

Mongolia 1st to 16th June 2019

Introduction

Where

The very mention of Mongolia causes a quickening of the pulse in any ardent traveller and this destination holds an evocative lure which few counties can rival in terms of remote and enigmatic appeal. Steeped in the history of Chinggis Khaan, its vast and sparsely populated expanse, its unique and varied landscapes, and, in particular, the experience of wild camping in the most isolated and picturesque locations, set this trip amongst the most memorable on our crowded planet.

The precise 'where' of our adventure was left in the hugely competent hands of [Tum-Eco Tours](#), who were issued with a list of target birds and who came back to us with the itinerary detailed below. All visiting birders will have a similar set of ten or twenty mouth-watering Central Asian specialities on their 'wanted' lists and Tumendelger Khumbaa (known as Tumen), founder of [Tum-Eco Tours](#) and one of Mongolia's most knowledgeable birders, has crafted a circuit which will incorporate them all.

The route is now somewhat tried-and-trusted, however our time in the forested hills of Jargalant was a new addition to the [Tum-Eco Tours](#) circuit this spring and looks set to become *the* site for Black-billed Capercaillie. Other stars of our unforgettable fortnight included Swan Goose, Mute Swan, Stejneger's Scoter, Altai Snowcock, Oriental Plover, Asiatic Dowitcher, Relict Gull, Amur Falcon, Henderson's Ground Jay, Mongolian Lark, Chinese Grasshopper Warbler, Hodgson's Bushchat, Saxaul Sparrow, Altai and Kozlov's Accentors, 'Khangai' Rosy Finch and Yellow-breasted Bunting; on this trip quality will win over quantity every time!

We also made an off-piste detour to Baga Gazriin Chuluu close to the end of the tour, which is not a site included in most itineraries, in search of some very rare ovines. Mammals are a major feature of this largely dry domain and we recorded an impressive twenty-nine species in the course of our travels. Highlights from a mammalian perspective included Corsac Fox, Przewalski's Horse, Algari, Kulan, Siberian Jerboa, Marbled Polecat and Long-eared Hedgehog.

Our complete itinerary was as follows:

Sat June 1st

0600 arrival in Ulaanbaatar (UB)

0715 departure from airport in our fleet of Land Cruisers (minus five bags!)

Tuul River 0815-0900 (White-crowned Penduline Tit, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Azure Tit)

Gachuurt Forest 1100-1500 (Siberian Tit, Siberian Chipmunk)

Lengthy crawl through UB traffic to Mongolica Hotel

Industrial wasteland near Mongolica Hotel aka 'Green Lake' area 1830-2015 (Swan Goose)

Sun June 2nd

0540-0700 Mongolica Hotel environs (Swan Goose, Amur Falcon, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler)

0800 depart Mongolica

Various stops en route to Khustain National Park, aka Hustai NP (Amur and Saker Falcons, Mongolian and Asian Short-toed Larks)

Khustain National Park 1100-1200 (Przewalski's Horse)

Dune oasis lunch stop 1300-1400 (Hawfinches)

Onward travel to Bayan Lake/Bayan Nuur

Bayan Nuur 1630-1930 (Relict Gull, Swan Goose, Asiatic Dowitcher, 'Mongolian' Bunting, Pere David's Snowfinch, Falcated Duck, White-naped Crane)

'Rail pools' 1930-2030

Mon June 3rd

Bayan Nuur 0515-1115 (Corsac Fox)

Onward travel to Ogii Lake/Ogii Nuur

Ogii Nuur 1345-1930 (Mute Swan, Dalmatian Pelican, Stejneger's Scoter, Mongolian Short-toed Lark)

Tues June 4th

Ogii Nuur 0515-1100 (Pallas's Gull, Mute Swan, Dalmatian Pelican, Stejneger's Scoter, Corsac Fox)

Onward travel to Jargalant 1100-2015

Lunch stop/rendezvous with Tumen in Tsetserleg 1400-1600

Arrival at Jargalant Capercaillie site at 2015

Weds June 5th

Jargalant Forest 0430-1300 (Black-billed Capercaillie)

1300-1530 Lunch break at camp

1645-1900 Riverside walk (Lesser-spotted, Black and White-backed Woodpeckers, Red-throated Thrush, Pied Wheatear, Daurian Redstart)

Thurs June 6th

Jargalant Forest (across the valley) 0430-0700 (Lekking Black-billed Capercaillie, Great Bustard)

Original forest 0745-0930 (Three-toed Woodpecker)

Caper forest again 1000-1145 (Red-flanked Bluetail)

Onward travel to Terkh Lake/Terkh Nuur 1315-1930

Stop at Cholot Gorge 1800-1830 (Ortolan Bunting)

Terkh Nuur – full name Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur – 2000-2100 (Stejneger's Scoter, Shower!)

