

## Holiday Highlights

### Mongolia

29 July – 14 August 2018

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**Guests:** Peter Pilbeam, Jayne Behenna, Patricia Annesley, Linda Fitch, Martin Warren, Caroline and Paul Hastilow, Tom Parr, Di and Nigel Hardcastle

**Travel Day:** It is a very long way to Mongolia and we prefer to use Korean Airways to Aeroflot, which means a longer but more pleasant flight with lots of legroom, very nice food and feeling well looked after. We have a break in Seoul which is a very beautiful airport then catch our next flight eventually arrive at Ulaanbaatar, where we are met by Balazs. It is about a half hour drive to our really very special hotel with superb rooms and it is great to sink into a nice soft pillow after the journey.

**Day 1:** We don't have much time to sleep, as this year the times of the flights are not great with the one from Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad, leaving at 5.30am. Yuk!!! We eat our boxed breakfast on the way and the flight leaves on time.

Arriving at Dalanzadgad we get a surge of excitement! At last we are in Mongolia in daylight! Outside the airport we find our first proper bird of the trip, a superb Isabelline Shrike, soon followed by Tree Sparrow, Feral Pigeon and a Collared Dove. Now we drive to our hotel and two of our rooms are available so we use these as storage for bags and people have the chance to unpack what they need for the day before we have a second and somewhat better breakfast.

Now it is all systems go as we head to the mountains in our smooth four wheel drive vehicles, some of the journey on dirt tracks that the vehicles cruise over easily. Approaching the valley where we are going to walk we start to see Shorelarks, Snowfinches and Twite then at the car park we find more Snowfinches some of which are extremely tame. A Shorelark is amongst them too, a whitish faced bird of the local race *brandti* showing hardly any yellow.

As we walk into the valley we are surprised by the number of people also here but we are soon distracted by all the birds around! Upland Buzzard, Pacific Swift, lots of Isabelline Wheatears, Rock Sparrows, Twite, Asian Short-toed Larks and more are flitting around and we are excited to find mammals too, including Mid-day Jird and what we identify as a Pallas's Pika. A Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel, like a souslik, shows very well and we find what we think are Daurian Pikas too - looking bigger, more sandy with pale rims to their big round ears - but we can't claim to be very confident!

Walking on we hear a bird singing in the short vegetation on the slope above and eventually find the bird - a Koslov's Accentor, rather like our Dunnock but a browner colour. A Blyth's Pipit shows briefly and Red-billed Choughs fly over then up a side valley we get superb views of 'eastern' Black Redstart - with orange belly like a Common Redstart! The scenery is spectacular and we scan the rocks for more birds, suddenly finding a juvenile Cuckoo! We wonder who will be feeding it and don't have to wait long before a Koslov's Accentor appears and stuffs food in its enormous gaping mouth! We wonder how many people in the world have seen this sight - this is species with a very restricted range feeding this cuckoo!

We enjoy watching more Pacific Swifts, there are lots more Isabelline Wheatears, then as we walk back towards the main track a superb Lammergeier flies over carrying a bone before cruising around the cliff tops - wow! Another appears, this time a beautiful pale adult bird and then two Golden Eagles circle up over the high peaks now just appearing out of the cloud. The sun is finally coming out. Scanning the ledges we find a Siberian Ibex, then as we pause to enjoy more Pikas - which seem to be out in numbers now, we find Brown Accentor, Common Rosefinch and a superb Cinereous Vulture circles overhead.

Walking back the day is warming up and we find lots of birds coming to the stream to drink and bathe, including several Brown Accentors, a few Twite, a superb Godlewski's Bunting and a pair of Chinese Beautiful Rosefinches. It is really good to see a male! We find a lovely pair of Mongolian Finches, the male a lovely pink colour on the chest. Pikas are everywhere and even right by our feet. There is some considerable discussion about which Pikas we are seeing and the book is little help as Daurian and Pallas's seem to be very similar and even the internet is little help, but later research suggests that Pallas's Pika is not actually found in this part of Mongolia and so the species here is likely to be Daurian. Also Daurian is more active in the middle of the day. It seems the only reliable way to tell the two species apart is whether the pads of their feet are black skin or covered in fur!!

Finally back by the van we head for a very late lunch and it is quite a drive! One vehicle spots a group of Mongolian Gazelles as we go. Lunch is at a ger camp and very good and after we have eaten we decide to search the grounds as there are bushes and trees here in the middle of stony desert which could well attract birds. We are pleased to find a big Tolai Hare - a lovely pale animal, then in the trees several Isabelline Shrikes. A Dark-sided Flycatcher shows well and is a nice find, then we are delighted to get great views of a Pallas's Reed Bunting.

Next we go in search of Oriental Plover but sadly we have no luck. though we do find more Mongolian Gazelles and our first Camels - not wild animals here of course but still there is something special about seeing them. There are

flocks of Shorelarks scattered all over the area and occasion Isabelline Wheatears, Ravens, Kestrel and it is great fun racing around on the dirt tracks!

We finally head back for our evening meal and our first run through the checklist. The food is very nice but there is much amusement at Martin's local dish - called mutton and vegetable on the menu, it turned out to be a whole plate full of six pasties!!

**Day 2:** After a leisurely breakfast we head out to our first stop - a small 'plantation' on the outskirts of town where migrants are often found. These plantations are where locals grow food in a kind of allotment but with trees planted for protection from the wind - all of which attracts migrants. Despite this not being the time of year for migration we feel it is worth a try and almost immediately find a Hawfinch amongst the Tree Sparrows - a migrant here. There are Isabelline Shrikes and we are delighted to find a small warbler on one of the trees. It is very active but we eventually get very good views and identify it as an Arctic Warbler. From the same spot we also find a Dark-sided Flycatcher convincing us that certainly are a few migrants passing through! There are lots of Isabelline Shrikes but also a rather odd looking bird that we eventually identify as an immature Brown Shrike.

We walk on through the area checking the trees carefully but it seems we have found the best birds already as the rest of the bushes seem very quiet. That is until Roy almost steps on a snipe that flutters up and lands again looking like it might be struggling to fly. It vanishes into a patch of grass so we carefully look and again it pops out and runs on ahead and back into cover. For a few moments we can see its face well enough to gather some features and then as it runs another short distance we grab a few photos then leave it alone as it is clearly injured and we don't want to distress it further. It is not an easy identification but very careful study of the books and internet - and detailed inspection of tail and scapulars and face markings means we later work out it is Pintail Snipe for sure! As we walk back towards the vehicles we get a very brief view of a Barred Warbler but we are a little shocked by the time! It is already 10:45am!

We now have a long drive and head out on the new highway, with lovely smooth tarmac!! It seems pretty bird-less as we travel - just a Raven or two and the occasional Shorelark or Isabelline Wheatear. In places the road has been completely undermined by the recent heavy rains, creating a river that has washed out under the road and we have to leave the tarmac briefly but then later we turn off and head out into the green desert - a swathe of wild alliums of some sort. Driving with the window open the wonderful smell from the crushed leaves is fabulous! We pass herds of multi-coloured goats and sheep and there are groups of horses everywhere - yet you feel like you are in the middle of nowhere with just the occasional shepherd's yurt - often with a solar panel and satellite dish!

We arrive at a small dam where there is a little pool of water and a stream and find a few waders, though nothing rare or eastern - about five Little Ringed Plovers, a Common and a Green Sandpiper. Then we head down to a small 'plantation' nearby where they are diverting the river to grow vegetables and they have planted trees as a shelter belt round the edges. During migration times this can be a magnet for migrants but today it is pretty quiet. A search of the main tree lines and some of the bushier areas produce a few Collared Doves, lots of Tree Sparrows and several Isabelline Shrikes, but there is one star bird - a Thick-billed Warbler. One of the Isabelline Shrikes entertains us by eating a whole lizard until just the tip of the tail is poking from its bill like a thin tongue! As we walk back we find a superb grasshopper which has a deep crimson colour in its wings as it flies and also take pics of a big headed lizard with a red spot on its shoulder - called a Toad-headed Agama.

It is now a relatively short distance to the village where we are having lunch and the food is good and certainly plentiful! We pop into the shop next door for ice-creams as dessert and a Raven is calling from the telephone tower.

Then we are back on our way for a long drive out to the Gobi Desert - and what a drive it turns out to be! It is wonderful watching the scenery change from wide open steppe, where the skies seem to go on forever, to more rugged rocky outcrops and eventually into a spectacular ravine in which we are driving along the river bed!! We are amazed at how they navigate - there are no roads!

We make occasional stops for birds or scenery and photography, the first when Balazs spots a flying Oriental Plover that drops down over a ridge. We drive to the top of the ridge, park up and scan, but frustratingly there is no sign. It is nice to have the chance to take photos of the view though and just be here! Before we leave we pick up our first Black Kite - birds here being Black-eared Kite, the eastern subspecies. An Upland Buzzard is soaring round with it looking rather like a Rough-legged Buzzard - big with pale on top of the wings and a pale head.

