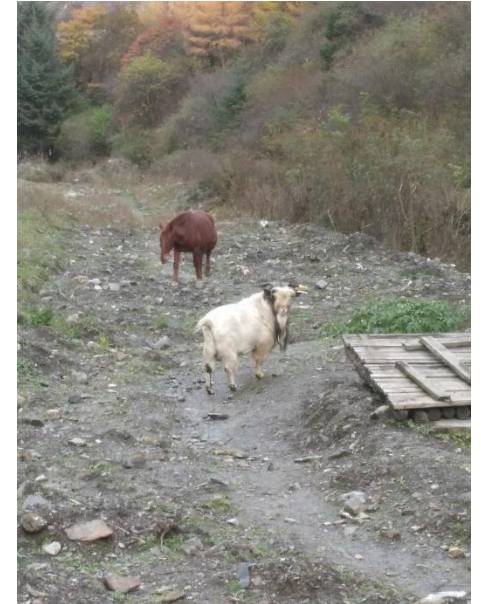
28. – 03.11.2019



We decided to have a look at the region around the Rhododendron Pass which is situated between Pingwu and Nanping because Roland mentioned having seen Asiatic Golden Cat tracks there and it was on the way from Tangjiahe and Rougerai anyway. We stayed in Pingwu the first night because we checked out another park which was closed for tourism (Laohe Gon). The Pass was far away from the city and we only checked one side of it in the afternoon and did a short night drive going back where we didn't see any mammal.

We found a lovely homestay in a small Tibetan village called Baxijia (32.49118, 104.12137) close by the next day. The rooms were comfortable with toilet and hot shower but without any heater besides the bed heater. We payed 180 Yuan per room per night breakfast and dinner included. Special about that place is that they have a very interesting religious belief. This people didn't believe in god: They believe in the mountains and every mountain has its sacred goat which they bring into the village ones a year for new year to celebrate with it. When we did a short walk up the mountain, we found the sacred (and very good looking) goat. After an emotional talk to it, we wished for an Asiatic Golden Cat and promised to organize

a mammal watching meeting for conservation in return. We think we got holy-blessed and we can deeply recommend that place not only for good food and nice people but also for a great luck-boost.







We were close to the pass from there: We took the next tunnel in direction of Nanping and then took the next road on the right leaving the tunnel. We crossed the pass twice on the second night, this took us about 4 hours. We spotted a **Gray-headed Squirrel** and another Flying Squirrel that was too far away for us to identify. Then a **Hog Badger** going down on the other side. When coming back we didn't see any mammal going up but shortly after starting to go down, we spotted a wildcat on the hillside. We only saw the head and the beginning of its upper body (with the rosette-pattern) but we immediately knew that this was something different. We always look to enjoy and experience the moment and try to identify a mammal before we photograph it. As we were beginning to realize that this was indeed an **Asiatic Golden Cat** (ocelot form) we got very excited and nervous and were only able to take crappy pictures and no picture when it stood up and went away. But we still have for sure the stunning face of this elusive cat in our minds. After the not so golden cat was gone, we climbed up

the steep hill and seeing the size of the hole where it was lying and the size of the branch in front of it, confirmed that this cat was much bigger than any of the 7 leopard cats we had seen so far even though their size vary greatly. Because of the fact that the "ocelot form" of this cat can be confusing compared to the big variety of the mainland leopard cats we recommend to study their differences carefully (although for us there seemed to be not many besides the size of the ears compared to the size of the face and the body size). We saw another **Mainland Leopard Cat** the next day on the pass and it was indeed much smaller than the Golden Cat. Going down we spotted another Flying Squirrel we were not able to identify because it was too far away. As already mentioned, we repeated the night drive the next day but there was a lot of fog and we only spotted one Leopard Cat and what was most probably an **Indian Flying Squirrel**.

During the day before the third night drive on the pass we discovered the Wang Lang Nature Reserve (32.54291, 104.09293). It's a beautiful reserve on an elevation of about 2500 m with primary mountain forest. The reserve has been protected since the 60ties. When we received the official permission to do night drives from the hotel to the exit (which is about as long as the night drive in Tangjiahe) we decided to stay there for 3 more nights. The overnight stay is the most expensive we experienced next to Tangjiahe but the rooms are very comfortable with a very comfortable bed, heater, shower and toilet. We payed 630 Yuan per room per night but the bus drives in the day were included as well as the diner and the breakfast.

