

Mongolia 18 May – 09 June 2019

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male Black-billed Capercaillie – east of Terelj, Mongolia

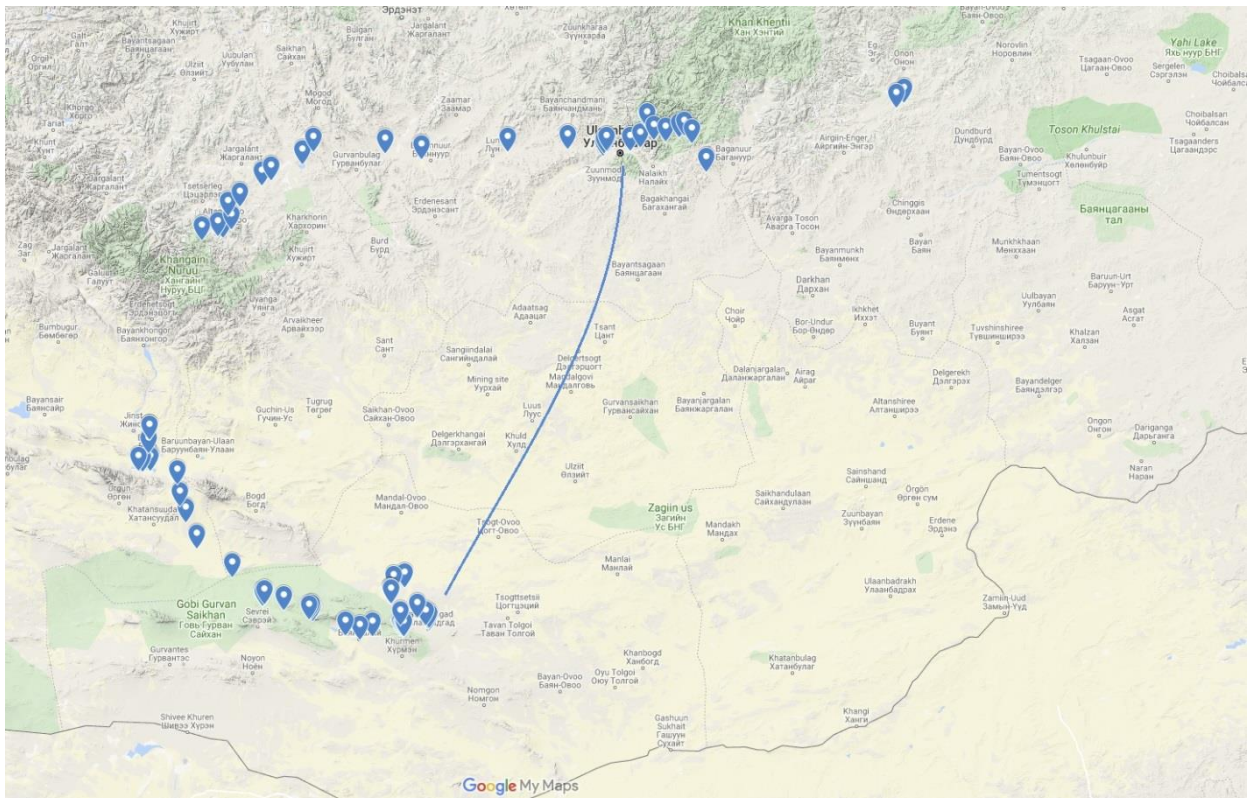
*Report by: Bart, Mark, Miguel, Bogi
Pictures: everyone contributed*

Introduction

In 3 weeks, tour we recorded staggering **295** species of birds, which is unprecedented by similar tours!!! Many thanks to Wouter Faveyts, who had to bail out because of work related matters, but was a big inspiration while planning the trip. The [Starling](#) team, especially Johannes Jansen for careful planning and adjusting matters to our needs. Last but not the least Bolormunkh aka Bogi and his crew of dedicated people. They really did their utmost best to make this trip one of the best ever.

Itinerary

Day 1. 18 th May	Arrival 1 st group at Ulaanbaatar. Birding along the riparian forest of Tuul river
Day 2. 19 th May	Arrival 2 nd part of group. Drive to Dalanzadgad
Day 3. 20 th May	Dalanzadgad area
Day 4. 21 st May	Shivee Am and Yolyn Am Gorges
Day 5. 22 nd May	Yolyn Am Gorge, to Khongoryn Els
Day 6. 23 rd May	Khongoryn Els and Orog Nuur
Day 7. 24 th May	Orog Nuur, Bogd and Kholbooj Nuur
Day 8. 25 th May	Kholbooj Nuur
Day 9. 26 th May	Kholbooj Nuur and drive to Khangai mountain
Day 10. 27 th May	Khangai mountain, drive to Tuin River
Day 11. 28 th May	Khangai mountain drive to Orkhon River
Day 12. 29 th May	Taiga forest Övörhangay and Arhangay
Day 13. 30 th May	Khangai taiga forest site 2
Day 14. 31 st May	Drive to Ogii Nuur
Day 15. 1 st June	Ogii Nuur and Bayan Nuur
Day 16. 2 nd June	Bayan Nuur and drive to Terelj National Park
Day 17. 3 rd June	Terelj National Park
Day 18. 4 th June	Drive to Khurkh valley
Day 19. 5 th June	Khurkh valley, Khurkh Bird Observatory
Day 20. 6 th June	Khurkh valley, Khurkh Bird Observatory
Day 21. 7 th June	Khurkh valley and adjacent riparian forest at Bayangol valley
Day 22. 8 th June	Return to Ulaanbaatar
Day 23. 9 th June	Flight back



Map of travelled route. The blue line represents our transfer by road from Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad

Practicalities

Transport

We traveled with Aeroflot from Brussels to Ulaanbaatar (UB) via Moscow and the same route (albeit reverse of course) on the return journey. Part of the group left on May 17th to arrive early in the morning on May 18th and two other team members arrived on May 19th. Due to delays in Brussels, the first party had to rush in Moscow to catch the flight to UB. As expected, the luggage was delayed until 19th, which was luckily easily retrieved upon arrival of the remaining two people. So no delays. In the airport we met people that were there for their 5th consecutive day, hoping their lost luggage would arrive (!)



Russian UAZ, 4x4, simple mechanics, high clearance, lots of space for people and luggage and got us everywhere we wanted to be

In Mongolia we were transported by UAZ vans with four-wheel drive and excellent cross-country properties. The roads in Mongolia require cross country capabilities. In Mongolia petrol stations are found quite easily, even in smaller towns. But even so our drivers brought a sufficient amount of fuel in a reserve tank.

Paved roads are virtually non-existent in Mongolia at or to the best birding spots, making it tough and tiring to travel especially when it had rained or at the wettest parts of valleys. But the drivers did their utmost best to reach each place in the best possible way. The vans broke down now and then, but simple mechanic is fixed quite simple... so we were often quickly back on the road anyway.

Accommodation

We slept mostly in tents. First night was spent a hotel in UB. And then it was a mix between gers or yurts and camping at locations good for birding either on the spot or tactically chosen for birding nearby the next day. We helped setting up tents wherever possible to give a peace of mind for the crew and to allow them to focus on preparing e.g. dinner or other things for us.

We had even a showering tent, albeit it was not often useful because of the cold mornings and evenings (and we were birding mostly). One sunny afternoon in the Khurkh Valley was declared as 'shower day' and we all enjoyed the comfort of having a nice warm shower in calm, warm weather! Last night was spent in a spacious, modern hotel in UB.



Camping



A ger or yurt, very comfortable accommodation in which Mongolian nomadic have been living for thousands of years. One of the tourist resorts in the Gobi

Weather

Compared to a 'Belgian' climate it seemed to be not much difference in amount of rain or sun, but in Mongolia it was rather windy on most days, which is typical of spring apparently. However, we all got tanned during sunny periods and nights and mornings were often cold with some nights resulting in frost on the tents. Days - when sunny - were often warm in Mongolia. It mostly didn't bother us going out birding, except for one of the last days in the Khurkh Valley when it rained a good part of the afternoon. We enjoyed the time for resting and catching up some sleep.

Money

Bogi had arranged some Mongolian currency (tögrög) for us for buying soft drinks and ice cream at stops and petrol stations. We barely spent an extra 50 Euro, since the tour was full board...

Health and safety

We encountered no real health problems or safety problems at all. But due to the somewhat colder climate (for being the end of May) and the fact that the weather was changing all the time, most crew members were soon catching a cold. This resulted in a sneezing, coughing or shivering party of Belgians trying to find Black-billed Capercaillie and Hazel Grouse in a taiga forest with no trails. Not a good combination ;-)

There were very few mosquitoes throughout and if present, they were hardly of any nuisance.

Most of the tour was in remote areas with no medical facilities or hospitals. Please ensure that you have all the necessary medication that you require for your travels.

Fitness: in general, this tour didn't require a high level of fitness; however, most of the birding was done on foot and required walking for several hours at a time. The walking effort during the main tour was mostly easy to moderate, although there were several optional strenuous hikes in the Khentii Mountains in search of Black-billed Capercaillie...

Food

The crew prepared an excellent variety of meals 3 times a day. Each time we were amazed by the choice of vegetables (Mongolians apparently eat hardly any greens) and the taste was incredible. There was never any shortage of food or hot/cold drinks. Excellent cook and assistant cook!

Bottled water was provided and sometimes also well water was the replacement when we were further afield from towns.

Visa

We arranged visas via the Mongolian embassy in Brussels before our departure. The cost was around 70€ per person.

Planning

The best experiences are those you cannot imagine before you get there. There remains a lot to discover in Mongolia, even on the well-travelled route we planned together with [Starling Reizen](#), our Belgian ground agent. By adjusting to the local conditions: weather, presence or absence of birds, conditions of the roads, etc... Our guide Bogi did a very good job in bringing us to the places we wanted to visit or by listening to our demands. If one thing - besides many other positive - Bogi is very flexible and an amazing planner and navigator.