Fri June 7th

Terkh Nuur 0600-0815 (Stejneger's Scoter)

Onward travel to Khokh Lake/Khokh Nuur 0830-1730 (nine-hour journey) via volcano/lava fields (Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur National Park is the wider location name)

Khokh Nuur 1730-2130 (Mongolian Gull colony, Hodgson's Bushchat, 'Khangai' Rosy Finch, Pallas's Bunting, Brown Accentor, Thick-billed Warbler)

Sat June 8th

Khokh Nuur 0515-0800 (Altai Snowcock, 'Khangai' Rosy Finch, Brown Accentor)

Across the valley 0900-1230 (Hodgson's Bushchat, Altai Accentor, Guldenstadt's Redstart)

Onward travel to Boon Tsagaan Nuur 1345-2035

Sun June 9th

Boon Tsagaan Nuur 0600-1300 (Hooded Crane, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Red-throated Thrush)

Onward travel to Kholboolj 1300-1715 (first Pallas's Sandgrouse)

Kholboolj Lake 1715-2015 (Relict Gull, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler)

Mon June 10th

Kholboolj Lake 0530-0900 (Relict Gull, Ferruginous Duck)

Onward travel to Khongoryn Els 0900-2045 (Eleven and three-quarter hours...)

Orog Nuur 1025-1100 (Mute Swan, Falcated Duck)

Tsagaan Agui 'White Cave' – Neanderthal gorge lunch stop (Lesser Kestrel, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush) 1430-1545

Henderson's Ground Jay and two puncture stops en route

Khongoryn Els (Shower!)

2300-2330 Spotighting session (Siberian Jerboa, Three-toed Jerboa, Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa, Desert Hamster, Tolai Hare)

Tues June 11th

Khongoryn Els dunes 0800-1100 (Saxaul Sparrow, Steppe Grey Shrike, Asian Desert Warbler, 1000s of Pallas's Sandgrouse, Great Gerbil, Marbled Polecat)

(Gurvan Saikhan National Park is the wider location name)

Onward travel to Yolyn Am 1110-1830 (Kulan, Henderson's Ground Jay)

Khavtsgait Gorge lunch stop 1340-1520 (Chukar, Mongolian Finch, Godlewski's Bunting)

At 1800 we hit tarmac – first proper road for seven days (Wrestling stop)

Yolyn Am area 1845-2300 (Oriental Plover, Long-eared Hedgehog)

Very late supper...

Weds June 12th

Yolyn Am ('Vulture's Mouth' Valley and Blue Ice Canyon) 0900-1415 (Kozlov's Accentor, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, White-winged Snowfinch, Wallcreeper, Pallas's Pika, Halys Viper)

Mukhar Shiverst Valley 1600-1800 (Barred Warbler, Godlewski's Bunting, Little Bunting)

Traditional Mongolian meal – goat on the rocks (Campbell's Hamster spotlighting)

Thurs June 13th

Heading north 0845-1730 (after crap taxidermy museum visit)

Dalanzadgad 0915-1015 (Desert Finch, Crested Lark)

Lunch/WiFi in Dundgovi 1430-1530

'Argali Valley' Baga Gazriin Chuluu 1730-1915 (Argali, Siberian Ibex, Midday Gerbil)

Spotlighting 2130-2300

Fri June 14th

Baga Gazriin Chuluu to Terelj Hills 0815-1245

Terelj Hills 1245-1715 (Chinese Grasshopper Warbler, Black-faced Bunting)

Onward travel to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park campsite 1715-1900

Sat June 15th

Gorkhi-Terelj National Park 0500-0700 (Hazel Grouse)

Depart camp at 0900

Chinggis Khaan statue 1000-1100

Korean riverside restaurant 1200-1400

Downtown Ulaan Baatar 1415-1500 Waste ground beside amusement park (Daurian Partridge)