You need to take the bus during the day which brings you to two different places in the park. During the day it's easy to spot **Blue Sheep** and we spotted a **Tufted Deer**, **Wild Boars** and had a beautiful sighting of a **Mountain Weasel** in the morning (we found it in the second place to the left next to the stream while walking the trail). Golden snub-nosed Monkey are apparently frequently seen in the morning around the hotel and the manager told us to watch out for Asiatic Black Bears so we guess that both might be possible to spot as well. There are also 28 Giant Pandas living in the reserve. Spotlighting in the night we saw about four Leopard Cats, one **Hog Badger**, two **Masked Palm Civets**, two or more **Indian Flying Squirrels**, one **Reeves' Muntjac**, two **Malayan Porcupines** and a **Wild Boar**.







Ruoergai

03. – 08.11.2019

Ruoergai is not a nature reserve it's a city situated on the Tibetan Plateau at an altitude of 3500 meters and therefore much colder than any of the other regions we visited before. If like us, you couldn't find it on Google Maps try "Zoige" which is the same city somehow. Because it's a city there is no need of a big description of hotel since there are plenty and the choice is big. Something we asked ourselves quite soon was how we would eat here. The place that is good for Pallas's Cat and Chinese Mountain Cat is an hour further away from the city and if the early morning and the late afternoon and the night are good times... When do we eat? First, we thought about going from 06-11h and then from 14-22h. Like this, we could at least have a good lunch and noodle soup for dinner. Fortunately, we soon found out that the Muslim restaurants, which have delicious dumplings and fried noodles and are located on the main street at the entrance of the city cook until 22h30.



### Mammals:

The Tibetan Plateau is not protected but sparsely populated and there is therefore still plenty of space for wildlife. At first glance, the vast expanses look empty or only animated by yaks and individual sheep. At second glance one soon discovers that there is a lot of movement, the one of thousands of **Plateau Pikas**. And where there's pikas and rocks, there's also probably cats. On the way to Ruoergai we spotted or first and only **Siberian Roe Deer** we saw there. We spotted both **Tibetan Gazelles** and **Tibetan Foxes** every day both during the day and the night. **Red Foxes**, although less common than



the Tibetan Fox, were also spotted every day both during the day and during the night. We luckily decided to start walking around on the first afternoon at about 5.30pm when it was starting to get cold to warm up and spotted the only **Asian Badger** we saw this way. We spotted at least one **Woolly Hare** on every night drive we did.

We didn't spot any **Chinese Mountain Cat** on our first night drive but then two individuals on the second night, one on the location 1h away from Ruogerao and one nearby the city. Interestingly, we didn't spot them again after that in Ruogerao. **Wild Boars** were seen twice in different areas at night and seem not to be common.



We already started to get nervous on the second morning, nervous because we hadn't yet discovered our main goal of our China trip and, we like to think our spirit animal, the **Pallas's Cat**. Well, we didn't have to wait long: Already at 07h30 we heard screams and when we looked on our left, we saw one animal chasing the other. It was a Tibetan Fox chasing... something else? A cat? We think that we have never had such a first sighting with so much excitement and action! We were wordless and a bit worried about the Pallas's Cat because we knew that red foxes could kill it. Shortly we thought about intervening, but this is nature and the cool cat fought back bravely. The cat took a few minutes to calm down from the excitement under the stones. After that it showed up four times and sunbathed and cleaned itself on the stones. We were able to observe the manul (with interruptions) for about one hour: What a gift! We extended our stay in Ruogerao but had no more luck afterwards and didn't see the cat anymore. **Sadly, the quarries that were the home to the Pallas's cat have now been removed in the name of environmental restoration.**

The day before our departure we decided to visit a forest close to Ruogerao in direction of Nanping: The baxi forest. We walked a bit inside and discovered a **Gansu Pika** on a small clearing. The road seemed interesting to us and we spotted two **Sika Deer** at the roadside while spotlighting.