The crew of 6 Mongolians spoke barely a word of English, but even so, we tried to communicate via simple words and with the help of Bogi, it was enjoyable company.

Electricity

In Mongolia the power plugs and sockets are of type C and E. C being the standard "Euro" plug. The standard voltage is 220 V and the standard frequency is 50 Hz.

As we were often remote, it was handy to have a 12V adapter to charge phones or batteries for cameras while driving. Depending on your needs of battery power, bring sufficient power bank power or rechargeable batteries. Read more at the [worldstandards](#) website.

Communication with the 'outer world' was limited. As a matter of fact, some lived 3 weeks 'of the grid'. You'd need a Mongolian sim card in your phone to be able to use the seemingly perfect reception at most places to get access to your mobile data. SIM cards are widely available at reasonable cost.

Visited sites

Below is a list of the sites we birded. Not a lot of information can be found in books about sites to visit in Mongolia.

To gather additional information www.cloudbirders.com was consulted for bird trip reports. These were the most useful reports, some of which contain a good list of species seen to get an idea of what to expect:

- [Gail Mackiernan](#)
- [Malmaeus](#)
- [Berlijn](#)
- [Shirihai](#)

Books dealing with the avifauna of Mongolia sensu stricto were at the time of our preparation for the trip not available. We used the Central Asia and East Asia book from the Helm series and the Collins Bird Guide to the birds of Britain and Europe (2nd edition) was also helpful of course.

However, now there are not 1 but 2 books available on birds of Mongolia:

- [Birds of Mongolia](#) by Sundev G. & Leahy C. ISBN13: 9780691138824
- [Field guide to the Birds of Mongolia](#) by Ganbold D. & Smith C. ISBN13: 9781912081042

Tuul River Valley and fields near Ulaanbaatar airport

Birded early morning hours till noon in the vicinity of the Mongolica Hotel and later in the afternoon near the UB Power plant and wastewater treatment plant.

Highlights: A **Fieldfare** (for UB area good bird), 6-10 **Naumann's Thrush**, the only **Black-throated** -and **White's Thrushes** and strangely albeit searching at other places as well the only **Long-tailed Rosefinches** (a pair) of the trip. Also 1 **Tristram's Bunting** which proved elusive, 1 **Yellow-breasted Bunting** and the only **Meadow Bunting** for the trip. **Japanese Sparrowhawk** and **Peregrine Falcon** were other noteworthy sightings for UB area.

On and near a small lake near the power plant both **Swinhoe's** and **Pin-tailed Snipe** were found, an **Osprey** and the 1st fly-over **Asian Dowitcher** and a lot of **Citrine** and **Eastern Yellow Wagtails** were seen. On the morning of 2nd day many thrushes had moved on, but a first **Amur Falcon** and a migrating **White-throated Needletail** were noted.

Dalanzadgad area in the Gobi Desert

Several plantations and small wetlands were visited while travelling in a NW direction.

Poor numbers of migrants on the ground because of exodus happened after a big storm hit the region days before we arrived.



Small oasis in the Gobi Desert near one of the plantations we visited. In Mongolia fences are put up to keep the cattle out, rather than in

Nonetheless good species were found: migrating groups of 33 and later 35 **Oriental Honeybuzzards**, **Japanese Sparrowhawk**, a possible male and female **Red-breasted Flycatcher** (possibly new species for

Mongolia!) amongst many **Taiga Flycatchers**. Several **Siberian Rubythroats**, **White-crowned Penduline Tits** and a **Godlewski's Bunting**. A **Little Owl** and **Mongolian Short-toed Larks** were seen on the road.

Shivee Am gorge

Chinese- and **Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches**, the only **Asian House Martins** and a couple of **Koslov's Accentors**.

Yolyn Am gorge

Altai Snowcock was surprisingly easy to find. A very pale **Saker Falcon** of the subspecies *mulvipes*, several **Koslov's** and **Brown Accentors**. A pair of mating **Wallcreepers**, displaying **Golden Eagles** and many **Himalayan Griffon Vultures** were overhead. A lone and briefly singing **Sulphur-bellied Warbler** was found deep in the gorge. At our Ger-camp **Grey-necked Bunting** and **Mongolian Finch** was seen.

Steppes in the Gobi

Grassy hills and valleys with no trees within sight for hundreds of kms. Highlights undoubtedly included at least 3 male **Oriental Plovers**, seen with their petrel-like display flight.

Small windswept shrubs and bushes held many migrants. A large group of migrating **Oriental Honey Buzzards** and another **Osprey** was a good bird for the area.



Steppes just before the desert gets dry, habitat for the enigmatic Oriental Plover

Road to Khongory Els

What was supposed to be a brief stop for shopping and gas turned into a chase for getting good pictures of a **Chinese Grosbeak**. A migrant **Paddyfield Warbler** gave good views as well. **Greater Sand Plover**, many **Pallas' Sandgrouses** and 3-4 **Henderson's Ground Jays** were found. Another 35 or so **Oriental Honey Buzzards** were of note as well.

Khongory Els

Brief stops at first an oasis and later just along our route produced **Daurian Starling** and **Steppe Great Grey Shrike**. **Saxual Sparrow** proved a bit difficult to find, but eventually a few were noted east of the bridge and later the next day near a cliff. An **Asian Desert Warbler** was also noteworthy.



Khongory Els sand dunes with (degraded) saxual forest in front. Habitat for the localized Saxual Sparrow, Isabelline Shrikes and much more...

Bayanug Sum gorge

Many **Lesser Kestrels**, first good looks at **Hill Pigeons** and a lone **Eurasian Eagle Owl** were highlights.

Orog Nuur

Many waterbirds in big numbers! **Eurasian Bittern, White-naped Crane, 40+ Great Black-headed Gulls, Eastern Marsh Harrier**, many marsh terns. A few **Brown-headed Gulls** were noted. Probable **Pallas's Fish Eagle** was seen, but howling wind prevented better views...

Kholbooj Nuur

2 adult **Relict Gulls**, several **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** out in the open, **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, many species of terns, gulls and shorebirds with 18 **Asian Dowitchers** displaying, **Pacific Golden Plovers, Marsh Sandpiper**, first **Red-necked Stints**, both **Greater- and Lesser Sand Plovers, Broad-billed Sandpiper** and **Red-necked Phalarope**. Two **Long-tailed Ducks** were unexpected, but nice find!

Khangai Mountains

Undoubted highlight here was a pair of **White-throated (Hodgson's) Bushchat, Willow Grouse**, many raptors with the only **Eastern Imperial Eagle** as highlight.

We camped in the Southern foothills of Khangia mountain and next morning we found nearby an **Evermann's Redstart, Tree- and Olive-backed Pipits** and the first **Red Crossbills** for the trip. On one of the higher points, we found after a long search a male **Guldenstadt's Redstart** and a pair of **Altai Accentors**, but better views would have been nice.



Khangai Mountains in the early morning light

Orkhon River and taiga forests near Övörhangay and Arhangay

A first attempt at **Black-billed Capercaillie** proved successful with a displaying, albeit difficult to see male. A mammal highlight here was 10+ **Altai Wapiti**.

Ortolan Bunting and **Three-toed Woodpecker** were also nice bonus species. In a park-like landscape a brief stop was made and provided good views of more **Ortolan** and many **Pine Buntings**. A pair of **Rock Thrushes** was also nice.

Raddes Warbler and lots of other phylloscops warblers including **Dusky, Pallas's, Hume's, Yellow-browed, Arctic, Greenish** and **Two-barred Greenish** were found in willow thickets near the second camp. Raptors included **Steppe** and **Greater-spotted** and **Booted Eagles**.

Baikal Bullfinch as a bonus and many **Siberian Rubythroats** and **Red-flanked Bluetails** singing along. Woodpeckers included **Grey-headed, Black, Three-toed** and **Lesser Spotted**.

Ogii Nuur

On the way to Ogii Nuur a plateau was crossed with many **Pere David's Snowfinches** and **Mongolian Larks**. Raptors included many **Steppe Eagles** and **Upland Buzzards**. 4000 **White-winged Terns** in breeding plumage, 10s of **Stejneger's Scoters** with one **Velvet Scoter** mixed in (2nd record for Mongolia!), a summer plumaged **Black-throated Diver**, many other waterbirds including a couple of **Red-breasted Mergansers, Falcated Ducks**. Again 3-5 **Relict Gulls** and **Brown-headed Gull** and a male and female **Pied Harrier**. A lone **Hen Harrier** was also seen.

An elusive immature **Pallas's Fish Eagle** was seen by only one member of the group while watching a pair of **Relict Gulls**.

Bayan Nuur

A shallow lake with lots of reeds and again a completely different setting. Highlights here were **Pale Martin** along with **Sand Martin**. **Pallas's Reed Bunting** of subspecies 'lydiae' or **Mongolian Bunting** was difficult to find. Several **Oriental Reed Warblers** and at dusk and dawn several singing **Baillon's** and **Brown-cheeked Rails** and **Spotted Crakes** were heard, not seen... Singing **Paddyfield Warblers** in the reeds, which also held elusive **Bearded Reedlings**.

Eastern Spot-billed -, **Falcated-** and **White-headed Duck**, many **Swan** and **Bar-headed Geese** were good wildfowl. Many **White-naped Cranes**, even with small chicks, while others were still breeding. Several **Asian Dowitchers**, **Eastern Black-tailed Godwits** and **Marsh Sandpiper** were shorebirds highlights.