We drive on through rocky outcrops and more wonderful scenery and down through a gap in the mountains and start to pick up more raptors. Initially we find Upland Buzzards, first one then another and another with some perched close to the 'road'. Then a Saker Falcon is flying past heading in the other direction and we jump out to watch it as it starts circling. And as we watch this bird we find more and more birds in the sky - Himalayan Griffon Vultures, some looking almost black and white in the sun. We get superb views of a Lammergeier and a puzzling eagle that we think must be Steppe as this is the species you get here but it looks very like a Greater Spotted Eagle and when we see more Steppe Eagles later we decide that it must have been!

We continue on without even stopping for more Lammergeiers and Upland Buzzards then the road becomes more and more uneven as we follow dry

river beds and even sometimes wet river beds then we start heading down a ravine following the river. It is quite spectacular and we can't resist another stop to enjoy it. Nigel spots a Pied Wheatear and Jane brilliantly picks out a couple of Siberian Ibex on the rugged mountain side while one of the other vehicles get great views of Chukar.

Finally we drop out of the mountains and get our first views of the amazing dune system of the Gobi Desert down below as we head on down. It is still a long drive as the dunes gradually get closer and closer but as we get closer we are suddenly aware of Balazs shouting something over the radios in great excitement! We can't understand what he is saying - it sounds like Kulan- Kulan! He has clearly seen something exciting then he seems to pick up what we have no idea what is saying and shouts, "Wild Ass -Wild Ass!" We are astonished - this is a very difficult species to see here and we are not expecting to see them at all so we race to catch up his vehicle. Sure enough there they are, five of them, walking in a relaxed fashion away from the road towards the hills. And what beautiful animals they are. It is so unexpected. You might imagine them to be like pale donkeys and a little scruffy looking but they are immaculate and a beautiful sandy colour with a dark eye in a plain face. We are delighted and watch them through the scopes as they wander away towards the hills and Ugan explains they come down from the hills to drink in the river then head back up at this time of day so our timing is perfect! We can't believe our luck but time is pressing on and so we eventually drag ourselves away and continue our journey.

Balazs tells us it is about another 10 or so km so it will not take much longer now - but almost as the words are out of his mouth one of the vehicles grinds to a halt - flat tyre!! We all get out and they quickly get on with sorting the problem swapping the tyre quickly and in the meantime we scan the surroundings and we are delighted to spot a Goitered Gazelle. What a beautiful animal!

We move on again for the final dash and we soon arrive at camp and settle into our gers (yurts) for two minutes before heading for our evening meal as we are now quite late. It is a good meal but the day is not over yet!

Once we have finished we gather outside the yurts with spotlights and take a walk to see what we can find. And we have hardly started; we are not even out of the border of the camp, when we find a delightful, almost white-furred, Long-eared Hedgehog. What a gorgeous little animal it is - so cute it is ridiculous!! We take lots of photos and persuade Jayne she can't take it home, then leave it to wander as we start scanning for jerboas. Balazs sounds confident but after a little while we have not found one and wander further out into the desert and suddenly there is one in the torchlight - bouncing rapidly along like a tiny Kangaroo. Balazs makes chase and races after it and wow can it move!! Roy joins the chase then Nigel and we run and run with the Jerboa outdoing us both in speed and manoeuvrability but eventually one of us gets

ahead of it and it stops! When the others arrive to see they are crying with laughter at the sight of three grown men chasing a bouncing mouse! What a lovely animal this is though, the long ears and huge back legs and feet and long tail with tassel on the end all add to make one of the most delightful little animals you could ever imagine! Siberian Jerboa is the species and once used to the torchlight it seems to calm down and start looking for food and we enjoy lovely views of it before it finally runs off again and we let it go. What a brilliant finish to the day!

### Day 3:

We wake to rain!!! This is rather a surprise - we are in the Gobi Desert - but it is not bad news as it means the temperature is likely to stay lower. After breakfast we decide to start the day looking for Henderson's Ground Jay and drive to an area of scrubby bushes where they are usually to be found but despite searching hard we find nothing. There is no sign of them but we do find a couple of Isabelline Shrikes and a family of Desert Wheatears that are remarkably tame. As we leave, a small flock of Pallas's Sandgrouse fly over but we hope for better views later.

We decide to head down to the Saxaul 'Forest' and drive down past the ger camp to the scrubby bushes which it is hard to describe as a forest! The scenery is amazing with the enormous sand dunes as a back drop and we watch a circling Black-eared Kite in front of the dunes making a wonderful scene. We find more Desert Wheatears and also a delightful Asian Desert Warbler that behaves wonderfully, even sitting on top of one of the bushes while we take turns looking through the scope. We spot a Hobby and decide to drive a little nearer.

We drive into the habitat a bit more then get out again to scan, soon getting better views of the Hobby and the Black-eared Kite plus a beautiful pair of Steppe Grey Shrikes. We are delighted to find a Great Jerboa, a large species of gerbil, which remarkably sits in the open long enough for people to get scope views! We walk through the bushes and find an immature Black-eared Kite that doesn't look very well at all. It is nice to see the beautiful markings as it is covered in large pale tear-drop shaped markings and looks beautiful and we leave it be hoping it may be ok. Scanning more distantly to some grassy areas by the river we find a fabulous Saker Falcon that looks enormous and Ravens that somehow look enormous too - perhaps it is just hard to judge distance here.

We drive down to the river where there are Tree Sparrows and a single Rock Sparrow drinking and a pair of Little Ringed Plovers. We find Isabelline Wheatear here and more Desert Wheatears, before driving on to the grassy area where there is also a stream and lots of horses among the wet ground. It is full of wheatears!! At first we assume they are all Desert Wheatears but then notice some very white tails and darker birds and realise that a large proportion of them are actually Pied Wheatears, either immatures or females. There is a single Isabelline which stands out being much more upright. There are lots of

Asian Short-toed Larks, plenty of Ravens, and we see a few Green and Wood Sandpipers then we are pleased to discover a flock of White-cheeked Starlings.

Then we notice a Snipe! The three species of snipe present one of the most difficult identification challenges of the region. We spend ages looking at finer details with little information to go on. The books are not much help and even Nigel's apps are not helping enough. We take lots of photos and leave Di, Nigel and Balazs to try and get a bit closer as the rest of us walk back to the vehicles. As they get closer it finally takes flight and Di captures an astonishingly useful picture of the bird's tail - rather spread and showing all the detail, as it takes flight. Later, with access to the internet and also from images on Nigel's app, Di's brilliant photo confirms the id as Swinhoe's Snipe! A fantastic find indeed.

We head back for lunch and then take a short break before going out again at around 3.30pm. There is now a new option - those who would like to go Camel riding while the rest of us go birding. The Camel people have a wonderful time enjoying the ride as well as even seeing a new bird - Hill Pigeon. Those who go birding are slightly frustrated by the lack of birds with just a few Isabelline Shrikes and two Upland Buzzards. Then we have to make a dash for it. The dark skies that we have been watching approaching finally arrive and the rain starts, so we run for home as apparently the roads can get quite bad in heavy rain like this. By the time we get over the river it is torrential and it is still pouring down when we arrive at the camp. We run back through the rain and spend the rest of afternoon chilling out around the camp, catching up on sleep, using the showers which are now working properly, then we gather again for our evening meal and run through the checklist.

A couple of people missed out on seeing Jerboas last night so we decide to go out and try again. We meet outside the gers and start scanning with the torch and within a very short time locate a Jerboa. This time we just keep it in the lights and walk towards it and it seems less spooked this time and we only have to run a little at the end to get it in the spotlight, where it seems to calm down and start to look for food. We enjoy amazing close views but it is a different species to last night with shorter ears, the Northern Three-toed Jerboa and Balazs thinks they are not so excitable!

We continue to scan and spot another one running very fast but it seems closer to the ground and we realise it is in fact a Roborovski's or Desert Hamster! We are delighted and enjoy lovely close up views of this pretty little creature - all silvery-grey and white. After this we start walking back but a final scan produces another species - a Long-eared Hedgehog and we are pleased for Martin who missed this last night. What a great round up of species on our nocturnal walk - just about everything we might have hoped for!

**Day 4:** This is a travel day, with the long drive back to Dalanzadgad on a new route as overnight rain has apparently washed out the road we were intending

to travel. Our new route turns out to be superb with wonderful scenery and plenty to see as we go. Birds include Shorelarks, a superb Steppe Eagle, Saker Falcon, Upland Buzzards and a beautiful pair of Demoiselle Cranes. We make a break for coffee and walk in a small gully where we find Snowfinches, three Hoopoes, Black Redstart, Black Vulture and two snipe fly over which we think are surely Common Snipe from the very long bills.

We drive on passing another Steppe Eagle being mobbed by Ravens then we find a group of seven Himalayan Vultures walking up a slope like chickens! They look quite amusing as they waddle up the slope but then a man appears they take flight and suddenly look incredibly majestic - and enormous!

We decide to finish the day at another nearby gorge, the name of which translates to 'Bushy dead-end gorge'. There are lots of Snow Finches almost round our feet and several furry things too - Daurian Pikas and Mid-day Jirds. A Pacific Swifts flies back and forth and then a very noisy Upland Buzzard passes overhead. Walking up the valley we find lots more birds with plenty of Crag Martins and lots of Beautiful Chinese Rosefinches, though few males. One side valley has lots of bushes and looks good for birds and we work our way slowly up identifying two Barred Warblers and a very plain looking Common Whitethroat. It is very different looking to ours, looking much greyer and a different subspecies *rubicola*. We find a smart 'Eastern' Black Redstart, get a brief view of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and even briefer view of Alpine Accentor before finally heading back to the vehicles and back to our hotel.