One last word: As mentioned in the beginning, Rouergai is not a reserve, and it seems that nobody is going to clean the trash. We found loads of broken glass just in front of the Pallas's Cat home and we just couldn't ignore it. The thought of these animals getting hurt by this glass was really sad to us and we collected three of these carton box full of glass plus loads of Red Bulls and other waste.





## Qilianshan

09. – 12.11.2019



After Ruorgai we decided to visit the Qilianshan Mountains mainly because someone took a recent footage of a Dhole group there. We knew that we were going to look for a needle in a haystack, but the area was also potentially very interesting for other animals such as the Kulan and the Asiatic Wildcat.

Our base was in Zhangye, it's a big city with many hotels. They are currently building loads of infrastructure where we were looking for animals because apparently Unesco might chose this place as a World Heritage. So, in the meantime they transform the region into a 5A tourism Geopark which is the highest standard in China. There will be loads of hotels there in near future therefore we guess. Anyway.

On the way from Xining to Zhangye we spotted the usual Plateau animals on the pass: **Blue Sheep**, **Tibetan Fox** and **Plateau Pika**. We bet there would be more animals to discover but it was a big road, difficult to stop and with a lot of traffic. So, after an overnight stay in Zhangye, we entered a small road here in the first morning: 38.947595, 99.903716. As it was still dark, we spotlighted for a while and spotted this very interesting **Wildcat** on an elevation of about 1900m. Our first thought was that this must be an Asiatic Wildcat with these clear markings and because the elevation was too low for a

Chinese Mountain Cat but having a second look at the picture, we realized that the face and the tufted ears are those of a Chinese Mountain cat. In the meantime, we asked different experts, and all agree that it's probably a hybrid cat with felis bieti and either felis lybica or a domestic cat. It's an area where

sophie.betrisey@bluewin.ch





both felis lybica and bieti occur and future research there would be really interesting. Other than that, we spotted a couple of **Woolly Hares**, **Red Foxes** and Blue Sheep again. The people in the village confirmed that Dholes were around but obviously very difficult to spot. We learned that



it's tourist season from April to October there and that you can only enter during the day by bus during that time. From November on it's supposed to be closed because of danger of fire but the gate was just open all the time. There is also a nature reserve inside.

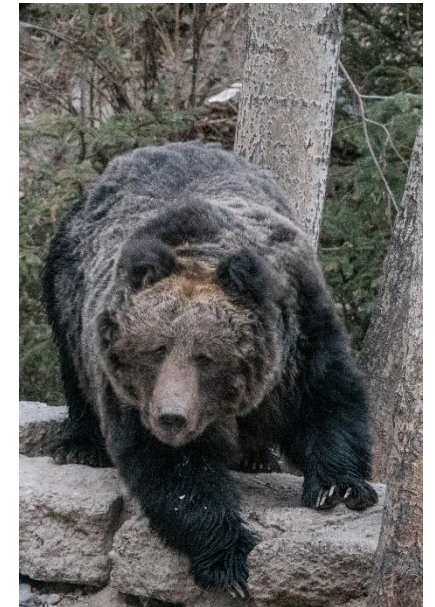
In the afternoon we decided to continue the main road in direction of Xining (38.684737, 99.521685). The area is very interesting as it is mountainous but still quite low until not far from Xining (all around an altitude of 2500m) and there are still some patches of forest left. We found two **Red Deer** in the forest and lots of Blue Sheep in the day. On our last night we did a night drive there and saw many **Alpine Musk Deer** as well as a surprise sighting of a **Beech Marten**. We think that this place would have had many more surprises left for us but sadly we had to leave early as the weather forecast announced snow and Fugui needed to get back to Wolong.