Bayan Nuur with its extensive reedbeds and marshy edges

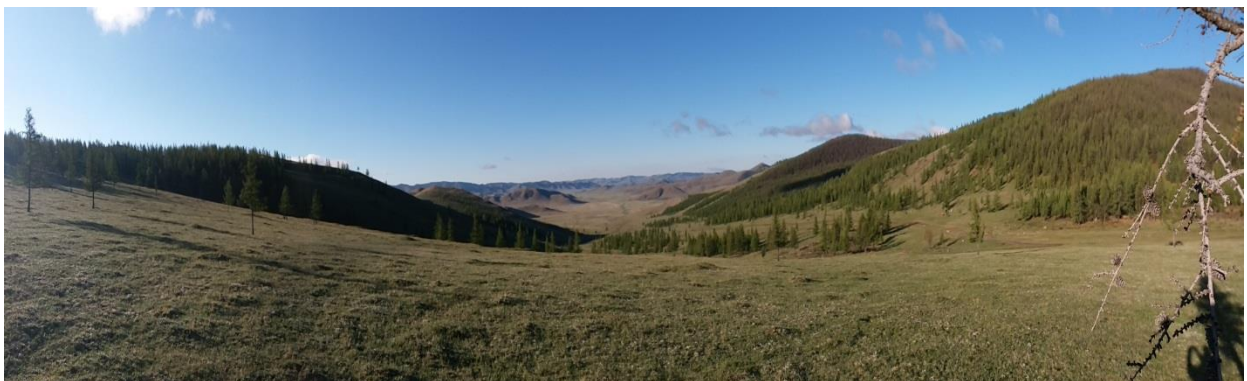
Terelj National Park

Initially proved a little disappointing with no sign of last year's presence of Lanceolated and Chinese Bush Warblers, Black-billed Capercaillie or Ural Owl.

But we found our only (albeit brief) **Siberian Jay** in a large group of alarming **Spotted Nutcrackers**. No Siberian Tits to be found... A **Northern Goshawk** was seen flying above the woods.

We had to move to another site to find what proved the best spot for **Black-billed Capercaillie** with (finally) several displaying males in the vicinity of the camp. At least in the early morning.

In a secluded deciduous woodland we found a cooperative male **Hazel Grouse**



Terelj National Park, at the edge of the taiga forest coming down from Siberia, covering most of the north of Mongolia

Ulaanbaatar towards Khurkh Valley

Hazel Grouse, **Ural Owl** and **Willow Grouse** were seen each by some members of the group at a stop site hoping for early Chinese Bush Warblers, in vain... nonetheless well worth the stop!

Khurkh Valley and Khurkh Bird Observatory

The whole valley was worthwhile the visit at the end of the trip. Time to relax while having camp near the bird observatory.

Many highlights: **Great Bustards** ssp. *dybowski* displaying, 5 species of crane: **Common-**, **Demoiselle-**, **White-naped-**, **Hooded-** and **Siberian Crane**, lots of **Amur** and **Saker Falcons**, **White-tailed Eagle**, another pair of **Pied Harriers**, several **Chinese Bush Warblers**, 2 **Siberian Blue Robin**, 2 **Yellow-rumped Flycatchers**, **Japanese Quail**, many other warblers with good sightings of again **Pallas's Grasshopper** and several **Thick-billed Warblers**.

One evening an **European Nightjar** was found hawking near camp.



Khurkh Valley entrance, but could be taken anywhere in the steppes of Mongolia...

West of Bayanmod

Last night in a tent in a quiet place near the edge of a taiga forest. Many **Pine Buntings**, several **Chinese Bush Warblers** and finally a good albeit brief sighting of a **Lanceolated Warbler** for a few lucky observers.

Gungaluut Nuur

A small party of **Red-necked Stints** together with **Little Stint** provided a nice comparison. On the lake a few **Falcated Ducks** and **Stejneger's Scoters**.



Mongolia, land of the great vistas, here in the steppe at Bayan Nuur in the evening, after a rainstorm had passed

Day to day itinerary

Friday 17/05 – Saturday 18/05/2019

Friday morning Joost, Mark, Paul, Mallorcan/American Daniel and Miguel flew from Brussels via Moscow to Ulaanbaatar. The first flight took off with a delay of about 1,5h. So to make the transfer in Moscow airport, we had to run to catch our flight to Ulaanbaatar. As a consequence, the luggage didn't make it to Ulaanbaatar on that first day.

Early in the morning we arrived at the Chinggis Khaan International airport in Ulaanbaatar. We were met by our local guide Bogi and his crew. Together we drove to a hotel along the Tuul River on the edge of the busy capital. Birding started pretty much upon arrival, we were at the Tuul River, some 10kms outside Ulaanbaatar. Near the hotel there is some remaining riparian woodland along the river which attracts lots of migrants. It was overcast and around zero degrees celcius with an extra fresh breeze. Due to the lost luggage, some in the group were not quite dressed-up to it. Despite the cold wind we observed many good species and good numbers of migratory thrushes. Some of the more remarkable observations: **Azure Tit**, many **Eye-Browed-**, **Naumann's-**, **Dusky-**, **Black-Throated** and **Red-Throated Thrush**, several **Siberian Rubythroats**, **Long-Tailed Rosefinch**, **Lesser Spotted** and **White-backed Woodpeckers**, **White-Crowned Penduline Tit**, **Woodcock** and 1 **White's Thrush**.



From top left: Black-throated, Red-throated, Naumann's and Dusky thrush

A sizeable flock of **Little Buntings** contained a male summer plumaged **Yellow-Breasted Bunting**, a **Meadow Bunting**, a **Black-Faced Bunting** and one brief **Tristram's Bunting**. Meanwhile we enjoyed the first **Taiga Flycatchers**, **Daurian Jackdaws**, **Dusky Warbler**, etc... A fly-over **Japanese Sparrowhawk** rose Bogi's enthusiasm since it was a lifer for him. What a start!

After lunch we drove to a small wetland in a very industrial area near Power plant number 4 on the westside of UB. Good number of waterfowl and waders there including: **Falcated Duck**, **Ferruginous Duck**, **Swinhoe's-** and **Pin-tailed Snipe** side-by-side in a ditch, **Long-Toed Stint**, one **Asian Dowitcher**, **Swan Goose**, many **Citrine** and **Eastern Yellow Wagtails** and **Pallas's Reed-Buntings**. Surprise of the

day at that location was an **Osprey**. No sign of the reported Baikal Teal though. Goal was set for the trip when Bogi announced that about 75 species would be a good number for the first day and if we'd see 100, we'd be breaking records.... We ended the first day with 106 species. Meanwhile Filip and Bart flew from Brussels via Moscow airport. And later took the plane to Ulaanbaatar. No rush for them, luckily.



Migrating male Yellow-breasted bunting

Sunday 19/05/2019

Bart and Filip arrived in the early morning. With them also the luggage of the others flew in from Moscow. Plan was to start the long trip to the southern town Dalanzadgad after breakfast. However the road south was blocked because of a snowstorm in the Gobi – only to be opened after 11h.

That gave us time to show our newly arrived friends some of the goodies around the hotel. This time, in a more comfortable warm outfit. We didn't have a whole lot of time but again found some **Naumann's Thrushes**. Numbers were down from yesterday, probably the clearing skies had something to do with the urge to migrate... A fly-over adult male **Amur Falcon** and a fast zipping-by **White-throated Needletail** were also of note.

The three 4X4 Russian UAZ vans that would take us on our three week tour through Mongolia arrived at the hotel. And we met the crew and the drivers that would accompany us on this would-be epic trip.

As the domestic flight to Dalanzadgad had been canceled we drove the eight-hour trip to the town of Dalanzadgad in the south of Mongolia. We started our long drive south shortly after eleven o'clock and left the capital behind us. Along the road we saw large herds of cattle, sheep, horses, domestic Camels, but also a small herd of **Mongolian Gazelles**. Few birds, but a couple of **Demoiselle Cranes** kept us looking for more. After several hours of driving through the steppe we made a lunch stop in a basic restaurant in Mandalgovi. There we got a taste of Mongolian cuisine. After several more hours of driving on the potholed road we started seeing our first groups of **Pallas's Sandgrouse** flying by. In the late afternoon we arrived in the basic Ger-camp in Dalanzadgad. After diner we settled in our Ger-tents for our first night in the Gobi.

Monday 20/05/2019

Most slept rather short. Adrenaline? Too tired to sleep? Strange noises outside??? At five o'clock we woke up for an early breakfast. First we went birding at a small wetland on the south side of town. Finding **Little Bunting**, **Common Rosefinch**, **Dusky Thrush**, **Dusky Warbler**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Wryneck** and **Eurasian Hoopoe**. There was very little water in the wetland but **Long-Toed Stint**, **Common** and **Pin-Tailed Snipe**, **Citrine Wagtail** and **Richard's Pipit** were all seen. Then we went birding in a large plantation at the southwesterly edge of town. A second **Japanese Sparrowhawk** was seen! Other notable birds included: **Daurian Redstart**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Red-Throated Thrush**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Eye-Browed Thrush**, **Hume's Warbler** and large numbers of **Pallas's Leaf Warblers**. A group of 33 **Oriental Honey Buzzards** started their migration low over the center of town just as we left. Next stop, another plantation, this time just south of the local airport. Both **Isabelline** and **Brown Shrike** and a male **Black-Faced Bunting** were firsts for the trip.

Afterwards we followed the road towards the famous Flaming Cliffs and stopped at a plantation along the entrance road. We birded the area of the spring and searched all the bushes and trees in this oasis in the middle of the Gobi-desert. Numbers of birds were quite low but again we were not bored: we had nice observations of **Desert Wheatear**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, many **Taiga Flycatchers**, **White-Crowned Penduline Tit**, 5 **Siberian Rubythroats**, **Wryneck** and **Little Bunting**. To our surprise we discovered what we initially identified as two adult **Red-Breasted Flycatchers**.