**Day 5:** Although not really the original plan, flight times have presented us with the chance to go back to yesterdays site and indeed try a new one - our flight to Ulaanbaatar now being at 7.30pm. So after a pleasant breakfast we head out to the 'Bushy-dead-end-valley' again.

We whizz out pretty quickly and arrive to find it misty and very atmospheric with several Pacific Swifts cruising around - they are just superb! An immature Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush flies over our heads and lands on the rocky outcrop behind us allowing nice scope views then as we walk into the valley Roy is suddenly shouting "Wallcreeper!!!" There is a small amount of chaos as we try to get everyone onto the bird which is not behaving very well hopping round the end of the rocks then flying again but soon it settles and everyone enjoys great scope views as it feeds on the rocky outcrops on both sides of the valley - the wonderful 'butterfly-like' flight lovely to see as it passes overhead. We are well pleased but soon start finding more birds including several Beautiful Chinese Rosefinches, though all but one are either immature or females which are perhaps not so beautiful! There are plenty of Crag Martins, 'Eastern' Black Redstart, a family of Whitethroats and a pair of Mongolian Finches.

We walk on further up the valley intent on making it to the end this time but stop to scan some bushes which seem to be full of birds! We are surprised



to find all of them are Common Rosefinches, including many drab birds but at least two incredibly brightly coloured males, surely brighter than any seem in western Europe - they almost glow! An adult and then an immature Lammergeier fly over head with the occasionally languid flap followed by an Upland Buzzard flies over too and there are plenty of Pikas. We reach the narrowest part of the gorge and here we are amazed to find a Wallcreeper on the ground just in front of us bathing in the tiny stream flowing along the valley bottom! What a wonderful sighting, and it seems in no hurry to fly off either, flitting up onto the rocks and searching for food for a little while before flying round the cliff and out of sight.

At the far end of the valley we reach the dead-end and are surprised to find some thick plates of ice on the valley floor - which seems hard to believe when the temperatures are in the twenties! There is yet another Wallcreeper high above us. It is a wonderful place with great scenery but it is already time to start back and we are astonished as we get to be the narrow bit of the gorge to find now two Wallcreepers here chasing each other around and then feeding on the cliff face - we just can't believe our luck. While watching these birds we also find more Pikas and what has to be some sort of Hamster, like a tiny grey Pika but with a short tail! The problem is that there are three species in the book that all look rather similar and all could be here.

We march back to the vehicles where Jayne is watching a Mid-day Jird then drive back to the hotel for lunch. We have been cunning and ordered it in advance which works very well indeed and allows us to get back out again relatively quickly.

In the afternoon we drive out almost an hour to a wetland that when we arrive appears to be completely devoid of birds except for two Demoiselle Cranes. However, very careful checking of the shore produces a family of Kentish Plovers and then a Temminck's Stint. Balazs spots a Bar-headed Goose out on the water - which seems odd to be all alone like that but a super looking bird. Right at the back we find a small flock of Curlew Sandpipers, then as we walk along the dam all we push a flock of Desert Wheatears along ahead of us including quite a smart male. There is a single Isabelline Wheatear amongst them.

Down below us on a wet patch we find two Green Sandpipers, Asian Short-toed Larks and brief snipe - which no-one wants to try and identify so we are secretly pleased when it vanishes up a gully on the other side. We wander on and right at the far end Caroline finds a Turnstone! This is a bit of a surprise, but we realise there are plenty more birds and we scan through flocks of Little Ringed Plovers and Common Sandpipers finding little else until Di picks up something bigger - a superb Greater Sand Plover. And we are out of time so we walk briskly back pausing to look at lizards as we go of which there are two species - Toad-headed Agama and Goby Racerunner.

Then we head back to the hotel to sort out our bags and have an early evening meal so that we can get on our way to the airport for our flight back to Ulaanbaatar. We arrive at our hotel for one night and head to bed - ready for a slightly earlier start tomorrow as we have a bit of a drive to our next destination and we want to get there as early as possible.

**Day 6:** After one of the most luxurious breakfasts you could hope for with everything from full English to cakes and salad we get on our way towards our next destination. Enroute we pass a few birds including Demoiselles Cranes, Steppe Eagles, Black Vultures and a Sparrowhawk mobbing a Black-eared Kite.

We make a brief stop at the astonishing statue of Chingis Khaan - an enormous silver statue of the formidable man on horseback only made a little less imposing by the little heads poking up from the top of the horses head as you can actually go up inside and out on top! A new addition is a group of several bronze coloured members of his horde who are charging forth on their horses, some with bow and arrow, some with swords and one with a falcon on his arm. Apparently they are intending to make ten thousands of these eventually and it will be a real spectacle - and if you want to sponsor one, you can pay and have your face on one!! We are already making a list but only if our one can have a pair of binoculars round his neck.

After about two and a half hours we arrive at a pair of lakes and we see immediately there are lots of birds! We are hopeful for some exciting ducks but just about all of them are Goldeneye, with a few Gadwall amongst them. There are several Whooper Swans and a family of Great Crested Grebes but nothing much else on the water. A few Common Terns are fishing in the lake and there are Avocets and Black-winged Stilts along the shore - but far more exciting is a Terek Sandpiper that flies in and lands close by soon followed by a second.

We decide to check out the second pool, where the waders are even more exciting! We are astonished to find that a flock of waders very close by are in fact Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. This is a very nice surprise as it is not a common species but today it seems to be about the most common with at least thirty of them here! With them are lots of Curlew Sandpipers, with some in superb breeding plumage and then scanning the pools more carefully we add Ruff, Temminck's Stint, Black-winged Stilt, lots of Lapwings and then another exciting find, Red-necked Stint. There is a nice 'eastern' Black-tailed Godwit and a few Little Ringed Plovers and plenty of Wood Sandpipers. We spend quite a while working on some of the more distant birds, with a possible Little Stint not identified for certain but we delighted to find a Red-necked Phalarope and also a small number of delicate Marsh Sandpipers. A flock of Mongolian Gulls flies in and lands on the water and a single duck poking its head above the grasses turns out to be a Garganey. There are more Ruddy Shelducks and a couple of Grey Herons and a Steppe Eagle appears soaring around over the steppe appropriately.

We walk back to the vehicles for coffee but some of us can't resist walking a little along the other lake shore and after watching more Terek Sandpipers, and a couple of Little Ringed and a Kentish Plovers we add a very distant Redshank and find a much closer Red-necked Stint, this one with a really nicely coloured throat.

After coffee we move on and pause just over the rise at another rather grassy pool where there are several Grey Herons and a lovely flock of Spotted Redshank. There are two Greenshank here too plus a lot of Wood Sandpipers and amazingly yet more Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. A Saker Falcon puts up everything - a big bruiser of a bird. Way in the distance we spot a flock of well over a hundred Demoiselle Cranes. A Mongolian Lark puts on a nice show here flying up and then landing quite close by. There are a few more ducks on here including Pochard, Red-crested Pochard and Tufted Ducks and we find several Black-necked Grebes.

Time has run out so we head on to the ger camp where we are staying tonight and where we have lunch. It is a superb place with lots of Barn Swallows nesting and feeding young - adults and young birds with chestnut bellies making them the *tytleri* subspecies. There are lovely clean looking White Wagtails with the broad white wingbar of the *baicalensis* race, loads of Tree Sparrows and a Blyth's Pipit flies over calling.

After lunch we head out again, this time towards a different wetland - but first we divert to an area with lots of Tarbagan Marmots!! They are all over this one bit of land and run and chase each other all around with some standing right up tall like prairie dogs. At the back quite a few of them are doing this and we realise why when a Corsac Fox appears, running along the back edge of the colony! We watch this for a little while before it vanishes. Suddenly Balazs sounds excited saying, "Come and see what I have found" and we are thrilled to see he has a pair of White-naped Cranes, one of the most sought-after species in Mongolia. They are rather distant so we decide to drive a bit closer and from this new position we can see them much better - and supremely elegant and beautiful birds they are.

We move on to the wetland, pausing to look at a Blyth's Pipit that is showing well and also spotting more Mongolian Larks. When we reach the wetland there are plenty of birds out in the wet grasslands and small pools. There must be a good thirty Grey Herons or more plus a flock of six Spoonbills. Scanning around we find at least three pairs of White-naped Cranes and Demoiselle Cranes too, and there is a big flock of 'Eastern' Black-tailed Godwits There are quite a few snipe and we wonder if there is any point in look at them at all but in flight we do notice some birds with a very definite white trailing edge to the wings making them Common Snipe - while others look heavier and shorter billed and don't have this white trailing edge - making them either Pin-tailed or Swinhoe's - but with these views we can't say which. There are plenty of Wood Sandpipers and a few other waders but another Corsac Fox steals

the show and we watch it for ages as it trots along the grass in the distance. Balazs brilliantly spots a distant flock of Pacific Golden Plovers.