Angsai /  
Sanjiangyuan  
18. – 25.11.2019

We arrived in Yushu two days before our host family would pick us up to go to the “Valley of the cats” so Terry Townshend from Birding Beijing recommended us to visit a special monastery. We contacted a driver group of Yushu over WeChat (ID: quncuo396116) and one driver accompanied us for the day (just ask for the “bear temple”). They don’t speak English but use a translator to communicate. Our driver was not a slow driver and we have to admit that we were a bit scared for our life but other than that everything went fine. Regardless of the speed we still managed to identify one **Siberian Roe Deer** on the way, and it took us about one hour to get to the temple. The monks are used to put the rest of their dinner in a bucket outside for the Tibetan Mastiff to feed. One day however they started to have other visitors: **Brown Bears**, sometimes up to 5 bears at a time. They don’t come every day but just before hibernation a bear doesn’t say no to free food. Anyway, we arrived there, and the monks told us that we were lucky and that the bears were still not hibernating. They said they would come around 7-8pm so our driver wanted to wait the whole day. We pushed him to inform himself where we could look for mammals. At first, he said that there were “only rats” there but of course there were not: In the end we found out that the area is probably pretty good for wildlife. The first valley where we walked and scanned was here: 32.44339, 97.20503. We were not able to find other animals than Yak, but people showed us camera trap pictures of both Leopard and Snow Leopard photographed there. The second valley we checked by car was here: 32.715313, 97.413131, actually just opposite of the monastery. We found **Blue Sheep** and Snow Leopard tracks there. Then it was already time to go back to the monastery and wait for the bear. At around 6.30pm we were lucky enough to be able to observe a big male eating just about 10 meters away from us: Very impressive!







So afterwards as described we spent the next 8 days in the “Valley of the Cats”. Booking can be made easily here: <https://valleyofthecats.org/>. The “Valley of the cats” is a community-based program that started only 2 years ago, and we were very impressed how well everything went after this short time. There is a very high concentration of Snow Leopards in Sanjiangyuan, they say the highest density in the world. A limited number of tourists can visit the place. You stay with one of 22 host families that are participating in the program. The host families are yak nomads living outside of the Angsai town and they are also your guides for the time being there.

As Terry described this trip is nothing for the “faint-hearted”. In our family there was no running water, no shower, no toilet and of course no connection. Now every family seem to have received sort of a bungalow to accommodate tourists so there is privacy but no heater inside. When we woke up in the morning and realized our contact lenses were frozen as well as our water, sunscreen and basically anything liquid, we knew that the night had been very cold (our family lived at an altitude above 3800 m). The yak nomads heat their home with dried yak dung which is a really good thing conservation-wise because this means that they don’t cut the trees. But this also meant that all in all our body had a very interesting smell after 8 days. We don’t know how this is going to change in near future but that was our experience.

Foodwise it’s usually Tsampa in the morning, which is flour, yak butter mixed with yak milk tee, yak yoghurt with bread for lunch or basically anytime during the day and then yak meat for dinner. Our family bought vegetables in Yushu and cooked us really good meals for dinner.

Because we stayed there for quite a while, we tried to draw a beautiful map and will describe what we learned even though communication was very limited. We learned three words in Tibetan: “Gadenche” means “Thank you”, “Demo” means “Hello” and “Gacho” “Goodbye”. We still can’t guarantee this is correct, but it seemed to work. A couple of animals: “Sa” is Snow Leopard, “le” Lynx, “Zsa” Leopard, “Lublia” Blue Sheep and “Tutse” Woolly Hare. We also learned the name of the Alpine Musk Deer, the White-lipped Deer and the Brown Bear but we don’t remember how they called it.

We can really recommend this program: All the money that you pay (1’000 Yuan for the car and guide per day + 300 Yuan per pax per night for hosting) goes into the community. 45% goes to the host family, 45% to the community which means they build infrastructure like roads like this and they also pay back cattle killed by wild animals with this money. 10% finally goes to a snow leopard fund.



## Mammals:

When travelling from Yushu to the Valley you pass several passes and the area is Tibetan Plateau. We spotted the usual inhabitants: **Tibetan Gazelle**, **Tibetan Fox** and **Plateau Pika**.

Our daily companions on the Valley were definitively the Blue Sheep. It felt like we spotted hundreds of them everywhere we went. No wonder there are so many Snow Leopards around!