First, we found a female with all the characteristics of **Red-Breasted Flycatcher** and could compare it well with classic female **Taiga Flycatchers**. A few moments later seemingly adult male popped up. It was clearly different from the male Taiga's, with much more 'red' on its breast.



Taiga Flycatcher with characters of a Red-breasted Flycatcher, the jet-black upertail coverts did the trick...

Puzzling through field characters, we were positive about our identification. However, the upertail coverts turned out to be jet-black and the brown on the head was too extensive. Not good enough for this possible new species for Mongolia. There is apparently an identification paper on its way to sort out the clearly aberrant **Taiga Flycatchers** from real **Red-breasted Flycatchers**. Terry Townsend commented afterwards that R-B Flycatcher is regularly seen in the Beijing area further east, so surely it will be found one day in Mongolia. Meanwhile a nice group of 35 **Oriental Honey Buzzards** migrated north.

Further on, after lunch, during a must-stop (one of the vans got stuck), on one of the stone-walls of a shepherd's house we discovered a nice pair of **Little Owls**. Nearby **Mongolian Short-Toed Larks** were found and many other common steppe birds like **Horned Larks**... We returned to the main road and stopped at a marshy area near a spring. Here we waited for **Pallas's Sandgrouse** coming to drink, but only fly-bys were noted. In the wet area few **Temminck's-** and **Long-Toed Stints** and **Citrine Wagtail** were foraging. A nearby plantation had an **Eye-browed Thrush** and a **Siberian Rubythroat** and an unidentified cuckoo, most likely a **Common Cuckoo**.

Time to move on and we drove on through the empty plains towards our Gobi Ger-Camp, an excellent camp with a very good restaurant and sanitary building. After dinner we birded the steppes and were rewarded with distant views of several **Oriental Plovers** in their fantastic display-flight, banking like a

petrel in a fantastic green landscape... An **Osprey** was roosting on a pylon in the middle of the Gobi and a distant large flock of **Oriental Honey Buzzards** was looking for an elevated place to roost.

Tuesday 21/05/2019

Before breakfast we drove to the plains northwest of the camp and soon discovered two distant male **Oriental Plovers**. They were clearly territorial and again stole the show with their extraordinary display-flights. Later we drove to the southeast of the camp where we had seen the displaying males yesterday and again had magnificent of two male **Oriental Plovers** in full breeding-plumage. These birds were following each other in a territorial dispute and gave crippling views. Surely one of the best birds of the trip!



Male Oriental Plovers disputing over territory, one of the highlights of the trip!

After breakfast we drove towards Shivee Am gorge. In the junipers in the first part of the gorge we found **Chinese - & Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches**, **Common Rock Thrush**, **Godlewski's Bunting** and our main target **Kozlov's Accentor**, the only breeding endemic bird of Mongolia. The last part of the gorge was still covered in ice and snow, but the cliffs above had a nest of **Bearded Vultures**, with the adult pair circling over the rock face. Also inside the gorge a number of **Crag-** and **Common House Martins** were collecting mud, showing clearly signs of attempted breeding there. Amongst the **Common House Martins** we discovered a couple of **Asian House Martins**.

Time to move on and set up camp for the night near the famous Yolyn Am Gorge. While the crew was setting up the tents, we birded the low slopes and had **White-Winged Snowfinch**, **Kozlov's - and Brown Accentor**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Twite** and **Isabelline Wheatear**. After dinner we scanned the rock face for Altai Snowcock but couldn't find any. Clearly mornings are better... However we did see one adult male **Siberian Ibex**, a pair of **Bearded Vulture**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Himalayan Griffon Vultures** and **Golden Eagle**.

Wednesday 22/05/2019

A rather cold night in the tent, but with an amazing sky with billions of stars, we woke up very early and had breakfast. Close to the Yolyn Am Gorge we started scanning the rock face for our main target for the day: *Altai Snowcock*. And after just a couple of minutes Miguel aka Eagle-eyed Johnny discovered an **Altai Snowcock**, a bird was at the edge of the cliff in the distance. A little bit later we found another snowcock and six adult male **Siberian Ibex**. Finding the snowcocks in the scope saved us a stiff walk the the higher slopes and cliffs.

With time on our side, we walked to the entry of Yolyn Am gorge and birded the valley finding **Twite**, **Pallas's Reed Bunting**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Kozlov's-** and **Brown Accentor**, **Arctic Warbler**, **Chukar** and **Dusky Thrush**.

At the Yolyn Am Gorge - the valley of the Lammergeir - many vultures: evidently **Bearded-**, **Himalayan Griffons-** and **Cinereous Vultures**. On the passerine front: **Kozlov's** - and **Brown Accentors**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch**, first one mating pair and later another **Wallcreeper**, a pair of displaying **Golden Eagles** and a presumably just arrived singing male **Sulphur-bellied Warbler**.

After have such great views of all of our target species in this beautiful gorge we returned to camp for lunch and eventually drove on. We checked in mid-afternoon at another ger-camp nearby and had a siesta. In the late afternoon we took a walk in the rocky river-valley near camp. Here we had great views of **Grey-necked Bunting**, **Mongolian Finch**, **Pied Wheatear** and another **Dusky Thrush**.



Golden Eagle over Yolyn Am Gorge – the Valley of the Lammergeier, which we evidently saw as well there...

Thursday 23/05/2019

We hit the main road towards Khongoryn Els after a breakfast at six. We got on the tarred road and after some time we headed for a tree grove. Nearby was a well where constantly groups of **Pallas's Sandgrouse** came drinking.

Inside the plantation we saw, amongst 'regular species': **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Wryneck**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Pallas's Reed Buntings**, **Mongolian Finch** and a **Brown Shrike**.

We stopped in a small town to stock up some provision as this would be the last town we would pass for several days. Miguel made us promise to stay only for 10 minutes when plans were made for an ice-cream. But then he found a **Chinese Grosbeak** in a group of **Hawfinches**. A lifer for our guide, and a rare bird in these corners of Mongolia. Also present were several **Pallas's Leaf Warblers** and all enjoyed great views of **Paddyfield Warbler** and a **Black-faced Bunting**. Soon it was almost an hour later. And then we yet had to visit the pharmacy...

Finally some progress was made and albeit a brief stop at a waterhole further west provided us with a group of drinking **Pallas's Sandgrouse** and a few **Greater Sand Plovers** in full breeding plumage gave great views. Around mid-day we reached a gravel plain with small bushes, the prime-habitat for the localized **Henderson's Ground Jay**. After some scanning we first found two Groundjays and soon more, we all had great views of these curious crossbreed between a jay and a hoopoe..

We lunched in a nearby dry gorge. At first it looked rather birdless, but some scanning revealed a pair of **Bearded Vulture**, 2 **Chukars**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Mongolian Finches**, **Woodcock**, and 40-45 **Oriental Honey Buzzards** migrating north. On the mammal front another **Siberian Ibex** was going uphill.

The last stretch towards Khongoryn Els with the mighty sand dunes already in view... we made a brief stop and a small oasis. Here we discovered another vagrant: a **Daurian Starling** was quietly foraging on the ground at close range. We made some more stops to check **Mongolian Wild Ass** or **Kulan** and for **Steppe Grey Shrike**.

We reached our wooded lodges in the late afternoon and had a siesta there. After dinner we drove to the saxaul-forest at the base of the Khongoryn Els sand dunes. The dry, diminishing, overgrazed saxaul-forest didn't look to be appealing for Saxaul Sparrow and as a result, we couldn't locate any. We did see **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Steppe Grey Shrike** and **Isabelline Shrikes**, **Daurian Redstart** and a few fly-by **Hill Pigeons** for some of the group.

Stopping at some ruins and with better habitat within sight and soon found us looking at two adult males and one female **Saxaul Sparrows** near their nests. On the way back to the lodge we had great views of a lone male **Lesser Kestrel**. The old building where it was breeding in was demolished a couple of years ago, but yet, every year a couple of Lesser Kestrels return in the hope of..... a sad sight nonetheless.



Khongoryn Els sand dunes, also known as Duut Mankhan, the singing dunes are about 6-12kms wide and up to 100kms long

Friday 24/05/2019

No need to hurry, we saw our target birds last night at the sand dunes, so we drove straight to Orog Nuur making several stops along the route. Driving through the desert several groups of **Pallas's Sandgrouses** and some **Goitered Gazelles** were sighted.

We passed several healthy Saxaul groves and after about two hours stopped at one near a small cliff. While the crew made camp for breakfast, we birded and found **Saxaul Sparrows** and an **Asian Desert Warbler** singing, mimicking? Since it sounded much like a Yellowhammer.

Other birds of note were **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Desert Wheatear** with fledglings, **Pied Wheatear**, lots of **Pallas's Sandgrouses**, 10 **Saxaul Sparrows**.

Driving on, we encountered some more **Mongolian Finches**, **Desert Wheatears** and a **Richard's Pipit ssp sinensis**.

At around noon we reached Bayanug Sum, a gorge where remains of prehistoric people have been found. Once inside the small gorge we had great views of 10 **Hill Pigeons**, a colony of 12 **Lesser Kestrels**, **Mongolian Finch**, **Pied Wheatear**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Siberian Rubythroat** and a mighty **Eurasian Eagle Owl** that flew from its roost. After a great lunch we crossed a dry river bed and crossed a mountain pass to reach the eastern shores of Orog Nuur. There were lots of waterbirds, terns and waders. But also **Common Crane**, **Eastern- and Western Marsh Harriers** and **Eurasian Spoonbills**.

Camping seemed no option with the very strong wind, so we drove on to the small shepherd-house and soon it was arranged to spend the night there.