'Green Lake' sewage pools 1600-1745 (Yellow-breasted Bunting)

Sun June 16th

Mongolica Hotel/Airport/ Mongolica Hotel/Airport (Hobby added to the list)

2315 take-off from Chinggis Khaan International (1615 UK time)

Map of Full Route Taken (courtesy of Tum-Eco Tours)



When

Timing is critical in ensuring a successful spring trip to Mongolia. The goal is to include an active Black-billed Capercaillie lek, certain to be a highlight of any visit, whilst also connecting with several late-arriving spring migrants and chancing on a passing Relict Gull. Whilst Black-billed Capercaillie will deliver their bizarre larch-top lekking rituals through April and into May, Hodgson’s Bushchat and Chinese Grasshopper Warbler do not arrive on their Mongolian breeding grounds until June. Furthermore, Relict Gulls generally pass through rather early in the spring, making the precise choice of travel dates something of a birding dilemma.

We booked our trip far in advance and gave Tumen free rein on date selection, bearing in mind the above criteria, and he hit the Mongolian spring birding sweet-spot with absolute perfection! Regardless of choice, an element of luck is certainly involved too, as no two years are alike and unpredictable seasonal variations will always play into the mix.

How

First and foremost must come acknowledgement of the part played by [Tum-Eco Tours](#) in the success and enjoyment of our Mongolian adventure, almost to the degree that one simply needs to get in touch with this company and everything else will be arranged to perfection! We first contacted [Tum-Eco Tours](#) a full fourteen months before our planned departure date to ensure an optimum calendar slot, with an instant and positive response. We soon established that a minimum of eight people were required to make the trip cost-effective and very rapidly nine friends were recruited; the minimum number of participants is a function of the ground support required to operate what is effectively an expedition into the remote wilderness of this vast country.

[Tum-Eco Tours](#) is a family business, headed by Tumen, his wife Oyunaa, and Tselmeg (known as Sam), one of his three sons. No one knows more about the birds and mammals of Mongolia than Tumen whilst Sam, who also accompanied us on our tour, speaks perfect English and took infinite care of our every need

throughout the trip. Sam had recently returned from several years working in Australia and New Zealand, making him superbly well versed in how to keep a bunch of Westerners happy in a very unfamiliar environment!

Transport for the duration of the trip was by a fleet of very well maintained Toyota Land Cruisers, whose combination of comfort and go-anywhere capability was tested to the full during our 3500km circuit. More than two-thirds of the trip was undertaken without the aid of tarmac roads and for a seven-day period we were totally restricted to dirt roads, making top class vehicles and highly competent drivers absolutely essential.

As well as the Land Cruisers our convoy included a UAZ, a charismatic go-anywhere Soviet-era workhorse, which was laden with all the culinary requirements of our hungry team. The cooking crew were supremely efficient, producing fine three-course meals within an hour-or-so of arrival at a lunchtime stopover or evening camping site. Food and hot drinks were served on folding dining tables accompanied by comfortable camping chairs, with a large dining tent erected when conditions dictated. Beer was purchased along the way, and it was never a problem to ensure that a can of Niislel was available to toast the array of highlights from each and every day.

All of our drivers were superb, being highly skilled in negotiating tricky river crossings, expanses of deep sand and any other conditions which the challenging environment threw at them. Not only were they accomplished drivers, they were also experienced mechanics, electricians, tent-erectors and sous chefs, all contributing to the effortlessly smooth operation of the trip from a client's perspective.

It is worth noting that, other than the first and last nights of our trip, spent in the comfortable Mongolica Hotel, the remainder consisted of wild camping with an occasional night in a ger (traditional Mongolian round tent). This meant that there were only two opportunities to take a bathroom shower during our entire two-week circuit, though we were offered a shower tent should it have been required. The remote wild camping experience was a certain highlight, as the team's experience meant that we always pitched tents in stunningly scenic locations and awoke to immediate birding opportunities. Tents and sleeping bags were provided and set up by the team, all equipment being top class and very comfortable.

A visa is required to enter Mongolia, but at least in the UK this is a pretty straightforward process, with the requisite letter of introduction supplied by [Tum-Eco Tours](#). There is no online or postal application option and therefore an intermediary is required, unless a personal visit to the Mongolian Embassy in London is an option. We used [Scott's Visas](#), who were very professional and efficient.