A couple of words about the “map”: The scales are completely wrong, and the black dots are supposed to be houses. The orange dot is the orange house which is the base of the NGO. The places where “mountains” are drawn are nice Valleys to scan. We learned on our last day that the Valley on the right of the orange house is the best place to look for Snow Leopards. The Valley on the left of the orange house is supposed to be good for the Lynx. But in the end, we think that both Lynx and Snow Leopards can be spotted basically anywhere in the area. We were often invited for tea or yoghurt by other

families and they all saw the Snow Leopard around their houses, at least that's what we understood.

Our one and only **Snow Leopard** we spotted was in the area north of the Camping after having crossed one river when the road starts to go up towards the pass at about 6pm. We could observe this magnificent self-found wildcat for nearly one hour with our scope which certainly was a highlight in our mammal watching career. Besides, we are now blessed according to Tibetan beliefs. Villagers spotted another Snow Leopard on the next day in the area around the orange house, but we came minutes too late. We should mention here that night drives are not allowed on the Valley. In the evening Blue Sheep would come down to the grasslands next to the road and we found many **Woolly Hares** there as well every morning and every evening. We think that night

drives would be brilliant there with probably a great chance for Eurasian Lynx, but we didn't spot any during our stay. We spotted two **Gray Wolves** (which looked quite different) and one **Red Fox** during our stay. We think they could both show up anywhere in the region.

We saw many **White-lipped Deer** but only in the area from Angsai to the orange house. **Alpine Musk Deer** were seen anytime during the day in all of the areas drawn on the map besides the pass area on top of the map (there is no forest there). That's also the range where we would spot **Glover's Pika** and when we spent the day there, we would always spot at least one. Finally, we saw a **Korean Field Mouse** running around our house at night and our host caught two of them in a mouse trap.