Pallas's Sandgrouse was a common sight anywhere in the steppes and the Gobi

Saturday 25/05/2019

After an early breakfast we followed the southern shore of the lake. Birding was hard because of very strong winds. Using the vans and some ruins as a shelter, the lake was scanned: **Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Eurasian Spoonbill, Eastern Marsh Harrier, 3 Great Bitterns, Golden Eagle, 100s of White-winged Terns, Ferruginous Ducks, Red-Crested Pochards, 2 immature Brown-headed Gulls, breeding Whooper Swans, 40 Pallas's Gulls, Common-, Demoiselle- and White-naped Cranes** and much more. Moving on, a group of 28 **Rosy Starlings** in a small plantation and a mixed colony of spoonbills, herons and **Great Cormorants** in the reed-beds.

Due to the strong winds and finding few new birds on the north bank, it was decided to drive on to Kholbooj Nuur. On the route a beautiful **Saker Falcon** was found only to be flushed by a motorcycle before we could take pictures. At the small town of Bogd some shopping and refueling was done before we arrived at the more promising looking Kholbooj Nuur. This lake is smaller, shallower and much birdier and more important... somehow the wind was down too. Camp being erected, we started birding along the marshy southeastern shore and very

quickly saw: two adult **Relict Gulls**, 4 **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers** trying to skulk in the short grass, an adult male **Yellow-breasted Bunting** in full breeding plumage, 18 **Asian Dowitchers** displaying, again large flocks of **White-winged Terns, Swan Geese, Bar-headed Geese, Black-faced Bunting, Long-toed Stint, Paddyfield Warbler, Pacific Golden Plover**, and many more common shorebirds...

After a very nice lunch exploring the southern shore an adult **Rosy Starling** was found. But also **Brown-headed Gull, Horned Grebe, 2 Long-tailed Ducks** (again a rarity in Mongolia!), **Swan Goose**, several **Pallas's Reed Buntings** and many more waders, marsh terns and waterfowl. In the distance there were some sizeable thunderstorms that in fact caused sandstorms. But luckily they didn't come our way. With the vans we explored the eastern shore. Seeing lots of waders, including **Broad-billed sandpiper**,

Greater- and Lesser Sand Plovers and 1 adult **Relict Gull**. Along the northern shore we found **Temminck's-Long-toed** and **Little Stints** and some **Pin-tailed Snipes**. One of the birdiest places we've been to so far!



Kholbooj Nuur, with a wide variety of shorebirds and waterbirds, but surprisingly a lot of grounded passerines migrants as well!

Sunday 26/05/2019

The night was cold with temperatures dropping to -4°C , freezing the marshy pools. We walked to the muddy eastern shore and scanned the mudflats with our scopes having the rising (and warming) sun in our backs. It was teeming with waders, gulls and terns. Highlights: 40 breeding **Gull-billed Terns**, 1 **Marsh Sandpiper**, 2 summer plumaged **Red-necked Phalaropes**, 10+ **Pallas's Gulls**, 200+ **White-winged Terns**, 3 **Broad-billed Sandpipers**, 8 **Asian Dowitchers**, 3 adult **Relict Gulls**, 1 **Red-necked Stint** and many more common species of which the summer plumaged and displaying **Sanderlings** were also of note! A dead male **Stejneger's Scoter** was found on the beach.

Near camp we observed a **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, **Siberian Chiffchaff**, **Slender-billed Gull**, **Brown-headed Gull**, **Golden Eagle**, **Little Bunting** and large numbers of low flying **Common Swifts** ssp *pekinesis* with some **Pacific Swifts** mixed in for comparison.

Time to move on, we left this wonderful lake after lunch and drove to a high plateau at the southern foothills of the Khangai mountains. The plain was infested with rodents that attracted a great range of raptors. We saw **Steppe Eagle**, **Steppe-**, **Upland-** and **Eastern Buzzard** and several **Booted Eagles**. We crossed the tar road and followed yet another valley to the north full with burrows of **Brandt's Vole** and we had our first good views at **Pere David's Snowfinches** and **Mongolian Larks**.



Pere David Snowfinches were common in the right steppe like mountainous habitats

The higher Khangai Mountains were within sight when we drove up a valley...

The ground was crawling with voles and the valley proved great for birds of prey. At least 1 pair of **Golden Eagle**, 1 pair of **Saker**, **Upland Buzzard**, and several **Steppe Eagles**. While setting up camp we also noticed a **Least Weasel** hunting the voles.

Exploring the valley and the slopes we saw many **Cinereous** and **Bearded Vultures**, **Tarbagan Marmot**, **Rock Sparrow**, **Common Rock Thrush**, while **Pere David Snowfinches** were very common.

Monday 27/05/2019:

After again an early breakfast we drove up the mountain slope as far as the van could take us and then walked up the steep slope to the ridge towards the valley of our main target in this area: **White-throated** or **Hodgson's Bushchat**.

Their habitat is wet highland with boulders and willow thickets. Once in the right habitat great views of a pair of these very localized breeding birds were obtained. Not easily found or followed though, but at times very confiding!

Bonus came in the form of lone female **Willow Grouse**, **Brown Accentor** and singing **Siberian Rubythroats**.



Hodgson's Bushchat, adult male at our stake-out in the Khangai Mountains

Back at the top of the ridge we enjoyed low flying **Bearded Vultures**, **Cinereous Vultures**, **Golden Eagle**, **Steppe Eagle**, 1 **Eastern Imperial Eagle** and migrating **Oriental Honey Buzzards**. We made the steep descent towards the camp seeing **Common Rock Thrush**, **Rock Sparrow** and a pair of **Saker** attacking an intruding **Golden Eagle**. With our main target bagged we left the valley after lunch, one day ahead of schedule. We drove to the provincial capital of Bajanhongor and birded the riparian forest along the Tuin River, while the crew went for groceries to the supermarket. There were few passerines in the willows, the good weather clearly cleaned the promising habitat. Following the Tuin River valley, a short stop at the lovely Buddhist monastery was made. Just north of this town we observed **Corsax Fox**, 2 **Black Storks** and several pairs of **Demoiselle Cranes**. In the evening we reached a campsite in a side valley with larch-forest on the northern slopes.

Tuesday 28/05/2019

Some woke up early and climbed the very steep forested slope near camp. Only the very top with some rocky outcrops would bring us the desired Evermann's Redstart. Luckily the forest on the way up was quite birdy: singing **Tree Pipits**, **Hume's Warblers**, **Red-throated Thrush**, **Red Crossbills**, **Two-barred Warblers** and several **Eurasian Nuthatches** of the pale *asiatica* subspecies... And then finally one fine adult male **Evermann's Redstart** started singing in top of a larch. A rocky outcrop on the cliff nearby held a nest of **Bearded Vulture**, an impressive sight! After breakfast we drove up the valley close to the high mountain pass. Birding this valley and scanning the rock-faces on the slopes, we found **Little Owl**, **Brown Accentor**, **Twite**, **Water Pipit ssp. blakistoni**, **Bearded Vulture**, **Golden Eagle** and **Common Rock Thrushes**. It took some intense scanning with our scopes, but finally we had distant views of one male **Guldenstadt's Redstart** and a pair of **Altai Accentors**. For better chances and better views of these two

target species, plus perhaps Asian Rosefinch you'd need to get here earlier in the day and climb as high as possible towards the snowline...



Oriental Cuckoo

We had lunch just below the high mountain pass. At the pass itself we had a pair of **Common Rock Thrush**, one singing **Altai Accentor**, **Brown Accentor** and **Crag Martin**.

Beyond the pass layed a vast high plateau, full off yak-herds but otherwise pretty birdless. Several short stops were made. One was at a deerstone, a 3000+ year old stone monument with carved depictions of reindeer, while another involved a short walk in a river valley while our drivers were fixing the gearbox of one of the vans. It was quiet, except for the omnipresence of **Cinereous Vultures**, the occasional **Saker Falcon** or **Upland Buzzard**... After a very bumpy ride we left the high plateau and descended into a large river valley. During the steep descend we saw a male **Eversmann's Redstart** in the larch-forest. We passed a second lower pass. This valley was at first very wooded but eventually opened to a plain. It was already late so camp was set in a pristine river valley some 30kms further on. After kicking and shoveling away the yak-kak we helped with the tents, while Bogi drove off

with the cook to buy what turned out a 6-year old 'lamb' from a nearby family. It was a nice feeling to camp on this floodplain between the yak and horse herds with their calves and foals, the night was filled with snorting yaks and snoring birders...

Wednesday 29/05/2019

Waking up in the beautiful valley we observed many singing birds: **Pine Bunting**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Dusky Warblers**, **Brown Shrike**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, **Red-throated Thrush**, **Siberian Stonechat** and **Common Rosefinch**. The old local shepherd had told Bogi he knew about a lekking area of **Black-billed Capercaillie** nearby... Our first chance of seeing one of the most enigmatic birds of Mongolia!

So, evidently we all jumped into one of the vans and rushed towards the lek. Driving up the slope along an extremely bumpy track, it seemed like an endless journey during a twitch... Eventually we stopped at a very beautiful Larch-forest with some rocky outcrops. Here we approached the lekking area very quietly. Being late in the season, poor chance of finding one, and yes, we didn't see or hear any capers. The shepherd told Bogi 10 males were lekking here only 2 weeks earlier. However a singing male **Oriental Cuckoo** and a dawn chorus of **Two-barred Warblers** and many other songbirds entertained us or tried to... our target wasn't around. However, we suddenly heard the characteristic ticking and clicking song of a male **Black-billed Capercaillie** echoing in the forest! Soon we were sneaking up to the singing bird, while the sound always seemed to be going deeper into the forest. After a long and intense search Miguel finally managed to locate the bird largely obscured half-way up a tree. We only saw its head as it was sitting motionless between dense foliage... A bit later it flew and we were able to see it flying off between the trees. All very happy with this first observation of this enigmatic species. Suddenly tension rose again and it got even better as we saw 10 male **Altai Wapiti** going past us at only 30-40m! Wow! Cameras rattled...