Ulan Bator is served by very few airline carriers and this can make air travel a little more challenging than it is for most destinations, in this age of prompt and reliable service. The European contingent of our crew all opted for Aeroflot, something which in hindsight I would not recommend. The Russian carrier managed to lose the bags of five out of seven of us, with one going missing for the entire two-week period.

It is also worthy of mention that we discovered, to our dismay, that flight delays are commonplace in Ulaanbaatar due to the configuration of the single runway. Mongolia is a land of wind, and any excessive crosswinds can cause curtailment of all flights for significant lengths of time. As a result of such winds we were delayed for fourteen hours on our way back home, which meant both the Eastern and Western contingents missing their local connecting flights and necessitated costly re-bookings of replacements; future travellers be warned.

A final word of appreciation must go to Simon Colenutt and Barry Wright, who made the same trip two years prior to us and who were instrumental in sowing the seeds for our incredible fortnight. Acknowledgement must also be given to the late Jon Hornbuckle, who takes credit for bringing Tumendelger Khumbaa to the world birding stage and making such a trip possible for all who choose to follow.

Notes on Target Bird Species and Local Specialities

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

Recorded on nine days of the trip, with sightings at all larger lakes visited and breeding witnessed at several. Maximum count of c70 at Ogii Nuur.

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*

Recorded at 'Green Lake' UB, Bayan Nuur, Ogii Nuur and Kholboolj Lake, with a maximum count of c50 at the latter. Mongolia is probably the best country in the world in which to search for this very rare bird and be pretty much guaranteed excellent viewing opportunities.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*

Mongolia is one of the few places where genuinely wild birds can be seen, though they are very thinly distributed. We saw a pair at Ogii Nuur and six at Orog Nuur.

Falcated Duck *Mareca falcata*

Four seen at Bayan Nuur and a single male at Kholboolj Lake.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Recorded at Bayan Nuur and Kholboolj Lake, with a maximum of 30 at the latter site.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*

A pair at Kholboolj Lake was the only record.

Stejneger's Scoter *Melanitta stejnegeri*

Three seen distantly at Ogii Nuur, followed by close-up views at Terkh Nuur where up to 40 were counted; stunning birds when seen well.

Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes bonasia*

Always a challenging bird to track down, we were therefore very pleased to find one and hear others close to our Gorkhi-Terelj National Park camping site.

Black-billed Capercaillie *Tetrao urogalloides*

One of the principal drivers for any Mongolian trip, we were treated to an unforgettable experience of this species at Tumen's new site, Jargalant. Our trip lay close to the end of the lekking season and on our first dawn we heard a lekking bird uttering its remarkable popping calls from larches within a few hundred metres of our campsite, but failed to locate it before display ceased. Mid-morning we were more fortunate, when a male was spotted from one of our vehicles and subsequently watched stealthily trotting amongst the trees.

On our second morning, Tumen had sent out his local guide to camp overnight at an alternative lekking site and just after dawn we were summoned by radio. Following an anxious twenty-minute drive we were shown a male lekking from a rather dense larch clump, then flush to another stand of trees. Thankfully he soon settled down to his display ritual and we were treated to the most incredible half-hour of uninterrupted views, as our bird called from a pine-top in the morning sunlight.

Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus*

Only seen on the high crags above Khokh Nuur. Although heard calling on the evening of our arrival, it took until the next morning for us to make visual contact. Two males were seen before breakfast, calling from prominent crags high above us.

Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*

Males seen at Khavtsgait Gorge and Mukhar Shiverst, with a most memorable response to playback at the first site.

Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica*

One of the most bizarre birding sessions of the trip was on a hot afternoon in central UB, where a pair of partridges was seen at close range in waste ground beside an amusement park, again with startling response to playback.

Black-throated Loon *Gavia arctica*

Smart summer-plumaged birds seen at Bayan Nuur and Terkh Nuur.

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auratus*

Four summer-plumaged birds at Bayan Nuur.

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Two summer-plumaged birds at Bayan Nuur.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Single migrant birds at Ogii Nuur, Khokh Nuur and Khongoryn Els.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Five at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*

Single breeding-plumaged birds at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and Kholboolj Lake.

Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*

A pair at Ogii Nuur was seen on both days of our stay.

Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*

Some wonderful views during the tour, with sightings at Jargalant, Khokh Nuur, Khavtsgait Gorge and the Argali Valley.

Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*

Regular sightings in our travels through more mountainous regions.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

Wonderful to be able to report that this was one of the most regularly encountered 'raptors' of the trip, with records on nine days and a maximum count of thirty in one day.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*

Three seen at widely spaced locations.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

Seen on six days at widely spaced locations.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Seen on five days, always in the uplands.

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

Only encountered at Boon Tsagaan Nuur, where good views were eventually obtained of a pair with at least two fledged offspring.

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

Notebook entries on eight days of the trip.

Eastern Buzzard *Buteo japonicus*

One at Terelj Hills.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Recorded at Mukhar Shiverst Valley and Argali Valley, plus a nest with chicks at Khongoryn Els.

White-naped Crane *Antigone vipio*

Only recorded at Bayan Nuur, where a pair with two newly-fledged young were present.

Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*

Delightfully widespread in a variety of landscapes, from lake edge to desert. Seen on eleven days of the trip, with up to twenty in a day.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Only recorded at Bayan Nuur and Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*

A pair at Boon Tsagaan Nuur was the only record. Great to have a four-crane trip!

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Recorded at Kholboolj Lake and Boon Tsagaan Nuur, with double-figure numbers in display at both sites.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus mongolus*

A single breeding-plumaged bird at Kholboolj Lake was the only record, something of a poor showing for the 'Mongolian Sandplover'.

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*

Three stunning white-headed males were a definite trip highlight at Yolyn Am. The short grassland habitat requirement of this species is clearly very specific, as no others were seen in our travels, though two flyover waders whilst travelling close to the Argali Valley were almost certainly Oriental Plovers. The stiff-winged display flight was very unusual and distinctive, and the distances covered demonstrated the huge territories required for breeding.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

Three at Kholboolj Lake were the only records.

Asiatic Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*

Up to twelve were counted at Bayan Nuur and also seen at Kholboolj Lake. This species and Oriental Plover are often considered 'breeding plumage specialities' of Mongolia, being very difficult to see in their colourful spring finery anywhere else in the world.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Half a dozen birds in evocative display above Kholboolj Lake.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

A handful of birds at Bayan Nuur, with display noted.

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

One of the surprises of the trip and something of a highlight, as we were treated to some wonderful views in the crisp morning light. Even Tumen was surprised to encounter an immaculate male bird on grassland in a valley bottom close to our Jargalant campsite, as this species is now a great rarity in Mongolia.

Relict Gull *Ichthyaetus relictus*

High on every wanted list, this bird caused much nervous anticipation as a huge element of luck is involved in connecting with migrant birds at some point in the trip. Note that no breeding sites are visited on this circuit, as they lie in the remote western regions of Mongolia, meaning that one must rely on a chance passage encounter with what is a very rare bird.

In spite of our late tour dates we were very fortunate and saw a single adult bird at Bayan Nuur on the second day of the trip, though it only lingered for an hour. At Kholboolj Lake two birds were seen on two consecutive days, which seemed most likely to have been different birds, making a total of five birds on three birding days, a huge trip success.

Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*

One summer-plumaged adult at Ogii Nuur, c30 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and five at Kholboolj Lake.

Mew Gull *Larus canus heinei*

One second summer at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Mongolian Gull *Larus mongolicus*

The large white-headed gull of the region and seen on eight days of the trip. Of note was an island breeding colony several hundred strong at Khokh Nuur, containing several wing-tagged birds.

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

This highly charismatic species was regularly encountered during our time in the Gobi Desert and its margins, with daily sightings between Boon Tsagaan Nuur and Yolyn Am. During this period the distinctive bubbling calls, which accompanied the morning and evening fly-pasts, were a welcome daily feature. The early morning gatherings at the oasis below the Khongoryn Els dunes were particularly impressive, containing a rough estimate of 2000 birds.

Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*

Ones and twos encountered at a handful of widespread locations during the trip.

Little Owl *Athene noctua plumipes*

On an otherwise owl-free trip, sightings at Khongoryn Els and Yolyn Am are worthy of mention.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

Wonderfully close looks at a male, involved in nest-hole excavation, at Jargalant.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*

A male watched drumming at Jargalant.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

Some great views of a low-feeding male at Jargalant and another in the Hotel Mongolica grounds.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

A male at Jargalant, clearly the woodpecker capital of Mongolia!