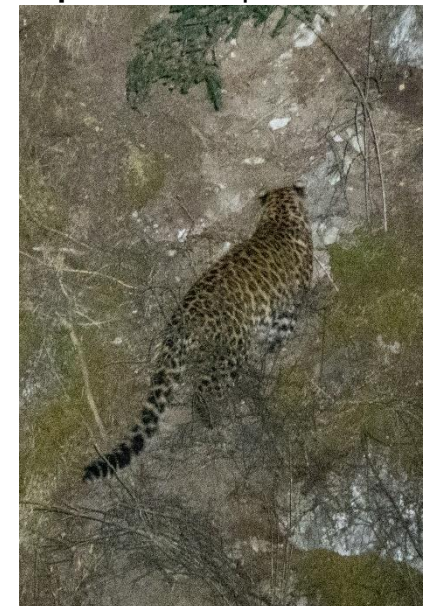






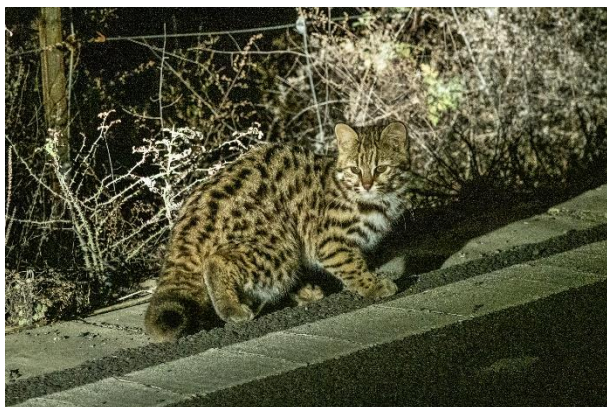
Garze region  
27.11 – 05.12.2019

We started our journey by travelling from Yushu to Garze and this was already very challenging: Everybody kept telling us that Garze was a region and not a city and nobody knew where to drive. Also, Yushu's drivers kindly offered us to drives us for 3'600 Yuan. We were very grateful that Zhaxi sent us a monk friend over to our hotel and he helped us organize a shared car for 150 Yuan each. Garze is located here: 31.622587, 99.8190. On the way just before Garze we spotted many **Plateau Pikas**, two **Tibetan Foxes** and a group of **Blue Sheep** on the last pass. Zhaxi picked us up there and we directly drove into the *Xinlong* region to try to find a good road to do a night drive. Xinlong is here: 30.940056, 100.314510. Yes, to confuse us even more, some cities really have two names. There are many hotels in Xinlong city, but we didn't find any accommodation anywhere else in the Xinlong county (region). On the way to main road we spotted a **Yellow-throated Marten** running next to the river that the main road follows, what a good start! In the evening we decided to drive further away from Xinlong and did the main road as well as a side valley (30.59503, 100.12074). There were quite a lot of houses in the valley, but we still saw a three **Chinese Serows**, a couple of **Chinese Gorals** and two **Sambars** all both next to the main road and in the valley. We also spotted a **Red Fox** next to the main road. We returned to the same valley the next morning and had a quick glimpse of a **Siberian Weasel** crossing the road. Looking at the valley in daylight we decided to try our luck elsewhere this time. We drove a bit further and tried another valley here: 30.49341, 100.08477. The way looked really good with nice rocks and forest and we drove further up the village until we were high up on a pass (30.44315, 100.00347). There were no habitations on the way besides a couple of nomad houses but sadly we realized for the first time that there was a lot of logging going on in this region. On the top we spotted a group of Blue Sheep. There is a military post in the village and "westerners" are not allowed to go any further into the valley. On the way back to the main road we spotted a Sambar Deer late afternoon and started our night drive route from there. On the way up the village





we spotted a couple of Sambars as well as a couple of **Woolly Hares** and a night active **Moupin Pika**. Going down towards the main road we spotted some more Sambars as well as Chinese Gorals and two Chinese Serows. We had a surprise with a **Malayan Porcupine** quite near to the main road. Little did we know that a far bigger surprise was still awaiting us. On the way back on the main road we had a really nice and very close **Mainland Leopard Cat** sighting. We hardly believed the last animal we spotted just 10km away from the city: A **Leopard**! This subspecies of leopard was the p.p.japonensis which is counted since 2017 in “A revised taxonomy of the Felidae” to the p.p.orientalis. It is therefore the rarest subspecies of leopard with only about 200-350 individuals left! We were really tired and excited at the same time. Thankfully we had enough time to observe and photograph this individual climbing up the rather steep hill after it probably came down to the river to drink. After this fantastic sighting we were unable to sleep and skipped mammal watching on the next morning. We wanted to try to look at a valley that seemed perfect to us on the very first day we arrived here: 31.22155, 100.13419. Unfortunately, we realized that after the valley had been heavily logged after a while (probably illegal logging again) and that the way back to Xinlong was by far not as good as the other side because the mountain side was too far away to spotlight. We still had a beautiful sighting of two Yellow-throated Marten running alongside the river when entering this side valley and saw three groups of Blue Sheep in the side valley as well as a Leopard Cat and three Chinese Gorals. We only spotted one Sambar on the main road on the way back. The diversity of the mammals we encountered really surprised us but had a bitter aftertaste thinking about the amount of logging that was going on at the same time. We wish this region and its nature will get more attention and protection in near future.

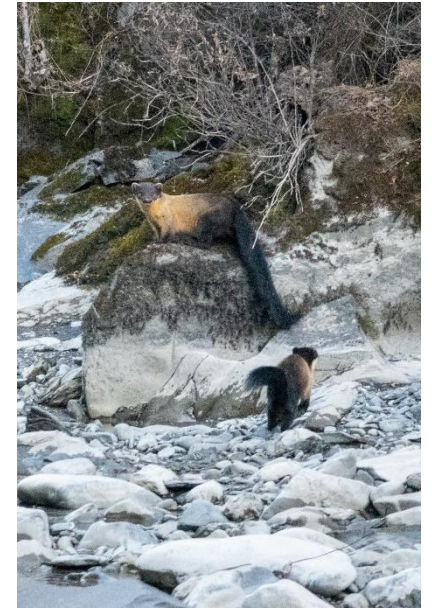


Next, we decided to try our luck further in direction of Yunnan. We drove to Daocheng which was basically an empty city as the tourist season was over. Roland told us that he remembered a nice forest between Muli and Daocheng and knowing that *Yading* is between both and that there was plenty of accommodation in Shangri-La (28.559613, 100.349722) we decided to stay there. Accommodations were much cheaper than in the main season and there were hardly any tourists there. We didn't go into the park as we would have had to wait until the bus was full to leave. Also, when asking what kind of animals, we could encounter, the employees replied “Yaks” and maybe Blue Sheep. Of course, that's not all there is and going through the Unesco site there should be both Leopard and Asiatic Golden Cat there. The thought of this bus trip and to be able to only walk 2km was just not appealing to us even if the ticket was half price (160 Yuan per pax instead of 300 Yuan per pax). Although there was indeed a lot of forest, we hardly saw any animal in the Yading area. We did a first night drive