We drive on a little way and pause when the track gets too lumpy and get out to look at a Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, then realise there are loads of beautiful flowers on the slope - including Trumpet Gentians, Spiked Speedwell, a lovely Yellow Poppy, Globe Thistle, Edelweiss and much more. A tiny snippet of song alerts us to the presence of a bunting and we find it at the top of the slope - a beautiful male Meadow Bunting - though it flies and gives a bit of a run around before showing well again briefly.

We head back, move into our rooms then take a walk in search of Père David's Snowfinch - with no luck, though there are some lovely wagtails by the river and at one point we have Eastern Yellow, White and Citrine Wagtails all on the same little patch of gravel in the river.

## Day 7:

This is a travelling day and we get going soon after breakfast, blinkering ourselves as we pass the lakes!! It is so tempting to stop again! We drive on towards Ulaanbaatar and pass several Steppe Eagles, Black Vultures, Black Kites and a Black Stork.

We eventually arrive on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, where we pause to check the river hoping for a few birds. It seems very quiet as we search with little calling or moving but we are pleased to watch a Hobby - though even more pleased when an Amur Falcon flies over. It seems there is a small colony in the taller trees nearby and they are soon flying back and forth and we make the most of enjoying these superb birds. We are immediately distracted however when an Azure Tit appears. What a gorgeous little bird! We hope for more here but have to be content with Lesser Whitethroat and a smart male Common Rosefinch.

Then we head to the airport and our flight to Khovd, enjoying delivered Pizza for lunch before the three hour flight. The town seems to be full of Black-eared Kites and Feral Pigeons, though two Hill Pigeons also appear flying off into the distance. We drive through some stunning scenery to get to our camp with one lucky car gets a glimpse of Henderson's Ground Jay on the way.

What an incredibly place we end up in. The scenery, the remoteness, the delightful gers and everything – it feels incredible to be here and have it all to ourselves and dare we hope for a Snow Leopard sighting in those mountains outside! We just can't believe we are here. After a tasty meal of the homemade pasties we head to bed, very excited about what tomorrow may bring - the only warning from Uugan being that it may not happen at all if it is raining as the roads become undriveable. As we head to bed lighting is flashing and thunder is rumbling and there is at least one heavy downpour during the night! Oh dear!!

## Day 8:

It is with great relief that we wake to see a glorious day, with sunshine and blue skies and we gobble down our breakfast keen to get going. Uugan sounds keen to get going too as soon as we can and we are on the road by 6.40am.

It is an astonishing drive! To say the road is difficult would be the greatest of understatement, with some very steep sections, narrow bits, bouldery bits and plenty of bumpy bits but the drivers handle it all brilliantly and we gain height rapidly - and the views!!! It is impossible to do the views justice with any words. The higher we get the more astounding they become with layer after layer of mountains - incredible formations of hills and rocky outcrops, hummocks and hollows, cliffs and peaks and all dropping down to the wide flat desert down below, with a tortuously winding river glinting in the sun. Further back is another layer of hills and behind them some more very high mountains! With the early morning sunshine creating shadows and layers it is just breathtaking - and so barren! Most of the ground looks to be dry and with little growing on it yet there are multiple shades of browns and greys and oranges and sandy colours in the rocks, with some much darker rocky outcrops and backlit ridges - the effect is jaw-dropping.

There is little wildlife on the way except numerous Pikas, perhaps Pallas's Pikas since it is early morning and we are now so much further west, but it is hard to be sure. We also spot the occasional Marmot and a couple of Tolai Hares. Balazs and Nigel glimpses a small group of Argali Sheep as they vanish over a ridge and Jane spots a flying Little Owl flushed by the cars ahead. There are our first Northern Wheatears, lots of Shorelarks and best of all a couple of Daurian Redstarts.

Finally we level out onto very open ground and head over towards a rocky outcrop where a small group of horses can be seen plus their riders and a small tent. These are our five scouts who have been out for the last few days searching for signs of Snow Leopard. They look very relaxed and have a scope set up on the ridge opposite and Uugan walks over talking with one of them and puts his eye to it. It feels like everyone holds their breath! There are no signs from the scouts, no thumbs up or anything - they just look very relaxed and we watch Uugan wondering what he is seeing. A moment later he turns to us and says "There are two Snow Leopards!!" The scout says something and he has another look, "No - three!"

We are astounded - how can we be so lucky so quickly!! Everyone wants to look at once but there is no need to rush he says as they are sleeping. The next few minutes are interesting and really make you realise the skill of the trackers. These guys have found these camouflaged animals in this enormous vista where there seem to be a million places for them to hide and some of us can't even find them in the small view in the scope!! It is crazy! You look in and look all around knowing that there are at least two Snow Leopards in the view and all you can see is rocks! Then suddenly you realise the white on one rock is a Snow Leopard's belly and it is lying on its back, or that this long pale rock

is a tail and after a few moments you can't work out why you couldn't see them immediately! It feels a bit like those pictures that are made up of squiggles and dots and you stare and stare at them, then suddenly a shape appears in front of your eyes. The third animal is a little trickier to make out but then we see that near to that one is a tail lying out from the rocks - so there is a fourth animal!!

We are overjoyed and there are hugs all round and even tears! We feel incredibly privileged to see this - it is THE target of the trip yet it has been so easy. You could almost say too easy perhaps as sometimes you appreciate something more when you have had to work for it - but who cares - we have seen them and here they are and we can relax and enjoy the moment. And this is exactly what we do. We take turns at the scopes watching them as they lie there, occasionally turning over or licking themselves, or sometimes getting up and changing position. Sometimes they look quite funny lying on their back with paws in the air. When the right way up the camouflage is amazing, they vanish amongst the rocks. We even invent a condition called 'Leopard Blindness'. Someone who has already watched them for ages can return to the scope after a break and be completely unable to make out any leopards despite there being three in the view! One lies in such a position his big paws are flat to our view and wow what a size they are. Photography is hopeless at this distance but we try anyway, using phone adaptors we can attach phones and get at least something as a memory shot. It is lovely to have so much time to enjoy them and we just watch them for ages.

Meanwhile there is other wildlife around too - though admittedly not very much! Northern Wheatears are numerous and have clearly had a good breeding season with the vast majority being young birds. A gaggle of Black-eared Kites have found our scouts and we wonder if they have thrown out something for them as quite a few appear. Circling out over the valley are both Steppe and Golden Eagles and a magnificent Black Vulture. A family of G黚denst鋎t's Redstarts appear on the rocks on front of us - a fabulous find and we are thrilled to see this high mountain species.

We decide to walk round to another promontory that looks like it may be a little closer, to see if the cats look any better from there. It is nice to walk a bit and though a little steep in places and rocky it is a slightly better view. The tail seems to have vanished but the three cats have come together now and you can see them all in one view lying in various positions and still sleeping. They have such warm coats that when the sun starts coming round and onto them they get up and move into the shade and flop down again. The tails are unbelievably long and the colour and pattern of spots are beautiful.

The view from here is incredible and we feel on a high as the light keeps changing the scenery changes with it. Nigel and Balazs decide to try and get even closer by going further down the slope to another point. It looks steep and no-one else fancies it - especially not the thought of coming back up in the

thin air at this altitude, we are not far off ten thousand feet here. As they go down they flush a party of Altai Snowcocks which scatter - some flying across the valley.

Back at the vehicles we check the leopards again and find they are still in the same position, so we go and have lunch - soup of delicious bread made in the back of the vehicle by Ugan. We discuss whether the bread or the Snow Leopards are the highlight of the day? We are incredibly relaxed now and spend yet more time watching the sleepy cats. At one point a Lammergeier is in the scope view at the same time - what a sight!! We spot more eagles, more vultures including a Himalayan Griffon and spend a while watching the amusing antics of a Silver Vole. We also puzzle over the complete lack of Argali Sheep and Ibex, which Balazs has seen easily here easily in the past. Incredibly we look back at the cats and they have gone!! No-one was watching! It takes a few minutes for us to relocate them and they are again fast asleep in a new shadier spot.

We wander down to a different viewpoint so that we can see down for better scanning for snowcocks or other birds. Still the cats sleep - and here we find more Gldenstdt's Redstarts and a lovely young Rock Thrush. We can hear the occasional Snowcock but can't find any. Another Lammergeier shows wonderfully well - and the cats sleep. At one point they suddenly all get up and almost run off - vanishing for a few minutes before Peter relocates them again and once more they are flat out asleep!! It has been a remarkable day and at 6pm we have to go back, we have been here around ten hours and been watching the cats for most of the time - yet we all agree we have never felt bored for a moment!

The ride back down is spectacular, with astonishing views once again and we pause to photograph the ger camp from miles above it. Then it is back for the evening meal and the checklist - a short but high quality list today!

Outside as we return to our gers there are Siberian Jerboas dashing about and later - well after dark - wow!! With no moon the night is still anything but black with the most incredible display of stars you could possibly imagine. It is almost impossible to spot the familiar constellations as there are so many other stars and the milky way like a bright wavy band of light across the sky - most people would never know the stars could ever look like this!

**Day 9:** We wake to glorious blue skies from wall to wall and enjoy a leisurely breakfast before gathering to head down the valley. As we drive there are Shorelark, Hoopoe, a single Isabelline Shrike and a few Desert Wheatears flitting about and we spot a couple of Goitered Gazelles, including a mother with two young ones.

