



TOUR REPORT – SNOW LEOPARD PHOTOGRAPHY IN WESTERN MONGOLIA



Compiled & photos by: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav

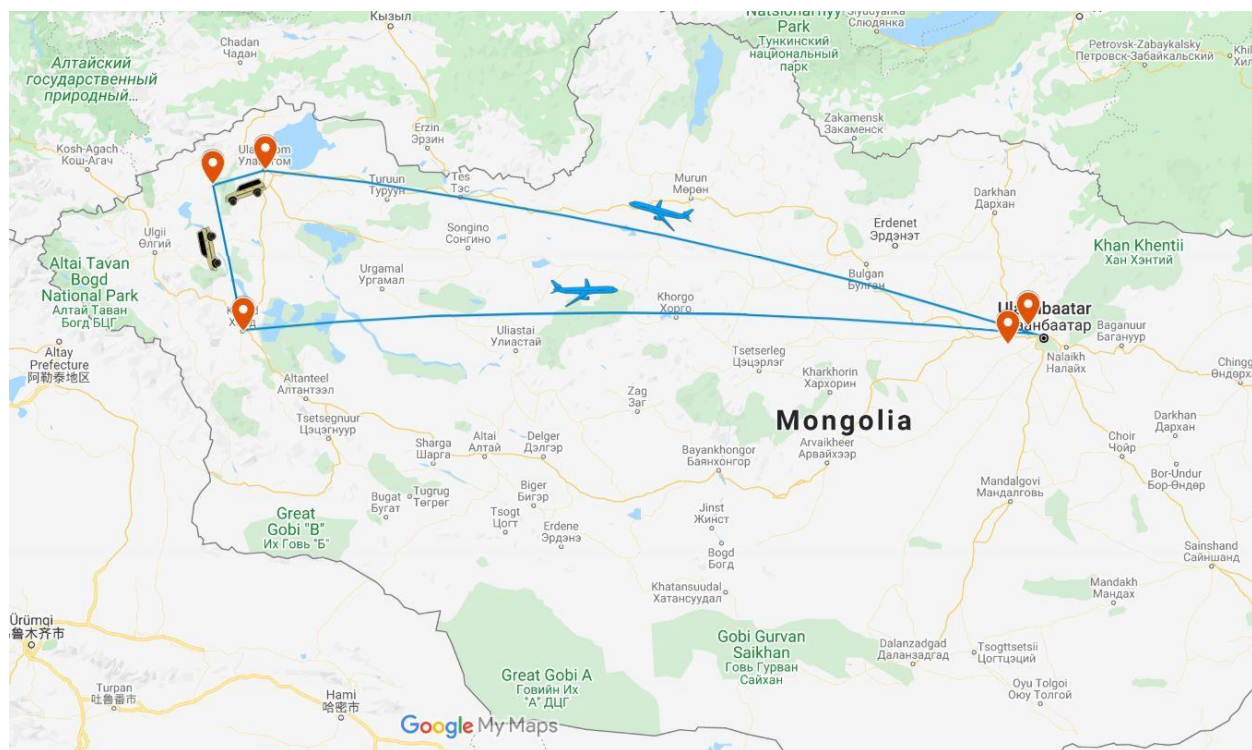
Tour dates: 02 – 14 March 2020

Participants: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav (leader) and Tony Davison (client)

Tour photo gallery: <http://www.wildlifetoursmongolia.com/photo-gallery>

Background information: Mongolia is home second largest population of Snow Leopard in the world. Snow Leopard watching and photography tours are becoming more and more popular in Mongolia because there are higher chances to see and photograph this elusive cat at much lower altitudes like 2,000-3000 m. The winter months are better for the photographic trips as the leopards come down to lower altitudes due to scarcity of prey. The Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) and Tarbagan Marmot (*Marmota sibirica*) are thought to be the main preys of Snow Leopard throughout most of its range in Mongolia. Siberian Ibex and other large wild preys are not easy to catch, and the marmots hibernate in winter. Thus, they prefer to catch domestic animals, predominantly goats in winter. The herders lose their animals to the Snow Leopards while grazing as well as from the campsite at night. This winter diet probably increases the chances of seeing this majestic animal in their natural habitats in Mongolia.

In addition to mammal watching tours which includes a Snow Leopard as one of the main target species, we offer Snow Leopard photography tours which require a maximum of four clients on every tour. We scheduled four Snow Leopard tours a year on the dates when chances are the highest. Please refer to below link for details about our Snow Leopard photography tours <http://www.wildlifetoursmongolia.com>. We have several Snow Leopard sites in western Mongolia to increase the chances/success rates.



Snow Leopard Photography Tour Route

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Day 1. Ulaanbaatar (UB)

We welcomed our client and transferred to the IBIS hotel for overnight.

Day 2-3. Central Steppe

In the morning of day 2, we went to the central steppe, around 100 km to the west of UB, to look for Pallas's Cat and other wildlife there. When we were about to reach the camp site, we stopped on a high hill top to look around. After scanning for about 10 minutes, Tony found a Pallas's Cat which was walking on nearest mountain slope in about 300 meters. It was walking and sitting on the rock which allowed us to watch it for a while.

Other wildlife we saw in this area were Red Fox, Corsac Fox, Tolai Hare and birds like Mongolian Lark, Small Snowfinch, Horned Lark, Asian Short-toed Lark, Golden Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Red-billed Chough and Daurian Partridge.