A singing male **Red-flanked Bluetail**, a drumming **Tree-toed Woodpecker**, **Nutcracker** and calling **Black Woodpecker** were almost neglected...

Driving back towards camp, we passed through a beautiful landscape with flower-covered meadows. We added 2 singing male **Ortolan Buntings** to our growing trip list.

Back at camp we enjoyed/celebrated late breakfast and broke up. We travelled on through a pristine river valley completely unspoiled by humanity, twice a mixed group of **Cinereous- and Himalayan Griffon Vultures** were feeding on carrion. It's nice to see good numbers of the endangered **Cinereous Vulture** in this country. However, when you know the livestock number is above 70 million it makes more sense because there is carrion everywhere.

Sadly a bit further the river valley was being destroyed and polluted by an illegal gold mine, a very awakening sight what humans are capable of...

Then, we passed a large area that had been destroyed by forest-fires several years ago. One of the vans broke down and while the drivers were fixing it, we considered our options and decided to drive to "the Owl-valley"



where a previous Starling group saw 3 species of owl in 2017. However, this was quite a big detour, plus a very bumpy and challenging ride with some very muddy tracks and river crossings, but the possibility of seeing *Great Grey Owl*, *Ural Owl* and *Northern Hawk Owl* was just too tempting.

First, we reached a beautiful park-like landscape, with large old Larches and bizarre rocky outcrops. This fantastic landscape would be a touristic hotspot in any European country, however, in Mongolia there was no living human soul in within sight. A short stop produced many singing **Pine Buntings**, **Common Rock Thrush**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Eurasian Wryneck**, **Steppe Buzzard**.

Next, was a high plateau full of flowers. Team picture time... while taking the group photo, **Bearded Vulture**, **Oriental Honey Buzzard** and **Red Crossbill** flew past.

After several mountain passes, each with some kind of shamanistic site in the shape of large teepee-like wooden structure at the top, with lots of blue ribbons, surrounded by piles of empty liquor. Heavy drinkers those Mongols ;-)

Eventually after several muddy river crossings, creeks and boggy areas, we arrived at the 'Owl valley' and a campsite was found. The whole area seemed much wetter than in 2017 though. We explored the edge of the forest and the bogs above camp. Activity was very low and there was no sign of owls. But we did hear displaying **Black Grouse** in the distance and saw a pair of **Evermann's Redstart**, **Red-flanked Bluetail** and **Wryneck**.

Thursday 30/05/2019

Waking up very early after a very cold night with frost on our tents, a search for owls and grouse in the forest above our camp, proved fruitless. During this walk we found droppings of **Wolf** and heard displaying **Black Grouse** and **Black-billed Capercaillie**. Only Miguel was able to locate the caper. We had great views on a pair of **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers** hammering on dead branches. Two **Spotted Nutcrackers** started alarm calling close by and we saw an **Ural Owl** flying through the forest. After some effort following the alarm calling nutcrackers, the **Ural Owl** was found sitting in a tree. **Olive-backed Pipits, Red-flanked Bluetails, Two-barred Warblers** escorted us walking back to the camp for breakfast and we came across the nesting tree of the Ural Owl. The nest had obviously been predated recently. The open areas between the forests were very boggy and there were almost no burrows of mice or rodents. This told us that it was probably a very bad year for rodents, resulting in very low presence of owl numbers.

After breakfast we searched the open forest below camp for perhaps the odd owl and woodpeckers.



Black-billed Capercaillie droppings, a clear sign of presence while searching

Despite an intensive search we still found no sign of any owls, but we obtained very nice observations of singing **Eurasian Wryneck, Red-flanked Bluetail, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Oriental Cuckoo, Bearded Vulture** and **Siberian Chipmunk**.

Lunch was a Mongolian style BBQ with more of that delicious "lamb"-meat and pasta. During lunch we talked

about our options. The 'Owl-valley' was not living up to its name, so we decided it was best to leave and go to another forest in search of more birds and capers. We left the valley along the very same muddy tracks we came in, while it started raining, a good choice thus to leave! After crossing many valleys and mountain passes, we reached our new camping site in a beautiful meadow surrounded by old grown taiga forest. A **Bearded Vulture** was flying around with a big bone and dropped it at a rock outcrop, National Geographic scenery! Soon we were exploring the willow and alder grown forest edges near camp and found a nice pair of **Baikal Bullfinch**, singing **Radde's Warbler** and a mixed flock of **Two-barred-, Arctic-, Greenish-, Yellow-browed-, Pallas's- and Dusky Warblers**. Clearly the inclement weather previously brought them to the edge of the forest. Nice to compare and to study all these feeding Siberian gems in one place! In the evening we went into the forest again and had a male **Siberian Roe Deer, Black Woodpecker, Wryneck** and **Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers**.

Friday 31/05/2019

Woke up while a **Black-billed Capercaillie** was calling in the larch-forest, unfortunately we could not locate the bird. But we did find **Black Woodpecker, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker**, a pair of **Tree-toed Woodpeckers, Wrynecks**, a singing **White's Thrush**, the good looking *brandtii* subspecies of **Eurasian Jay, Spotted Nutcracker** and again a pair of **Baikal Bullfinches**. In a wet bog of willow-ticket

interspersing the spruce trees, we found several singing males **Siberian Rubythroats**, **Radde's Warbler** and **Red-flanked Bluetail**. We saw a **Mountain Hare** and found paw prints and droppings of **Wild Boar**, **Wolf**, **Siberian Wapiti**, **Siberian Roe Deer** and possibly **Brown Bear**. The large mixed flock of warblers was still hanging around.

After breakfast an adult **Greater Spotted Eagle** flew over our camp. However, it was time to leave this great place and started driving towards Ogii Nuur.

On the way we observed a **Bearded Vulture** that was swallowing a big bone, again a scene from a National Geographic episode on "the bone-swallower",

More singing **Ortolan Buntings** and 2 groups of **Cinereous Vultures** feeding on dead sheep followed. We passed the first agricultural fields of the trip. Later on, a short stop at a salty lake west of Ogii Nuur proved pretty birdless, but the steppe around had many **Mongolian Larks**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, **Upland Buzzard**, **Booted Eagle** and some **Ruddy Shelducks**.

Arriving at the marshy northwest-side of Ogii Nuur, it was packed with ducks, swans and geese. A quick scan produced more than 4000 **White-winged Terns** in breeding plumage feeding above the marsh, a group of 14 **Demoiselle Cranes** flew right above our heads were another highlight. But first things first, check-in to the Ger-camp and a decent shower after camping in the freezing mountains for seven nights was needed. That last thing was a bit of a disappointment, as there was no electricity to charge our batteries, no soft-drinks or beer and the showers only had either boiling-hot water at first and then ice-cold and later no water at all. Luckily the food was good and there were plenty of birds around at the headland. Three female **Red-breasted Mergansers** were a bit out of place and time, **Pallas's Gulls**, **Horned Grebes** and a nice group of **Common Goldeneyes**.



Swan goose was common at almost every lake

In the evening we drove back to the marshy northwestern corner of the lake. Many new birds for the trip were found. Scanning the lake between the large groups of diving-ducks we observed a nice group of 29 **Stejneger's Scoters** and 1 **male Velvet Scoter**: a real vagrant - apparently only the 2nd record for Mongolia. An enormous flock of **White-winged Terns** flew right in front of us and gave great photographic opportunities. A **Hen Harrier** was hunting nearby and up to 8 **Eastern Marsh Harriers** were flying over the marsh, while an adult **White-tailed Eagle** hunted and caught a duck.

We also had 80 **Black-necked Grebes**, 110 **Great crested grebe**, 1 **Brown-headed Gull**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Pallas's Gull**, 10 **Swan Geese**, 50 **Whooper Swans**, **Eurasian Spoonbills**, 50 **Common Goldeneye** and large numbers of diving ducks including about 1500 **Common Pochard**, 1100 **Tufted Duck** with 50 **Garganey** and 1 **male Falcated Duck** amongst many more commoner species.

Returned to camp and had a singing **Common Quail** and **Tolai Hare** to end the day.

Saturday 01/06/2019

In the morning it was very windy, sheltering from the main-building we found: 2 adult **Relict Gulls**, flocks of **Stejneger's Scoters**, a singing **Common Quail**, **Horned Grebes**, **White-winged Terns**, 36 **Common Goldeneye** and a hunting **Hen Harrier**.

However, no sign of the hoped for *Pallas's Fish Eagle*!

After breakfast we returned to the northwestern end along the lakes shore, producing a breeding plumaged **Black-throated Diver**. Again a lot of birds including 2 male **Falcated Duck**, 1 **Caspian Tern**, 2 **Pallas's Gull**, **Black-winged Stilts**, a breeding pair of **Common Crane** and 4 **Corsax Fox** pups near their den. To our surprise we discovered a pair of **Pied Harriers**. A great find so far to the west!

At the northeastern side of the lake in search of our main target *Pallas's Fish Eagle*, we found a flock of at least 24 **Stejneger's Scoters** close to the shore. A marshy area held **Pallas's Gull**, **Gull-billed Tern**, breeding **Bar-headed Geese** and a nice mix of waders, mainly **Little Stints** but including several **Long-toed Stints** and 1 **Red-necked Stint** in breeding plumage. In the vicinity of the visitor center on the south-side, a nice pair of **Sakers** gave a show by hanging in the wind above a small cliff. A bit further on, again fantastic views of 2 adult **Relict Gulls**. Meanwhile, above the hills we saw several raptors. Scanning those produced 1 **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Steppe Eagles** and several **Upland Buzzards**. Miguel was the only one lucky enough to see an immature **Pallas's Fish Eagle** briefly before it disappeared behind the hills.