driving into this valley: 28.535911, 100.278128 and spotted two **Masked Palm Civet**. We looked for alternatives the next morning and spotted one good road going to a village a crossing a nice forest here: 28.35580, 100.30119. If you look on the map you find nothing, but you have to cross the river through the village and then going up turn right crossing another village and there is the forest. The road is quite good (concrete) but quite narrow. We saw one **Forrest's Rock Squirrel** walking around the area. We decided to drive next to the main road in direction of Muli at night and the same road as the night before again but further away until the first pass. We didn't spot any animal except for one **Moupin Pika** and being a bit discouraged we decided to move elsewhere the next day and explore one last region.



We decided to travel to the *Yajiang* (30.033323, 101.018191) area the next day as it seemed to us that there was still a lot of forest there and it was on the way to Zhaxi's hometown. Zhaxi also mentioned that he remembered that there were plenty of side valleys there. There were plenty of accommodations there but only a few were able to accommodate "westerners" it seems. We started off by going into a valley and sadly even the main road was a bad dirt road (30.017665, 101.012933). Then turned right into a side valley and went straight into an even worse dirt road at the first curve (29.56366, 100.58364). The road was bad, but the place was brilliant and very promising. It looked beautiful and obviously no one was living there. After a while we realized that we were in a nature reserve called "Gexigou". We spotted what probably was a **De Winston Shrew**, two Sambar, three Chinese Gorals, two Chinese Serows and a Mainland Leopard Cat there. On the main road again, we also spotted two **Particolored Flying Squirrels**. We were really excited about this place and that's how big our disappointment was when we returned in the day and were told that we were not allowed to enter. There is another road entering the same nature reserve but also here we were told to turn around and leave. So, we continued to the next side valley and it seemed also nice, after a while there was also a gate and we couldn't cross again but found a way to walk inside just before the gate. Nobody was living there, and the way went quite far into a small valley. We found wolf tracks and a couple of bamboo plants there. We remembered a sign saying "Decai Fairy Mountain Provincial Nature Reserve" on the pass between Litang and Yajiang and decided to visit the area. You have to enter the valley here: 30.053076, 100.776917 and when you arrive there turn left and drive 50 more km towards the nature reserve. As it was already late in the afternoon and we didn't have too much fuel left, we didn't quite make it there but the further we went more promising it looked with a lot of untouched forest. It started to be really good around here: 29.904717, 100.823595 and that's also where we found a way to walk into a small valley. We found tracks of a rather medium-sized cat (probably Asiatic golden cat) walking there and people told us that a leopard visited a village one year ago and that "Yeti" (Asiatic Black Bear) would come and eat apples. The area also looked perfect for Eurasian lynx. We spotted a group of **Rhesus Macaque** eating on a crop field. At night we saw one Sambar in the forest and three Leopard Cats as well as three Red Fox nearby the villages. We were also surprised by a massive Eagle Owl just standing next to the road before leaving the valley, one of the really cool birds. Sadly, there was way too much traffic on the pass to spotlight. We decided to return there the next day but it was snowing and there was a big chaos on the pass. This place is certainly one with the most potential for further mammal watching in the region. We turned around and arrived back in our hotel in late afternoon. Zhaxi had one last idea where we could spotlight. We entered this valley: 30.03464, 101.04390 and turned into a side valley going to a monastery (30.06149, 101.091589). The region until the monastery looked brilliant with only one village on the way. There was again a gate in this village, and we were allowed to pass (we told them we wanted to visit the monastery). We spotted four **Tufted Deer** there as well as two **Tolai Hare**, one Leopard Cat, three Masked Palm Civets, two Sambar, one **Indian Giant Flying Squirrel** and one **Gray-headed Flying Squirrel**. As it was beginning to heavily snow again, we had to turn around and finish this last night drive. Our final mammal was a **Long-eared field mouse** caught in Zhaxi's home.