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*

Surprisingly scarce, with our only sightings being around the Mongolica Hotel and in transit to Khustain National Park on the second day of the trip.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

Seen on six days of the trip at widely spaced localities across the steppe; we were shown several pylon-nesting birds, as well as encountering others at large.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Recorded at Gachuurt Forest and Jargalant.

Daurian Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Recorded at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and Baga Gazriin Chuluu.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris*

One record only, at Khongoryn Els, where a nest with eggs was found.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*

Only noted in the vicinity of Ulaanbaatar.

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

A bird of arid habitat with sparse vegetation, typically encountered in small family groups. We found it on three days of the trip, all within the Gobi, at Boon Tsagaan Nuur in the vicinity of Khongoryn Els.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Seen at Gachuurt Forest and Jargalant.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

One of the most widespread birds in Mongolia, even being noted as a town-dweller in some areas.

Daurian Jackdaw *Coloeus dauuricus*

Absent from the Gobi but seen in force throughout the remainder of the trip, including in towns, and behaving much like its western counterpart. Notebook entries on six days of the trip, stating a maximum of c100 in a day.

Siberian Tit *Poecile cinctus*

A bird seen at a known active nest hole, low in a spruce tree trunk, in the Gachuurt Forest.

Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus*

Four recorded in the riverside willows of the Tuul River.

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*

Two recorded in the riverside willows of the Tuul River.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata magna*

The only records were on wasteland on the outskirts of Dalanzadgad.

Steppe Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris brandti*

Likely to become a full species soon, we recorded Horned Lark on twelve days of the trip, making it one of the most widespread species seen. Notebook accounts show up to 100 per day.

Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis*

This species was clearly very thinly distributed and took some effort to locate. Eventually a single pair was found in dry stony steppe habitat with sparse bushes, close to Ogii Nuur.

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica*

This impressive and highly conspicuous species was seen in open grassland habitats on eight days of the trip, with up to 50 birds in a day noted.

Asian Short-toed Lark *Alaudala cheleensis*

Recorded on eight days of the trip, in dry steppe.

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Numerous in the Jargalant mixed woodland. Singing birds noted.

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Just a handful of birds at Jargakant and Terelj Hills. Singing birds noted.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Birds noted at widely-spaced sites on four days of the trip.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

The most widely encountered *Phylloscop*, seen on seven days of the trip. Singing birds noted.

Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Just a couple of records at Jargalant. Singing birds noted.

Two-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*

A late migrant at Khokh Nuur.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

A couple in Jargalant. Singing birds noted.

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Only noted at Gachuurt Forest. Singing birds recorded.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*

This mouse-of-a-bird was seen on four days of the trip, clearly all migrants and often in uncharacteristically open habitat; one actually ventured inside an open tent!

Chinese Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella tacsanowskia*

A single bird heard and subsequently seen at Terelj Hills, frequenting dense willow scrub, eventually showing well in spite of our hot midday visit.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria*

Watching these striking birds defend their hillside territories in the Mukhar Shiverst Valley was something of a warbler highlight. Up to four present at this site.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*

A single singing bird tracked down in the desiccated scrub at Khongoryn Els.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

Two pairs watched in the steep gorge at the head of Yolyn Am.

White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*

A couple seen in the vicinity of the Mogolica Hotel, UB.

Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*

Two at Jargalant, including a nesting bird, and a migrant at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

Migrant birds noted at Bayan Nuur and Mukhar Shiverst Valley.

Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane*

A single migrant bird at Khokh Nuur.

Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*

Singing birds on territory in dense scrub at Gachuurt Forest and the Terelj Hills, plus a migrant bird in the Hotel Mongolica grounds.

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

Up to six per day in the mixed forest at Jargalant, though not seen elsewhere.

Eastern Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*

Recorded in the rocky terrain of Cholot Gorge and the Mukhar Shiverst Valley.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Up to ten per day in the mixed forest at Jargalant, plus one singing close to Terkh Nuur.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*

Recorded at Jargalant, where c5 birds were seen, and another one close to the Terelj Hills.