We reach the main road and turn towards a green strip of land where we are visiting a lake but our first stop is to look out over a lake we can't get to, as

Ugan says the reeds before the lake are too high to see anything if you get closer. The heat-haze is quite bad already and we can make out the shapes of Ruddy Shelduck, Whooper Swan and a big flock of waders wheeling round and landing but they too far away. We can only make out for sure the Avocets and Black-winged Stilts then Linda spots a flock of dark birds in the distance flying in front of the mountains. We puzzle over what they might be but Glossy Ibis or Cormorants seems most likely and gradually they get closer - and we identify them as Cormorants. We keep checking the Black-eared Kites in case any are Marsh Harriers with no luck but it is lovey to see Common Cranes here with quite a few of them even very close to the road as we drive on. The next distant lake appears to have lots of Spoonbills and we pause to look at a single Spoonbill very close to the road.

We shortly arrive at the pool we can actually get to and here we find plenty of birds, with a nice synchronised flock of fishing Cormorants - could they be the ones we were watching earlier in flight? There are Red-crested Pochard, lots of Coots, a single Mallard and then Balazs alerts us to a Black-throated Diver. It feels bizarre to see such a bird that we associate with the far north in a small pool in a desert! It is in full breeding plumage and shortly we realise there is a second. Suddenly they appear to be fighting - there are wings flapping and one has the other by the back of the neck then Balazs explains this is how they mate! And yes, it does seem this is what they are doing, in a similar way to some ducks, he has her by the back of the neck and holding her in position! Then after they separate, they rise up in the water together and flap then posture in synchrony in a display, before dipping heads to the water and again posturing together - a wonderful sight and how bizarre that on all our joint experience of watching Black-throated Divers it is something none of us have seen, before we visit a small pool in a Mongolian desert!

We now start scanning more carefully and realise there are White-winged Tern flitting round the edge of the lake, a single Mongolian Gull and several Black-headed Gulls, a pair of Great Crested Grebes with chicks, a flock of Greylag Geese and further round a few Common Pochards. We walk a little way along the shore and find a different race of White Wagtail, the '*personata*' race also known as Masked Wagtail and a potential split. A Caspian Tern flies through looking enormous and we find two Great Egrets amongst many Grey Herons and we notice both Grey Heron and Spoonbill nests at the edge of the reeds with very well grown young in them. Paul spots a small brown bird in the reeds and we are hopeful, perhaps it will be some eastern species - but careful inspection suggests it is simply a Reed Warbler. A few Swallows are flying over - all pale bellied birds here and a few Sand Martins too. Then as we walk back towards the vehicles we spot a Cuckoo on the wires.

We drive on to try and find somewhere to make lunch. It is now baking hot at around 35 degrees and we hope to find shade under some trees but when we arrive the areas under the trees are heaving with mosquitoes! In the end Ugan cooks stew out in the sun and people shelter as best they can beside



the vehicles. Roy, Di and Nigel spray on copious insect repellent and brave the trees as surely there must be some birds in here! Strangely once further into the trees there seem to be fewer mosquitoes - or is it that we become distracted by little flitting birds. And gosh what an identification challenge!! These little warblers are presumably adults that are end of season and hence very worn as they look very different to anything we expect! Our first has no tail at all and appears to have a broadish wingbar, but only one, and seems to have almost no colour – but then calls exactly like a Yellow-browed Warbler! It calls again and again and we check against the recordings and against other species and there is no doubt! The next looks to have the thinnest wing bar possible, it is almost invisible and this one, after careful checking and one very good view we decide is Greenish Warbler, but the next confuses us too. A brown bird skulking in the bottom of a bush so we think Dusky Warbler, but when it appears it looks more like a chiffchaff with apparently dark legs and a supercilium that is quite short and not very obvious at all. We have pretty much decided on Chiffchaff due to the shortness of the supercilium when it calls - it's a Dusky Warbler!! We find a Lesser Whitethroat next - an easy identification, then find a very scruffy pale grey warbler that appears to have no discernible markings at all and leave it unidentified!

After we have devoured our stew and bread we decide to see if we can get down a track we noticed leading down to the first pool we passed earlier. It proves relatively easy and we flush several Asian Short-toed Larks as we approach the lake. Another bird with a very long tail like a wagtail but clearly a pipit is surely a Richard's! The Short-toed Larks are feeding one the shore when we arrive and a small number of Masked Wagtails too - they are very smart birds indeed!

Out on the water we check through the Ruddy Shelducks and discover a nice group of Common Shelducks with young. A single Mallard is there but no other ducks then excitedly we turn to the waders. There are Avocets and Black-winged Stilts but also perhaps two or three hundred waders all along the shore and scanning through they seem to be almost entirely Kentish Plovers! There are three Redshank and scanning carefully through the plovers Nigel finds a nice Red-necked Stint, then we are pleased to spot three Greater Sand Plovers. We look in the book to remind ourselves the identification of Lesser Sand Plover but this is perhaps optimistic as this is an extremely rare bird even here and we are in western Mongolia now anyway. Something puts up the flock, which wheel round and fly around before landing again and Roy looks through his scope and the first bird in his view looks exactly like the Lesser Sand Plover picture in the book. What!! Has his brain imprinted the image? He looks carefully and compares with the next Kentish and shows it to Nigel who immediately, if hesitantly says, 'Lesser Sand Plover!' Wow!! We can't believe it. We compare back and forth between immature Kentish and the Greater Sand Plovers nearby and it is absolutely fabulous to have the chance to do this - a 100% Lesser Sand Plover in the company of both confusion species.

Next we have another confusion to get round. A pair of stints appears in front of us and Roy immediately thinks, "If I was at home I would just call these Little Stints." Being here we assume they are more likely to be Red-necked as they do look rather rusty necked. But is that a pale chin? We stare carefully but in the harsh sunlight it is hard to be sure. Checking the book we decide to check for rusty fringed tertials and sure enough they have them and then one looks up and does have a pale throat - so Little Stints they are. It is time to go and we head for home, one vehicle flushing a party of Pallas's Sandgrouse on the way.

**Day 10:** Today we are to spend the whole day up in the hills and after breakfast we are soon on our way, driving the now familiar route towards the main road, leaning right over in the vehicles here, through ditches up steeper bits and bouncing along rough tracks through riverbeds dotted with scrubby bushes. And it is in one of these stretches when Di suddenly shouts "What's that!" and points as a bird alights on top of the ridge to our right. "Henderson's Ground Jay!!!" We are out and grabbing scopes and alerting other vehicles when it runs off over the top of the ridge.

We gather everyone and walk to the top of the ridge and find no sign of the bird for a little while then suddenly we spot it running up the slope of the next ridge. At least this time most people see it but again it vanishes over the top. We walk to that ridge and it runs round the edge of a raised hummock, so we wait and decide to all go together but cunning as ever it suddenly flies to the next ridge and after a moment of posing runs over the top and we give up! It feels like we could play this cat and mouse game all day but most people enjoyed some good views.

We drive on passing occasional Desert Wheatears and spot a Goitered Gazelle running into the distance, then instead of heading down to the main road we travel parallel to the mountains along another dirt track. We notice a black object ahead but can't work out what it is, maybe a person stooped over something, then as we get close we realise it is a Black Vulture!!! It looks enormous and to our delight it stays put as we drive to the nearest point and stop for photos. We can't believe it just stays and looks round apparently unbothered by our nearby presence.

Now we head back up towards the mountains and into the valley, which is full of little scrubby bushes and we pause to enjoy the sight of lots of Chukars including one with tiny chicks. It is a lovely scene. There is a Lesser Whitethroat in the bushes and a couple of Isabelline Wheatears and a shrike that seems somewhere between Brown and Isabelline, so we give up on it! A Pied Wheatear flies across as we set off again, landing on the cliff-face.

And now we start to really gain height and shortly we come out over a steep rise into a wide open area of grassy-alpine meadow with a views of mountain slopes all round. Amazingly it is already approaching lunchtime so we decide

to park up here and scan while they make lunch. It is amazing what they can do in the back of a land-cruiser and they set to boiling water and chopping vegetables and even making bread.

Scanning the slopes and tops we pick out a small group of Siberian Ibex running along the skyline. They look fabulous silhouetted like that with their enormous horns. Another small group are resting on one of the slopes but we can't find any Argali Sheep. Three Golden Eagles appear above the ridge and we enjoy fabulous scope views with one bird even displaying. We discover a Steppe Eagle at a nest with well grown young and again enjoy wonderful scope views. Black-eared Kites are constant companions and we watch Lammergeiers circling above us and over the ridges along with masses of swifts moving through.

Lunch is superb with the delicious bread and stew, then we drive up to 'the saddle' where we split into groups to scan different areas. Roy and his team up to left, some at the bottom and some on the saddle and Balazs to the right. The aim is to cover as much ground as possible.