Relict Gull was seen multiple times at the steppe lakes

In the afternoon we drove on towards the next steppe lake Bayan Nuur. During the very bumpy ride to the tar road north of Ogii Nuur we saw **Golden Eagle**, **Cinereous Vultures** and several **Steppe Eagles** in their breeding area. A bit later we reached Bayan Nuur and started birding straight away. What a change of scenery and habitat again! This time the lake was hardly visible through the reeds. There were very birdy marshes on both sides of the main road. Close to a bridge we had several **Pale Martins** amongst **Sand Martins**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, **Black-faced Bunting**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, singing **Oriental Reed Warblers**, **Citrine Wagtail** and a male **Pallas's Reed Bunting** of the local subspecies *lydiae*. In the large marshes north of the road we had 3 pairs of elegant **White-naped Cranes**, some with small chicks. And also saw 80 **Swan Geese**, **Pacific Golden Plover** and two male **Falcated Ducks**, about 10 **Eastern Marsh Harriers**, one **Hen Harrier**, an **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Red-crested Pochards**

and lots of singing **Richard's Pipits**. A female **White-headed Duck** was again a bonus since its normal distribution is more to the west.



Bayan Nuur scenery with drinking and bathing horses

In the reed beds we found singing **Paddyfield Warblers**, **Oriental Reed Warblers**, a **Bluethroat** and calling **Bearded Reedlings**. On the main lake there were again enormous numbers of **White-winged Terns**, both **Common** and **Ruddy Shelduck** and lots of other common ducks and waterbirds. Smaller numbers of waders compared to Kholbooj Nuur, but including **Dunlin**, **Long-toed stint**, **Temminck's Stint**, **Asian Dowitcher**, **Eastern Black-tailed Godwit**, breeding plumaged **Marsh Sandpipers** and **Black-winged Stilts**. Several large **Mongolian Toads** were crawling around and a **Pallas's Gull** and a few **Black Terns** flew by.

In the evening we made a walk towards the marshes south of the road while Bogi took all our batteries to the nearby town to charge them. In this marsh we found more breeding **Whooper swan**, **Swan Goose**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Common Crane**, **White-naped Crane** and 6 **Eastern Spot-billed Ducks**. In the dry fields large flocks of **Demoiselle Cranes** were feeding. Some of us returned and waited near the bridge to hear or see rails until very late into the night, before going to bed under an amazing star lit sky.

Sunday 02/06/2019

Those at the camp didn't hear any rails, just singing **Common Reed bunting**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Isabelline Wheatears** and displaying **Asian Dowitcher**, but Miguel stayed up very late and was back at the marsh at 4 o'clock and heard singing **Baillon's Crake**, **Spotted Crake** and calling **Brown-eared Rails**. The early bird catches the worm...

We walked the north-side of the marshy area and had 8 singing **Paddyfield Warblers** close by in the reeds. On the main lake we saw 1 **Red-necked Phalarope**, large numbers of **Little Stints**, **Gull-billed Terns**, **Black-necked Grebes**, 2 **Falcated Ducks** and breeding plumage **Marsh Sandpipers**. Along the marsh Joost found another **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler**.

After breakfast we drove towards Ulaanbaatar, stopping for lunch in a valley just west of the capital. The steppe was full of grasshoppers, attracting a **Lesser Kestrel** and an adult male **Amur Falcon**, both foraging on these insects. We made a stop at a large supermarket in



Paddyfield Warbler at Bayan Nuur

Ulaanbaatar, refueling and stocking up for the next week ahead. Trying to avoid the busy road through the capital, it was a very strange feeling after driving in the desolated outback of Mongolia. From the eastside of the city we drove up a very rough track to our next destination the taiga forest of Gorkhi Terelj National Park.

At the edge of the park we explored a river valley. This boggy valley with low willows is the breeding habitat of **Lanceolated Warbler**, but probably this late migrant had not arrived yet, we could not find it. But we did find several singing male **Pine Buntings**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Oriental Cuckoo**, **Wryneck**, a pair of **Siberian Stonechat**, singing **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher** and 2 singing males **Black-faced Bunting**. Two guys of our group flushed a pair of **Daurian Partridges**.

We arrived pretty late at the intended campsite higher up in a Terelj NP. **Oriental Turtle Dove** and **Red-flanked Bluetail** sang close by. At dusk we climbed a very steep hill behind camp to try for **Ural Owl**, but only heard one calling very far away. During the night some of us heard calling **Red Fox** and 2 howling **Wolves**.

Monday 03/06/2019

At dawn, everyone was keen on finding a caper or two and *Siberian Tit*, so we drove up a side valley with one of the vans and climbed the steep hills covered in mature larch and Siberian Pine-forest. We found a noisy group of about 12 **Spotted Nutcrackers** with 1 **Siberian Jay** mixed in, they were probably mobbing an owl or some other avian predator.

Other birds included **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Red Crossbill**, **Oriental Turtle Dove** and several singing **Red-flanked Bluetails**. On the top of the hill we found droppings of our main target **Black-billed Capercaillie**, but unfortunately did not hear or see any displaying. Just a few saw one flying off. There were many signs that pine seeds were being harvested on a massive scale. Using some kind of large wooden hammer to knock at the pines and make the cones drop. Strange to see this inside a national park.... Descending from the hill and we saw several singing **Pallas's Leaf Warblers**, a displaying pair of **Brown Shrike** and more **Red-flanked Bluetails**. Also found the feathers of a dead **Hazel Grouse** and saw a noisy **Red Squirrel** in a pine. The valley floor was covered in butting willows. A brief search evolved, but there was no trace of the hoped for *Lanceolated Warbler* or *Chinese Bush Warbler*. There were plenty of more common songbirds with singing **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Black-faced Bunting**, lots of **Yellow-browed Warblers**, **Common Rosefinch**, **Siberian Lesser Whitethroat** and **Dusky Warblers**, but we were lacking the one goodie that would energize us!

After enjoying a good breakfast, we returned to the valley exploring the birch forest at the base of the hill. This forest looked excellent for *Hazel Grouse*. Despite an intensive search we didn't find a trace of this elusive bird. We did find clear signs of **White-backed Woodpecker** activity. Back at camp it was decided that we would be better off leaving the area, because there was no sign of our main targets here.

There were likely much better chances in other forests parts nearby, so we broke camp one day ahead of schedule. A **Bearded Vulture** and a **Northern Goshawk** circled above our heads.

So we left this part of Terelj NP and drove on along some extremely bumpy tracks right across the wooded Khentii mountains, through magnificent valleys and crossing passes high above them. On the second mountain pass we went into the birch forest to try for *Hazel Grouse*, again no luck with that species. However, we did have one adult male **Siberian Roe Deer**, **Siberian Chipmunks**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Red-flanked Bluetail** and a family party of **Greater Spotted Woodpeckers**. It started raining, so we drove on and crossing the Tuul River in the village of Terelj. Just east of the village we stopped at a rocky hill and searched in vain for **Meadow Bunting**. Only a pair of **Pied Wheatear** and **Common Rock Thrush** was found. There was a nice riverine forest in the valley with massive poplar trees. A nice walk in this shaded valley produced our first **Eastern Marsh Tits** and **Eurasian Treecreeper**. We also had a very nice light phase **Booted Eagle** giving good views, singing **Wryneck** and **Daurian Redstart**.

Driving further east through a wide river valley we came across a feeding flock of **Pine Buntings** and a pair of **White-cheeked Starlings**. Sometime later we birded the willow thickets along the river seeing 2 female **Goosander**, good numbers of singing **Black-faced Buntings**, **Pine Buntings**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Dusky Warblers** everywhere and **Long-tailed Tit**. No sign of the hoped for Long-tailed Rosefinch though.

Going up a side valley and then from the mountain pass we drove into an open larch forest. Much less dense than the forests we were used to. Being skeptical about the presence of our still better-views-desired *Black-billed Capercaillies*, camp was being set up. Miguel went investigating for signs of the birds in the forest, when suddenly he hurried back into the camp rushing for his binoculars and scope while shouting: "CAPER – CAPER – CAPER". He had just seen a male **Black-billed Capercaillie** close by... Instantly we all got our gear and followed him into the forest. About 80m on, there at the forest edge, it was still there, an adult male! Seemingly frozen solid as it hadn't moved an inch. All were ecstatic, taking pictures and enjoying this incredible observation. Everyone was delighted that our choice to leave the touristy part of Terelj NP had paid off so quickly. At dinner we celebrated with a good glass of whisky, well deserved.

Tuesday 04/06/2019

During the night it had rained a bit at first, but when the front had passed, it started freezing to - 4 °C. But waking up with the sound of displaying **Black-billed Capercaillies** all around us, our frozen tents were barely noticed... Sneaking out of our tents into the forest, we quickly located them. What a show! Everyone in the group got good views of several capers. This is what we came for! Singing **Red-flanked Bluetails** and **Oriental Cuckoos** were also around. The quest for the other boogie bird was on... In the open forest near the pass were several singing **Pine Buntings**, **Blyth's Pipits** and **Water Pipits**. On the other side of the pass - by the way - one of the most beautiful places we visited in this awesome country, we entered a birch rich part of the forest and started searching for **Hazel Grouse**. Soon we heard a male calling and after some intense minutes that looked like hours, we all were rewarded with fantastic views of this cryptic bird as it ran around us at only a few meters.



This is how one wants to see Black-billed Capercaillie...

Re-loaded with energy and having seen all our targets we decided to continue towards our final birding destination of the trip: the Khurkh Valley.