Güldenstädt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

A pair on a rocky hillside above Khokh Nuur was our only record, in habitat shared with Hodgson's Bushchat.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Multiple daily records in the dry rocky terrain during our travels through south eastern Mongolia; particularly numerous in the spectacular orange landforms at Baga Gazriin Chuluu.

Hodgson's Bush Chat *Saxicola insignis*

Another certain trip highlight, seen only at Khokh Nuur and the principal reason for our visit to this spectacularly remote site. Two males and a female seen close to our lakeside campsite on the evening of our arrival and up to six on a more distant hillside reached in our vehicles the next morning. Favoured habitat was at the bases of steep slopes, where the limited shelter promoted the growth of a little sparse bushy vegetation, in an otherwise bleak and windswept landscape. We noted several colour-ringed birds at the second site, where we presumed the birds were being studied.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Commonly encountered in open steppe lands throughout the trip, with records on eleven days of up to fifty birds. Song-fighting birds were a regular feature.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Seen on three days, as we travelled through the Gobi.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Recorded on five widely-spaced days of the trip.

Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri*

Only seen at Khongoryn Els at very specific sites. A couple of pairs were feeding young in nest holes located in dilapidated buildings next to camel corrals, close to the base of the huge sand dunes.

Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana*

Only encountered at Khokh Nuur, in habitat shared with Hodgson's Bush Chat, where up to four birds were present.

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*

Numerous at Khokh Nuur, with up to fifteen seen on our second day and at least four noted at Yolyn Am. Low dense bushes on open rocky hillsides were the preferred habitat.

Kozlov's Accentor *Prunella koslowi*

Only recorded at Yolyn Am, with a pair close to our ger camp and another four seen inside the national park.

Mongolian (Eastern) Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis macronyx*

Only recorded at Bayan Nuur, with up to ten birds on the second morning.

Northern Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola citreola*

Recorded at a handful of widespread localities during the trip, with breeding noted.

Southern Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola calcarata*

Just one record, a male at Bayan Nuur.

Baikal (White) Wagtail *Motacilla alba baicalensis*

Recorded on approximately half of the days of the trip, in a variety of habitats, clearly breeding at many.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Only recorded at Ogii Nuur and Bayan Nuur, in low, damp grassland.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

Recorded on eight days of the trip, often in song flight, generally in rocky upland areas.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Only recorded at Jargalant.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Recorded in the forests of Jargalant and Gorkhi-Terelj National Park.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Only recorded in the uplands around Khokh Nuur.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

A handful of birds recorded at Khustain National Park and Jargalant.

Mongolian Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*

Recorded at Tsagaan Agui and Khavtsgait Gorge, with up to twenty birds seen at the latter site.

Khangai (Asian) Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa sushkini*

Just four birds seen during our time in the rocky hillsides above Khokh Nuur. This bird is something of a Mongolian prize, as it seems likely to be split into what will become an endemic species.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

The 'pleased to meet you' song of this species was a sound heard at a variety of widespread sites.

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*

Only recorded at Yolyn Am, with up to ten birds noted in the ground-hugging scrub.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Carpodacus sibiricus*

This attractive species was seen at the Tuul River and the 'Green Lake', both close to UB.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

A single male bird in a strip of landscape planting in the centre of Dalanzadgad was clearly a migrant. We were shocked to discover later that the record constituted a second for Mongolia!

Twite *Linaria flavirostris*

Seen at a handful of widely spread sites.

Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*

A flock of twenty-eight at Gorkhi-Terelj National Park.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Noted at Gachuurt Forest, Jargalant and Gorkhi-Terelj National Park.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Seen at Jargalant and Cholot Gorge.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

A lone migrant at the Mukhar Shiverst Valley.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*

Now sadly a very rare bird in Mongolia, we found a single male in the willows at the rapidly disappearing 'Green Lake', UB.

Pallas's Bunting *Emberiza pallasi pallasii*

Only recorded in the uplands close to Khokh Nuur, frequenting the few areas of sparse low bushes.

Mongolian (Pallas's) Bunting *Emberiza pallasi lydiae*

Only seen in the vicinity of Bayan Nuur, where singing birds were noted in the surrounding low dry scrub.

Southern Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhuloides*

Only noted in the extensive reedbeds at Bayan Nuur.