Daurian Partridges in the central steppe

Day 4-9. Altai Mountains

We flew to Ulaangom town, capital of Uvs province, and landed at the local airport in late afternoon. We stayed at Ulaangom town overnight and continued our journey towards our Snow Leopard site with a 4WD land cruiser in the next morning. We have been told by a local herder that, he lost one of his goats to a Snow Leopard while guarding his herd during a daytime day before we reached the Snow Leopard site. Unfortunately, the dead goat has been moved away by Snow Leopard and we did not go after it.

We explored the valley for next two days and talked to the local herders about their recent Snow Leopard sightings and livestock killed by Snow Leopards.



Our Snow Leopard Valley in the Altai Mountain

The mammals and birds that we have seen in the valley were several herds of Siberian Ibex, Wild Boar, Tolai Hare, a single Mountain Hare, Pallas's Pika and Altai Snowcock (heard only), Daurian Partridge, Bearded Vulture, Golden Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Common Raven, Eurasian Magpie, Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, Bohemian Waxwing, Azure Tit, Horned Lark, White-throated Dipper, Brown Accentor, Common Redpoll and Meadow Bunting.

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In the morning of fourth day since we arrived in the valley, we were informed by one of the local herdsmen that his goat has been killed by a Snow Leopard around 8 km away from our camp in the bottom of the valley. We immediately drove there and parked our car at an elevated spot near the dead goat. Suddenly, a Snow Leopard started running away to the mountain slope as it heard and saw us. It has walked up on the barren slope and disappeared in the grey rocks that are located in a relatively flat area.



Snow Leopard walking on the mountain slope

We decided to put up our hide at a spot which could allow us to photograph this elusive animal in a close range. We have got everything we needed and told our driver to pick us up at around 7:00 pm when it gets dark.

Our hide had enough space to contain 2 people with photographic gears. We watched a group of Eurasian Magpies and an adult Golden Eagle feeding on the carcass while Snow Leopard was absent. After about 40 minutes, Golden Eagle has flown away abruptly and we found out that Snow Leopard was walking towards its kill. The Leopard has stayed next to the carcass for the next 10 hours as guarding its food from other predators and scavengers, and waiting for the dark to feed. When we got out of the hide to leave the site, it did not seem to be bothered much as it moved away a little bit and came back to the carcass after a few minutes. We thanked this Snow Leopard for allowing us to photograph it and moved back to our camp.



Snow Leopard photos taken during our trip in the Altai Mountains in March 2020

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Day 10. Altai Mountain to Khovd town

We continued our journey towards Khovd town and reached there in the late evening. On the following day, we visited the Otson Chuluu tree plantation and saw a single female Red-mantled Rosefinch, a few migrating male Eversmann's Redstarts, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Great Tit, Rock Dove, Hill Pigeon and other resident corvids.



Otson Chuluu Tree Plantation in Khovd town



A male Eversmann's Redstart in Khovd town

Day 11. Khovd town to Ulaanbaatar

We flew back to Ulaanbaatar and transferred to IBIS hotel.

Day 12. Tuul River Valley in Ulaanbaatar

As we had a full day in UB before our tour ended, we went to one of the birding hotspots near UB, the Songino resort area which is located in the western edge of the city. We watched here Daurian Jackdaws, White-backed Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Bullfinch, Hawfinch, Bohemian Waxwing, Red-throated Thrush, Azure-winged Magpie, Great Tit, Azure Tit, Eurasian Tree Sparrow and Common Redpoll. We also checked the stream and ponds in the vicinity and saw Common Goldeneye, Mallard, Ruddy Shelduck and Chinese Spott-billed Duck.

Our tour ended here with a successful observation of one of the most elusive and sought-after mammals, the SNOW LEOPARD, and other wonderful mammals and birds.

Full species list:

#	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	SIGHTING LOCATION
MAMMALS			
1	Pallas's Pika	<i>Ochotona pallasi</i>	Altai Mountain
2	Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>	Altai Mountain
3	Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	Altai Mountain
4	Siberian Ibex	<i>Capra sibirica</i>	Altai Mountain
5	Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>	Central Steppe
6	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Altai Mountain & Central steppe
7	Pallas's Cat	<i>Otocolobus manul</i>	Central Steppe
8	Snow Leopard	<i>Panthera uncia</i>	Altai Mountain
BIRDS			
1	Daurian Partridge	<i>Perdix dauurica</i>	Altai Mountain & Central steppe
2	Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	UB
3	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	UB
4	Chinese Spott-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>	UB
5	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	UB
6	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Khovd town
7	Hill Pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>	Khovd town
8	Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Altai Mountain
9	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Altai Mountain
10	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Altai Mountain
11	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates minor</i>	UB
12	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	UB
13	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	UB

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#	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	SIGHTING LOCATION
14	Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax graculus</i>	Altai Mountain
15	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>	Altai Mountain
16	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Khovd town
17	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	UB
18	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Altai Mountain, Khovd town, UB
19	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Khovd town, UB
20	Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>	UB
21	White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	Altai Mountain
22	Asian Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala cheleensis</i>	Central steppe
23	Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Everywhere
24	Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	Altai Mountain
25	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	Khovd town & UB
26	Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus</i>	Altai Mountain & UB
27	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Khovd town & UB
28	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Everywhere
29	Small Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda davidiana</i>	Central steppe & Altai Mountain
30	Long-tailed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus sibiricus</i>	Khovd town & UB & Altai Mountain
31	Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>	Khovd town
32	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	UB
33	Eversmann's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i>	Khovd town
34	Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>	Khovd town & UB & Altai Mountain
35	Eurasian Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	Altai Mountain
36	Common Redpoll	<i>Acanthis flammea</i>	UB & Altai Mountain
37	Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	Khovd town & Altai Mountain