We scan and scan and scan and scan and work through every bit of cliff finding very little. There don't even seem to be any Pikas or marmots anymore and we work carefully through the rocky outcrops until suddenly Roy shouts, "I've got one!" In his view is a Snow Leopard eating something! The next few minutes are rather chaotic as we realise the group with the vehicles don't seem to have a working radio!! Roy dashes back down the slope to make sure they are all on the animal then we send a vehicle for the others and soon everyone is there. Last to arrive is Jayne who then has a shocking bout of dreaded 'leopard blindness!' She just can't see it and it only after very careful explanation that suddenly she can see it and we all cheer! The beautiful animal has now started to sleep and almost vanishes into the rocks it is so well camouflaged. At one point it is head on to us and almost impossible to make out. We decide to try another spot that is a bit closer and enjoy more views of it from there and altogether we spend over two hours watching this beautiful cat before we have to leave - funny how exciting it is to find your own and quite a different feel to the scouts finding it for you. The drive back is simply breathtaking with beautiful lighting on these astonishing mountains as we drive back to camp and we are smiling the whole way.

Back at camp we enjoy a shower - with the bizarre talking shower unit that speaks Chinese to you when you press the buttons, then after toasting cats with our meal we pop out for a look for jerboas. They seem amazingly common here and we find one in seconds! Again it is the Siberian with the long ears and with a cool breeze it seems to rather like being huddled between Paul's feet, where it settles down and almost creates a little hollow for itself using its nose to push sand away in all directions! We decide he should leave his shoes there for it but for some reason he heartlessly moves his feet leaving it exposed to the elements again! And off it goes, bouncing away like a miniature Kangaroos again! We also find what seems to be a Pika - it certainly

has no sign of a tail so is not one of the hamsters or lemmings. Small and very cute we guess this must be a Pallas's Pika, which according to the book can also be nocturnal.

**Day 11:** We head out after an earlier breakfast for a large lowland lake - a lake that even Ugan has never explored at all, so we are all inquisitive to see how it is for birds. On the way we pass a small group of four Black Vultures with a Steppe Eagle and it is amazing to see how a big bird such as a Steppe Eagle can be made to look so small! Once away from the rocky slopes we pass down over rolling countryside alive with Isabelline and Desert Wheatears but little else. We arrive at a small village where we take on petrol and as they fill up we check out the pigeons, hoping for a Hill Pigeon amongst the Rock Doves. Roy is sure he has one but it is only when they fly that we suddenly realise that in fact they are almost all Hill Pigeons - all with a white band on the tail and they look great.

Moving on, we reach Saiga Antelope country and stare out over the flat plains as we drive. There seems to be nothing out there but the occasional group of camels or goats. Then suddenly a flock of Pallas's Sandgrouse flies up from the ground and then another. Some of them fly round in a big arch then land close by, so we stop nearby and carefully get out of the vehicles and walk slowly to get a bit closer. We get a few photos before they take flight but Ugan suggests we might have better luck staying in the vehicles. We try this approach and it does indeed prove a little more successful as not only do we get closer but you have a higher vantage point to see them over the chives. And what superb birds they are, walking like little clockwork toys along the ground as if they have no legs!

The lake is looking a lot closer now. Oddly we are still saying this half an hour later! Distance seems to be impossible to judge in this wide flat landscape. We arrive at the edge of the lake at last and there appears to be lots of birds here, the closest and most obvious being a group of five Pallas's Gulls - huge and an impressive sight through the scope. There are lots of Kentish Plovers along the shoreline and amongst them one Greater Sand Plover. There are quite a few Greylag Geese and one or two Bar-headed Geese amongst them and out on lake we find two pairs of Black-throated Divers. Whooper Swans are out there too and we still find it strange to see these typically northern species with desert sand-dunes in the background! On one of the islands is a big flock of Pochard, with a few Red-crested Pochards - plus small family groups of these on the lake too. There are several Mongolian Gulls and also a surprising number of Caspian Terns, including a very nice group perched on the island. There are lots of Cormorants here and a big flock of Spoonbills. Further along there are some tall grasses and reeds and here there are more Spoonbills, Grey Herons and a few Great White Egrets.

We decide to take a walk in that direction and flush a few Asian Short-toed Larks. There is also a Yellow Wagtail calling and flying round and when it finally

lands we are thrilled to see it is actually the white-headed race of Western Yellow Wagtail - *leucocephala*. The male looks quite strange with its white head. We also get superb views of a male Pallas's Reed Bunting. Following the shore we find Temminck's Stint and then another wader catches the eye. It is clearly different, looking more elegant but still small and with a rather rufous cap, and we realise we are looking at another eastern speciality - Long-toed Stint!! This is a great surprise as here we are western Mongolia and we would not expect this so much here. We add Shoveler, Wigeon, Common Terns, Lapwing, Redshank, Great Crested Grebe and Black winged Stilt.

We walk back for lunch having checked the birds carefully and the drivers having got back from their swim. In no time there is delicious soup and even more delicious bread seasoned with the chives from around us - we have been driving over carpets of them again today and the smell from the crushed leaves as we drive has been wonderful.

We decide to walk a short way in the other direction to check out the plovers - passing lots of Sand Martins on the way. There is much deliberation about these as we wonder whether any might be Pale Martins. These two species are notoriously difficult to separate and we study them carefully but one book makes it look easy while another shows them as virtually identical, so which is right? They look incredibly pale on top but they seem to have complete chest bands and more importantly, we think, the underwing coverts appear to be very dark. In the end we give up and call them Sand Martins - but it continues to niggle in the back of the head! There are lots of Ruddy Shelducks here but much more exciting, out on a spit, are about a dozen Lesser Sand Plovers. It seems hard to believe but we check carefully and there are several different plumages and yet, all of them appear to be Lessers! Wow - this is a fabulous find, about a dozen of them and Balazs actually wades right across the bay to film them for us.

We start driving back in the direction of home but over the 'Saiga plain' as we are calling it now and after some time we stop to scan. We scan and scan but with no luck, so we give up and continue on our way. Heading across the steppe we are still in the habitat though and after about ten minutes suddenly Ugan spots a small group of them, six in total, up ahead. We stop and enjoy nice, if distant, scope views and what strange looking animals they are. Even at this distance you can see the rather odd nose shape and the head looks sort of hammer shaped and held in a slightly odd position too - especially when they run. And can they run! Suddenly they head off, no idea whether in response to us stopping and wow they seem to travel fast without even looking like they are trying at all. Driving on we find a whole load more, also in small groups including one group of around 15 animals, perhaps a total of thirty or so. All are distant but now and then when the heat haze disappears a little the views are better - a great finish.

We head for home but on the very last section of track before we get back Roy spots a Tolai Hare running up the bank. It hides by a bush and we stop and watch it - then just as we are leaving a Steppe Eagle comes bombing in low over the vehicles and crashes into the bush as it tries to catch it. The Hare is fast though and jinxing this way and that the eagle seems to have no chance and stands around looking rather embarrassed as the hare vanishes over the ridge.

**Day 12:** A sunny day greets us again, with some cloud over the mountains where we are heading. It is another mountain day today but the intention is to try and find Argali Sheep. We drive up one of the valleys and pause to look at a Tolai Hare that is very close and then again when we pass a small flock of Chukars. Further up is a huge nest, with a full grown Black Vulture chick in it. Chick seems the wrong word for a completely feathered bird that is already able to fly but for some reason is now perched in the nest presumably waiting for food. We get some fabulous photos then continue on our way up.

We reach a good vantage point for checking the rock faces and grassy slopes that the Argali like and we start to scan carefully. We keep getting distracted by birds! There are at least three Upland Buzzards here - one very dark bird, one very pale and one in between and it is almost hard to believe they are the same species. Di picks out a Golden eagle perched up on the skyline and then Roy finds another circling above the higher peaks, which looks wonderful through the scope. Two Lammergeiers appear and a Steppe Eagle which looks tiny beside them. Gradually we check every inch of the view and it is clear that there are no Argali in view, though of course they could be hidden and we still give it plenty of time for them wander out from a hiding place.

In the end we decide to move on and try another spot and we drive right back down then along and back up to scan some grassy slopes. On the way down we spot a small warbler fly into a bush. To our surprise it is clearly a *phylloscopus* warbler and will therefore require careful checking. We jump out and thankfully the bird performs beautifully providing lots of wonderful views and we have the chance to check every detail including the supercilium which is widest above the eye and the bill and wing bars, one obvious one and one very faint second bar and we conclude this is a Two-barred Warbler.

We arrive out our next spot to find a friendly young dog wandering around. He seems nice and stays with us while we scan but we can't help wondering where it could possibly have come from! We find plenty of Black-eared Kites here and a Steppe Eagle but despite scanning the slopes incredibly carefully there appear to be no sheep of the kind we are hoping for. In fact it seems extremely quiet and in the end we decide to pack it in and head back for lunch at the camp. After some discussion amongst the drivers and Uugan we take the dog with us!

After lunch we take the vehicles up above the camp to a valley Ugan is recommending but, though it does look very good with a stream and bushes, we think the terrain is too difficult for some members of the group and decide to try another valley in the mountains the other side of the camp. We drive over there and after working our way to the base of a steep sided valley we get out of the vehicles and start walking up through the bushes. There is no water unfortunately but we are quickly surprised by the number of birds we start to find. Almost immediately we find both Whitethroats and Lesser Whitethroats in numbers and the further we go the more Lesser Whitethroats we seem to find - they are all over the place chasing each other round and flitting from bush to bush. Then a fluty song draws our attention to a Rock Thrush singing from the skyline. On the rocks nearby is a flycatcher which looks very pale and with no streaking on the chest and we realise it is an Asian Brown Flycatcher. Shortly we also find a Spotted Flycatcher and the streaked chest and longer bill is obvious straight away.