Notes on Mammal Species Seen**Long-eared Hedgehog** *Hemiechinus auratus*

After failing to find this sought-after species at Khongoryn Els, we set off on a determined nocturnal search on the return from the Yolyn Am Oriental Plover site. Spreading out in our vehicles to scour the grasslands, we found a Long-eared Hedgehog at the eleventh hour, after which it performed magnificently; Adrian was allowed to practice his dribbling skills as he kept it from a pursuing vehicle and, once cornered, as a finale it attempted to climb into a Land Cruiser wheel housing!

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

Seen at Gachuurt Forest, Khongoryn Els and the Chinggis Khaan statue.

Pallas's Pika *Ochotoma pallasii*

Seen in boulder fields at Khokh Nuur and Yolyn Am, with up to ten recorded at the latter site.

Tarbagan (Siberian) Marmot *Marmota sibirica*

The lolling gait of this bulky rodent was a regular sight on the steppe lands.

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus undulates*

The common ground squirrel of our Mongolian travels.

Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus erythrogenys*

Only reliably noted at Yolyn Am, likely overlooked elsewhere.

Alashan Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus alashanicus*

Also only reliably noted at Yolyn Am, likely overlooked elsewhere.

Siberian Chipmunk *Tamias sibiricus*

Two at Gachuurt Forest were our only records.

Brandt's Vole *Lasiopodomys brandtii*

Very common in the dry steppe between UB and Ogii Nuur.

Mongolian Gerbil *Meriones unguiculatus*

Regularly encountered between UB and Jargalant.

Midday Gerbil *Meriones meridianus*

One at Kholboolj, common at Baga Gazriin Chuluu.

Great Gerbil *Rhombomys opimus*

Just one pair seen, in a saxaul stand at the foot of Khongoryn Els dunes.

Mongolian Silver Vole (Royle's Mountain Vole) *Alticola semicanus*

Seen at Yolyn Am and Baga Gazriin Chuluu

Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*

Just one, possibly two, seen spotlighting at Khongoryn Els, close to our tourist camp.

Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa *Cardiocranius paradoxus*

One seen whilst spotlighting at Khongoryn Els, close to our tourist camp; fat-retaining tail very distinctive.

Three-toed (Hairy-footed) Jerboa *Dipus sagitta*

c20 seen whilst spotlighting at Khongoryn Els, close to our tourist camp.

Mongolian Hamster *Allocricetulus curtatus*

Common in the dry steppe beside Bayan Nuur.

Desert Hamster *Allocricetulus curtatus*

Two seen whilst spotlighting at Khongoryn Els, close to our tourist camp.

Campbell's Dwarf Hamster *Phodopus campbelli*

One seen whilst spotlighting close to our Yolyn Am tourist camp.

Corsac Fox *Vulpes corsac*

A fantastic showing from this impressive canid, with records on four days of the trip. One at Bayan Nuur, then a family part of eight at a den close to our Ogii Nuur campsite, where we watched cubs at play. Some great views of three different hunting animals on the drive to Khokh Nuur and finally three more en route to Yolyn Am.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

A single sighting at Khongoryn Els.

Marbled Polecat *Vormela peregusna*

A true mammalian highlight was our prolonged daytime encounter with a hunting animal in the saxaul at the foot of Khongoryn Els dunes. This rare and spectacularly marked mustelid spent thirty minutes hunting amongst Great Gerbil burrows in the low dunes, affording unprecedented viewing opportunities.

Kulan (Asiatic Wild Ass) *Equus hemionus*

Eleven individuals counted on the arid, sun-baked expanses of Gurvan Saikhan National Park, including several young foals.

Przewalski's Horse *Equus przewalskii*

Fourteen counted at Khustain National Park.

Siberian (Eastern) Roe Deer *Capreolus pygargus*

One seen distantly at Jargalant.

Siberian Ibex *Capra sibirica*

Although we failed to find them at Yolyn Am, eight were counted at Baga Gazriin Chuluu, including males with wonderfully ornate scimitar-horns.

Argali *Ovis ammon*

Great views of two males at Baga Gazriin Chuluu, huge powerful beasts with amazing spiralling headgear.

Goitered (Black-tailed) Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*

c20 seen in the Gobi plains as we approached Khongoryn Els.

Mongolian Gazelle *Procapra gutturosa*

Just one brief encounter with four individuals on a distant hillside as we travelled to Jargalant.