## Mammal list:

		Wolong	Place X	Labahé	Tangjiahe	Rhododendron / Wang Lang		Ruoergai	Qilian-shan	Sanjiang-yuan	Garze region
		3 nights	3 nights	2 nights	4 nights	3 nights	2 nights	5 nights	3 nights	7 nights	8 nights
Rhesus Macaque	<i>Macaca mulatta</i>				X						X
Tibetan Macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>			X	X						
Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey	<i>Rhinopithecus roxellana</i>				X						
Particolored Flying Squirrel	<i>Hylopetes alboniger</i>			X							X
Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista alborufus</i>			X							
Gray-headed Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista caniceps</i>	X				X					X
Indian Giant Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista philippensis</i>					X	X				X
Complex-Toothed Flying Squirrel	<i>Trogopterus xanthipes</i>	X		X							
Pallas's Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>			X							
Père David's Rock Squirrel	<i>Sciurotamias davidianus</i>				X						
Forrest's Rock Squirrel	<i>Sciurotamias forresti</i>										X
Chinese Jumping Mouse	<i>Eozapus setchuanus</i>				X						
Large-Eared Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus latronum</i>										X
Korean Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus peninsulae</i>									X	
Confucian Niviventer	<i>Niviventer confucianus</i>				X						
Malayan Porcupine	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>			X	X		X				X
Gansu Pika	<i>Ochotona cansus</i>							X			
Plateau Pika	<i>Ochotona curzoniae</i>							X	X	X	X



Glover's Pika	<i>Ochotona gloveri</i>									X	
Moupin Pika	<i>Ochotona thibetana</i>	X									X
Woolly Hare	<i>Lepus oiostolus</i>							X	X	X	X
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>										X
De Winton's Shrew	<i>Chodsigoa hypsibia</i>										X
Eurasian Least Shrew	<i>Sorex minutissimus</i>				X						
Asiatic Golden Cat	<i>Catopuma temminckii</i>					X					
Chinese Mountain Cat	<i>Felis bieti</i>							X			
Pallas's Cat	<i>Otocolobus manul</i>							X			
Asiatic Wildcat (Hybrid)	<i>Felis lybica</i>								X		
Mainland Leopard Cat	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	X	X		X	X	X				X
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus japonensis</i>										X
Snow Leopard	<i>Panthera uncia</i>									X	
Masked Palm Civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>		X	X			X				X
Gray Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>									X	
Tibetan Fox	<i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>							X	X	X	X
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>							X	X	X	X
Giant Panda	<i>Ailuropoda melanoleuca</i>		X								
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>									X	
Asian Black Bear	<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>				X						
Eurasian Otter	<i>Lutra lutra</i>				X						
Hog Badger	<i>Arctonyx collaris</i>	X	X		X	X	X				
Yellow-throated Marten	<i>Martes flavigula</i>		X								X
Beech Marten	<i>Martes foina</i>								X		
Asian Badger	<i>Meles leucurus</i>							X			
Chinese Ferret Badger	<i>Melogale moschata</i>				X						
Mountain Weasel	<i>Mustela altaica</i>						X				



Siberian Weasel	<i>Mustela sibirica</i>		X								X
Red Panda	<i>Ailurus fulgens</i>		X	X							
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>				X		X	X			
Alpine Musk Deer	<i>Moschus chrysogaster</i>								X		
Siberian Roe	<i>Capreolus pygargus</i>							X	X	X	
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>								X		
Sika Deer	<i>Cervus nippon</i>							X			
Tufted Deer	<i>Elaphodus cephalophus</i>	X					X				X
Reeves' Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>			X	X		X				
White-lipped Deer	<i>Przewalskium albirostris</i>									X	
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	X	X	X							X
Tibetan Gazelle	<i>Procapra picticaudata</i>							X		X	
Takin	<i>Budorcas taxicolor</i>				X						
Chinese Serow	<i>Capricornis milneedwardsii</i>			X	X						X
Chinese Goral	<i>Naemorhedus griseus</i>	X		X	X						X
Blue Sheep	<i>Pseudois nayaur</i>						X		X	X	X
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>