We walk on and find several 'Eastern' Black Redstarts then a small warbler in one of the bushes catches the eye, it looks green! It behaves very similarly to the warbler this morning and careful study reveals it to also be a Two-barred Warbler, much to Nigel's delight as he missed the one this morning. We walk on further, flushing an Isabelline Shrike, then two Barred Warblers, an adult and a young bird which show quite well. Walking on further we are surprised to discover two big camels in this narrow valley - perhaps they are migrants too? We find more migrant warblers and flycatchers but nothing new before we turn to start back towards the vehicles and head back to the camp.

**Day 13:** After many breakfast eggs we gather for a 'Team Snow Leopard' photo by the Mongolian flag with all the gang plus the drivers, cook and other members of the ger camp team. Then after many handshakes and farewells we wish our hosts goodbye and get on our way. It feels sad to leave this place, which given the remote location has been remarkably comfortable (though a few are looking forward to hot eggs for breakfast!)

We drive slowly through the ground-jay country keeping our eyes peeled - but all we see are Desert Wheatears, Isabelline Shrikes and a flock of Shorelarks. Then once on the main road we puzzle over the way that Mongolian drivers seem to love driving very fast on dirt tracks but as soon as they get on tarmac they slow right down.

We soon arrive at a section of river where there is a stand of trees and willow bushes, but there is a fence stopping us getting in so we try and get hold of the key in the nearest village. We have no luck but even from the road we find Ortolan Bunting and nice flock of immature Rose-coloured Starlings feeding in the buckthorn. We find a way over the fence but it is still impossible to get to the trees as there is a rapidly flowing river in the way and we peer over to the willows, finding Isabelline Shrike and a Spotted Flycatcher. A White

Wagtail (Masked) is on the river bank but we find little else other than a cloud of mosquitoes so we give up and head to the lake.

Driving on we make a brief stop at a shop for ice-creams and cold drinks! This is not something we have been able to do much this trip so it is very welcome in the heat. Jayne finds a couple of Smurf rings in a section in the bottom of her ice-cream tub and she and Balazs put them on in a strange ceremony that apparently makes them Smurf Buddies! Most of us are horrified to realise that Smurfs have made it to Mongolia!

We arrive at the lake walking down towards the shore at one of the nearest parts of the wetland. There are loads of birds here with lots of ducks out on the water. Mallards, Pochards, Red-crested Pochards, Wigeon, Ruddy Shelducks and more White-headed Ducks than any of us have ever seen anywhere! Greylags and Whooper Swans, Mongolian Gulls, Spoonbills, Great Egrets, Grey herons, Caspian, Common and Little Terns are all vying for attention as we get closer to the shoreline. Then we are distracted for a few minutes when Roy flushes a Bluethroat! This is a big surprise and we gather round hoping it may appear, though they are very skulky on migration and in the end all we get is another flight view. A Marsh Harrier appears over the reeds, flushing some of the ducks and we check it carefully but it is definitely the western species. Then we find various larks and pipits near the water. The larks seem to all be Asian Short-toed again, but the pipits are a puzzle. Two large pipits are almost certainly Blyth's Pipits though we never get a good view of them, but two other pipits puzzle us enormously. They don't fit anything!! They are very streaky on the back with no obvious supercilium, very little streaking on the flanks and dark legs. At least one of those features rules out just about everything and we puzzle over them - they look like Meadow Pipits except for the dark legs and lack of flank streaks and in the end we have to conclude they must be immature Water Pipits as this is really the only likely species here with dark legs. Further research back home also seems to back this up with a few pictures similar to these birds online.

We move on as time is racing away from us and it is clearly going to be a late lunch, though none of us had realised how far the drive is to the lunch spot! We drive and drive, finally arriving to a spot where there is a building in which they can cook lunch and we can go up a tower to scan the lake side as they prepare. There are thousands of birds here, including a huge mixed flock of ducks. Scanning through them we identify Mallards, Wigeon, Pintail, Shoveler, Teal and a small flock of Garganey. Nearby are lots of Cormorants and amongst them plenty of Spoonbills and a big flock of Greylags. White-winged Terns are hawking over the water and there are lots of Common Terns and a few Mongolian Gulls. There are three Pallas's Gulls by the cormorants but even better one flies right past us looking incredibly impressive.

We scan the more open water, spotting lots of Pochard, Red-crested Pochards, a few Goldeneye and thousands upon thousands of Coots! Caspian Terns fly



by and a few more are perched on the mud. Two small waders fly in and land beside a puddle and turn out to be Little Ringed Plover and Temminck's Stint. The other real spectacle is thousands of Sand Martins and Swallows passing over. If you raise your binoculars to the sky above the lake it looks like a swarm of insects going off into the distance - an incredible sight! We check lots of the martins for Pale martins but are puzzled by some of them which seem very pale and yet the underwing looks darker than we would expect - is it shadow? Again it feels a bit unsatisfactory and we wish we knew more. Then a surprise - five Starlings fly by! There are more Little Terns, A Carrion Crow (Oriental Crow), White Wagtails again of the Masked subspecies, Demoiselle Cranes and a few White-headed Ducks.

At last the call comes for lunch and we eat by the 'visitor centre' if that is not too grand a title for a room with a few pictures of birds on the wall. We are ravenous as it is almost 3pm! Still martins and swallows are passing over, a flock of Grey Herons fly by as though they are migrating and Black-eared Kites hunt over the reeds looking like harriers causing us some confusion!

After lunch we drive along the shore to check out another spot. As we drive we pass a fabulous flock of gulls and terns - all Pallas's and Mongolian Gulls and Caspian Terns and we get really close views from the vehicles. There is a massive flock of martins all down on the ground, some even sunbathing, in the car park and we carefully check through them with the scope. It is immediately obvious that some of them have dark brown bands across the chest while other are noticeably paler with a very pale chest-band which is sometimes hardly there at all or is broken in the middle. Surely at last we have Pale Martins and carefully study the flock, working through to see whether they easily fit into two types. It is slightly worrying that there seems no obvious cut off with the extremes looking so different but apparently every nuance of change in between! We are confident however that we definitely have both species here, even if there are individuals we can't assign to one or the other - and it is interesting to see even the palest birds seem to have rather darker underwings than you might expect when they fly hence our confusion earlier. Scanning the lake we find enormous numbers of distant coots like an oil slick! We add Whiskered Tern to the list.

But time is going fast and we get on our way for the run to Khovd, where we drive to a very nice restaurant for our evening meal, even though we feel it is not that long ago that we ate! It is amazing how you can still manage to eat again though when the food is good, then it is off to the airport pausing very briefly to check out a new statue which is a combination of Ibex, Argali, Steppe Eagle, Lammergeier, Snow Leopard and who knows what else twisted into each other!

Our flight, which is already four hours delayed from the original time, is even later and we don't board the plane until 9.45pm making for a very late arrival

in Ulaanbaatar, where we head straight to our hotel and a lovely comfortable bed.

**Day 14:** After a late and very tasty breakfast we gather at the bus and head out of town - after a slightly worrying lack of energy in the vehicle battery! Martin is going shopping today but we fill his space with the next group's guide, a guy called Milan, joining us as an extra pair of eyes.

As we head out of town we pass a couple of Daurian Jackdaws and at the roadside a few places where, if you want, you can get your photo taken with a Golden Eagle, Black Vulture or Saker Falcon on your wrist! We see little else of note before we arrive at the Terelj National Park. It is a very scenic area with scattered forests and open grassy slopes and rocky outcrops looking like enormous piles of boulders. One is rather turtle shaped and famous locally, bringing in lots of tourists to see it. The area is clearly much more touristy than even three years ago when Roy last came here, with several new hotels and ger camps.

Arriving at our first stop we walk just a very short distance to the edge of some boggy woodland and immediately start hearing quiet calls from small birds. A careful search soon produces Willow and Coal Tits, then our first Yellow-browed Warbler. Another appears but this time it looks very washed out and grey, surely a Hume's Leaf Warbler! A Nuthatch is calling nearby and looks rather smart with very pale belly unlike ours at home. We get brief views of a Taiga Flycatcher with a young one and find a family of Daurian Redstarts right by the path which show very well.

We walk along the path a little way and find a female Siberian Stonechat perched up on the bushes then above the ridge we spot raptors. Most of the birds of prey we have seen this morning have been Black-eared Kites, but these look different, and turn out to be an impressive Golden Eagle being mobbed by an Eastern Buzzard, noticeably different to the Upland Buzzards we have been seeing even just by shape, looking more like our own Common Buzzard. Then a Booted Eagle appears right over our heads, a dark bird reminiscent of Black Kite but with subtle differences, most notable not having a forked tail. Butterflies abound - Small Copper, Camberwell Beauty and what looks like a pale Clouded Yellow, Small Tortoiseshell, lots of blues and browns but the highlight is the Apollo. The flowers are lovely too with Edelweiss, Spiked Speedwell, a large blueish Aster, Shrubby Cinquefoil, Pinks and lots more. Big pale moths are flying here and there and later research identifies this as female Gypsy Moths.

We enjoy lunch in a ger camp where a small shelter with seats and a table are ideal and as we eat we enjoy astonishing views of an immature Lammergeier which has apparently been 'adopted' by the ger camp and they have been feeding it with bones! It is incredibly tame and allows for some amazing photographs. We eat biscuits, crisps, fruit and more and feed some banana

skins to the baby cow apparently called Muriel according to Jane. Patricia insists this is good for them and they consider it a treat in India!

After lunch we drive a little further up the road screeching to a halt when Roy spots a possible Wild Cat - which sadly turns out to be a domestic tabby cat though it did look very convincing out here on the rocky outcrops. We take another walk by a river in some taller trees. It seems very quiet, apart from wedding parties taking photos in the beautiful surroundings, but we get Daurian Redstart again and then a superb Siberian Chipmunk. These are quite large for a chipmunk but still with those typical chipmunk markings and is incredibly active, even climbing up into the trees. A little further on we find another one and this one is having great fun chasing Grey and White Wagtails feeding by the path! We then add another mammal to the list with a rather dark coloured Red Squirrel. We spot Nuthatch, Great Tit and get superb views of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker.

We are rapidly running out of time now and have a drive back to Ulaanbaatar for our flight home, with an evening meal to fit in too, so we walk back to the bus and soon we are heading back to town. Here we eat in a very nice restaurant that Uugan has chosen for us with excellent food and we relax and enjoy the meal and even have time to make our last run through the checklist before heading to the airport.

Here we say farewells to Balazs and Uugan - they have been amazing and there are big hugs all round. Then we head to check-in and our first flight back to Seoul arriving at some horrible time in the middle of the night. We have hotel rooms booked in the airport for the break though and have a good seven hours in our rooms before meeting up again for a coffee, croissant and our traditional round-up of the holiday in which each member of the group gets to choose their favourite species (we decide on four this time) a favourite place and a 'magic moment'.

A surprisingly large number of species get a mention with a nice selection of both birds and mammals. Azure Tit, Lesser Sand Plover, Mid-day Jird, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Saker, Black-throated Diver, Siberian Ibex, Tolai Hare and Goitered Gazelle amongst others score a vote each while other species such as Long-eared Hedgehog, Saiga Antelope and Corsac Fox score two votes and Wallcreeper scores three. Asiatic Wild Ass get several mentions - what a special moment it was spotting those and both Lammergeier and Siberian Jerboa five each! But the winner was never going to anything else really, with a massive eleven votes Snow Leopard romps deservedly home a clear winner.

The sand dunes of the Gobi Desert and the 'Bushy, Dead-end Valley' both get a mention amongst the favourite places, but again the Snow Leopard experience dominates with the rest of the votes divided between either the ger camp where we were based for this adventure, or the high tops from where we saw the leopards.

The Magic Moment is always very personal and there are a few different moments mentioned including the hilarious Jerboa hunt and Linda mentions a few exciting memories including the spoonbill fly by, the stars over the ger camp, the eagle chasing the hare and the vehicles racing out over the steppes, all of which are so memorable. But the Snow Leopards again take top place with most people mentioning something to do with watching them, whether the first moment we saw them, the excitement of Roy finding one and how this felt like our own leopard, to the moment 'leopard blindness' lifted and suddenly the Snow Leopard materialised from the rocky background! The big target of this trip was Snow Leopard. We included other places and saw lots of other wonderful wildlife but we all knew that failing to see a Snow Leopard would have felt like we had failed. Listening to these wonderful recollections and thrilled voices - it sounds like we succeeded big style!!

It has been an incredible trip to an astonishing country and amongst all the excitement and wonder we have also enjoyed many, many laughs and it has been a lot of fun too - so many thanks to everyone for your company and for being part of 'Team Snow Leopard and also to Balazs and Ugan for all their amazing leadership and organisation - a trip to remember forever.

## Birds

Bar-headed Goose

*Anser indica*

Greylag Goose

*Anser anser rubrirostris*

Whooper Swan

*Cygnus cygnus*

Ruddy Shelduck

*Tadorna ferruginea*

Common Shelduck

*Tadorna tadorna*

Gadwall

*Anas strepera*

Wigeon

*Anas penelope*

Mallard

*Anas platyrhynchos*

Shoveler

*Anas clypeata*

Pintail

*Anas acuta*

Garganey

*Anas guerguedula*

Teal

*Anas crecca*

Red-crested Pochard

*Netta rufina*

Pochard

*Aythya ferina*

Tufted Duck

*Aythya fuligula*

Goldeneye

*Bucephala clangula*

Goosander

*Mergus merganser*

Altai Snowcock

*Tetraogallus altaicus*

Chukar

*Alectoris chukar*

Black-throated Diver

*Gavia arctica*

Great Crested Grebe

*Podiceps cristatus*

Black-necked Grebe

*Podiceps nigricollis*

Black Stork

*Ciconia nigra*

Spoonbill

*Platalea leucorodia*

Great Egret

*Casmerodius albus*

Grey Heron

*Ardea cinerea*

Great Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Lammergeier

*Gypaetus barbatus*

Himalayan Griffon

*Gyps himalayensis*

Black Vulture

*Aegypius monachus*

Booted Eagle

*Hieraetus pennatus*

Steppe Eagle

*Aquila nipalensis*

Greater Spotted Eagle

*Aquila clanga*

Golden Eagle

*Aquila chrysaetos*

Sparrowhawk

*Accipiter nisus*

Western Marsh Harrier

*Circus aeruginosus*

Black-eared Kite

*Milvus migrans lineatus*

Upland Buzzard

*Buteo hemilasius*

Eastern Buzzard

*Buteo japonicus*

Saker Falcon

*Falco cherrug*

Hobby

*Falco subbuteo*

Amur Falcon

*Falco amurensis*

Common Kestrel

*Falco tinnunculus*

Coot

*Fulica atra*

White-naped Crane

*Grus vipio*

Demoiselle Crane

*Anthropoides virgo*

Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Lesser (Mongolian) Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus mongolus</i>
Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
Pin-tailed Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>
Swinhoe's Snipe	<i>Gallinago megala</i>
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Black-tailed Godwit (Eastern)	<i>Limosa limosa melanuroides</i>
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Ruff	<i>Phylomachus pugnax</i>
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Long-toed Stint	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>
Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>
Mongolian Gull (Vega Gull)	<i>Larus vega mongolicus</i>
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrhaptes paradoxus</i>
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
Hill Pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>

Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus isabellinus</i>
Steppe Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius pallidirostris</i>
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Henderson's Ground Jay	<i>Podoces hendersoni</i>
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>
Carrion Crow (Oriental Crow)	<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Parus montanus</i>
Azure Tit	<i>Parus cyanus</i>
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Shorelark	<i>Eremophila alpestris brandti</i>
Mongolian Lark	<i>Melanicorypha mongolica</i>
Asian Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Pale Martin	<i>Riparia diluta</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Dusky Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Yellow-browed Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Hume's Lead Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>
Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>
Two-barred Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>
Thick-billed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>
Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis rubicola</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia nana</i>
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>
Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
White-cheeked Starling	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>
Taiga Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>
Dark-sided Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa latirostris</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>
'Eastern' Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuriodes</i>
Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>
Güldenstädt's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythogastrus</i>
Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>

Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>
Kozlov's (Mongolian) Accentor	<i>Prunella kozlowi</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava leucocephala</i>
Eastern Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba baicalensis and personata</i>
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>
Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccorhraustes</i>
Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus pulcherrimus</i>
Twite	<i>Acanthis flavirostris</i>
Godlewski's Bunting	<i>Emberiza godlewski</i>
Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
Pallas's Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza pallasi</i>
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>
167 species	

## **Mammals**

Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Tarbagan Marmot	<i>Marmota sibirica</i>
Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus erythrogegnys</i>
Long-tailed Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus undulatus</i>
Siberian Chipmunk	<i>Tamias sibiricus</i>
Siberian Jerboa	<i>Allactaga sibirica</i>
Northern Three-toed Jerboa	<i>Dipus sagitta</i>
Mid-day Jird	<i>Meriones meridianus</i>
Great Gerbil	<i>Rhombomys opimus</i>
Pallas's Pika	<i>Ochotona pallasi</i>
Daurian Pika	<i>Ochotona daurica</i>
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>
Long-eared Hedgehog	<i>Hemiechinus auritus</i>
Roborovski's Hamster	<i>Phodopus roborovskii</i>
Mongolian Silver Vole	<i>Alticola semicanus</i>
Brandt's Vole	<i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i>
Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>



Red Fox  
Goitered Gazelle  
Mongolian Gazelle  
Saiga Antelope  
Siberian Ibex  
Asiatic Wild Ass  
Snow Leopard (5!)

*Vulpes vulpes*  
*Gazella subgutturosa*  
*Procapra gutturosa*  
*Saiga tatarica*  
*Capra sibirica*  
*Equus hemionus*  
*Uncia uncia*

### **Reptiles and Amphibians**

Toad-headed Agama  
Gobi Racerunner  
Mongolian Toad

*Phrynocephalus sp*  
*Eremias przewalskii*  
*Pseudepidalea raddei*