Driving through a wide river valley towards the road between Ulaanbaatar and Baganoor two **Sakers** were seen in the steppe. After lunch on a windswept mountain pass, we reached a nice zone with scrubs at the base of a forested mountain and went to explore. It looked perfect breeding habitat for *Chinese Bush Warbler*. Bogi began to think this species had not arrived yet, as we failed to locate them

again. We split up trying to maximize our chances of finding anything. With results, as some of the group saw another fine male **Hazel Grouse**, someone else had a female **Willow Grouse** and yet another guy flushed an **Ural Owl**. Other guys completely missed these three cracking species, but enjoyed more common birds: **Black-faced Buntings**, **Pallas's Leaf Warblers**, **Brown Shrikes** and more...

Entering the Khurkh Valley, we found 20 **Eastern Black-tailed Godwits** and an **Eurasian Curlew** of the subspecies *orientalis*, showing an incredibly long bill.

Once in the main valley we started seeing foraging male **Amur Falcons**, **Demoiselle Cranes**, breeding **White-naped Cranes**. A **White-cheeked Starling** was the best on the passerine front. The valley started to get wider with agricultural fields and marshy lakes. The Khurkh Valley is also locally known as the Valley of the Cranes and it surely lived up to its name, when we found yet another species of crane: 5 feeding **Hooded Cranes** at close range!

Battering the wind, we put up camp close to a bird rich marshy lake. Scope views of breeding **White-naped** – and **Common Cranes**, **Swan Goose**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Horned Grebe**, **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Common Tern** and **Mongolian Gull** and lots of ducks, including 22 **Common Goldeneye** and **Falcated Duck**. A **Hobby** and our first adult female **Amur Falcon** were hawking for insects.

We really had a super day today, with great species.

Wednesday 05/06/2019

The song of **Isabelline Wheatear** woke us up, such a varied repertoire... simply fantastic!

Early morning was spent birding the nearby lake. With observations of **Black-winged Stilt**, breeding plumaged **Spotted Redshank**, **Temminck's Stint**, 2 pairs of **Falcated Duck**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Long-toed Stint**, **Black-tailed Godwit**, **Black Tern**, **White-winged Tern** and lots of singing **Skylark** already made our day. Then a migrant **Thick-billed Warbler** was discovered hiding under one of the vans and three cute **Isabelline Wheatear** chicks were sitting next to their burrow, learning how to catch food.

After breakfast, camp was cleared and continued our drive through the valley towards Khurkh Bird Observatory.

At a second lake we saw similar species, though a migrating **Black Stork** was something new. At some agricultural fields we scanned for *Great Bustard*. No bustard, but rewarded with **Hobby**, **Amur Falcon**, **Demoiselle Crane**, **Mongolian Larks** and **White-naped Cranes**. A third small lake lined with reed beds held several singing **Common Reed Buntings**. We also had 4 breeding pairs of **White-naped Cranes**, **Swan Goose**, **Horned Grebes**, **Eastern Marsh Harriers**, **Hobby**, **Black-tailed Godwit** and lots of ducks. Again a pair of **Pied Harriers** was found. Bogi went talking with some of the researchers that were trapping insects to get info about presence or absence of our next and main target to come to this valley: *Siberian Crane*. Bad news. No Siberian Cranes had been seen so far was the impression Bogi gave when he came back. As we were wondering about our chances of seeing this much sought after and highly endangered species, we drove up a small hill, only to discover that on the next small lake awaited the ultimate prize of Mongolian birding: 1 adult **SIBERIAN CRANE!!!!!!** All of us were super happy with this beautiful bird, the fifth crane species of the trip. Bogi's poker-face didn't foul everyone after all... This fourth lake also had good numbers of **Common Crane**, **White-naped Crane** and **Demoiselle Crane**, giving a good opportunity to compare the differences in size. We kept our distance to these rare and endangered species, so no quality pictures...

Arriving at Khurkh Bird Observatory, we set up camp south of the ringing area. We were welcomed by a pair of displaying **Golden Eagles** and 8 adult **Amur Falcons**, fighting with **Magpies** in an attempt to take over their nests. Willows near the ringing station were checked and held **Dusky Warbler**, **Little Bunting**, nest-building **White-crowned Penduline Tit** and we heard the buzzing song of a **Chinese Bush Warbler**. We met with 2 young Swedish ringers, showing us a male **Oriental Cuckoo** they had just caught. Relaxing at camp, two **Hobbies**, a resident pair of **Sakers** and some **Cinereous Vultures** made an appearance.

The rest of the afternoon was largely spent relaxing near camp. With warm, sunny weather it was also one of the only moments during the trip that the relentless Mongolian wind finally dropped. After a nice hot (!) shower we felt re-born. The sky above camp was never boring with plenty of birds of prey, 5 species of falcon: **Amur**, **Hobby**, **Lesser-** and **Common Kestrel** and **Saker Falcon**, **Golden Eagle**, **Black-eared Kites**, etc...



Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler - adult - note the unstreaked rump

Our 2 new Swedish friends returned to show us some birds they had caught, making a lifelong dream come true for Miguel, as he could finally hold a **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** in his hands. He was like a child in a candy store as he was pointing out all the characteristics of the cracking bird. They also showed us three nice **Hawfinches**.

Late afternoon the quest for more new and special birds continued, as we checked some more

agricultural fields for bustards. Pretty soon we were rewarded with three displaying adult male **Great Bustards** of the local subspecies '*dybowski*'. The bustards kept their distance but still had great views in the scope.

In the evening the Swedes showed us another great bird: **Thick-billed Warbler**. What a day again...

Thursday 06/06/2019

At dawn the willows near the ringing station were thoroughly checked for migrants, largely avoiding the mistnets of course to not hamper the ringing scheme. Seeing lots of **Dusky Warblers**, a breeding plumage male **Yellow-breasted Bunting** in full song, **Little Buntings**, **Black-faced Buntings**, at least 4 **Thick-billed Warblers**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, displaying **Common Snipe**, 3 calling **Brown-eared Rails** and a **Red Fox**. Evidently the **Amur Falcons** were still in place and the Swedes showed us 2 **Thick-billed Warblers**, 1 male **Siberian Rubythroat** and best of all a female **Siberian Blue Robin**. A nice start of the day!

At the station we met another Belgian, Lyndon Kearsley and his team of researchers. They planned on netting and satellite-tagging some **Common Cuckoos**. Now all came into place when the Swedes were talking about: "the cuckoo-people will come tomorrow"... The **Oriental Cuckoo** was caught again late yesterday evening and as things went, we thus saw the first ever **Oriental Cuckoo** to be satellite tagged! Here you can read more about the project and follow the cuckoos in real time: <https://birdingbeijing.com/the-mongolia-cuckoo-project/>



2cy male Amur falcon

After breakfast we drove back to the main valley checking some lakes and willow groves for migrants. Notable observations off 7 pairs of **White-naped Cranes**, lots of **Black-necked Grebes**, 1 male **Falcated Duck**, **Swan Goose**, 3 pairs of **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, 2 **Marsh Sandpipers**, 2 **Asian Dowitchers** and the first pair of **Little Grebes** of the trip. The lake was packed with ducks included 18 **Garganey** and we discovered another pair of **Pied Harrier**!

More to the west we reached a lake with some nice reed beds. Here we saw a pair of **White-tailed Eagle**, more **White-naped Cranes**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Booted Eagle**, **Swan Goose**, **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Eastern Marsh Harriers**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, **Citrine Wagtail** and male **Lesser Kestrel**. In the reedbeds we had **Common Reed Bunting** and another skulking **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler**, while the air was filled with singing **Eurasian Skylarks**, **Mongolian Larks**, **Asian Short-toed Larks** and **Richard's Pipits**.

The whole area was very wet and swampy, so it was difficult to walk. The melting permafrost under our feet was creating deep holes in the lush soil, challenging our progress even more.

A small isolated bush in the middle of a boggy field and with no other trees anywhere near was within sight, THE perfect migrant trap, so we thought or hoped... first we had to cross yet another a wet bog... The bog held three singing **Japanese Quails** and a several displaying **Common Snipe**.

Arriving at the bush, we tactically surrounded the bush and started investigating. All were very keen on finding yet another mega... Soon we were rewarded for our efforts with a gorgeous adult male **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher**, found by Bart! There was also a **Dusky Warbler**, **Brown Shrike**, **Siberian Rubythroat** and **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** in the same few willows.



2nd CY male Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, a true Sib that delighted us in the Khurkh Valley

Hopes were high now for more interesting migrants, so we started birding again at the first willows of the side-valley where the ringing station is located, we were about 4kms from it! All the willows we systematically checked: lots of **Dusky Warblers** and **Pallas's Leaf Warblers** and 4 **Thick-billed Warblers**. We also found 2 more obliging **Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers**, **Two-barred Warbler**, **Black-faced Bunting**, another, this time a female **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** and best of all a female **Siberian Blue Robin**. This Blue Robin must have been another bird than the one that was caught in the morning, because it didn't have a ring.

Weather worsening, we returned to camp for late lunch and we stayed in the tents for a much needed rest during the afternoon as it was raining heavily until six o'clock. In the evening we had a talk with Belgian birder, ringer and satellite tag specialist Lyndon Kearsley and later we assisted them in catching a **Common Cuckoo**. In the dead trees we had tree species of falcons, with **Amur**, **Hobby** and **Lesser Kestrel** all in one three.

At dusk Miguel and Bogi saw a hawking **Common Nightjar** near camp.

Friday 07/06/2019

At dawn some made a long walk through the valley checking the willow bushes. Despite the wind we managed to find 2 **Thick-billed Warblers**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, a calling **Brown-eared Rail**, adult male **Lesser Kestrel** and 3 **Common Cuckoos**. Locations of the cuckoos were shared with Lyndon and his team, who managed to catch and satellite tag all of them! During breakfast there was an intense downpour, but luckily it soon got dry again. We made a final collective effort to see a close-by singing **Chinese Bush Warbler**. And after a long and tough search in the undergrowth we all managed to see this hard to find skulker. In the search we also unearthed another **Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** and heard a singing **Japanese Quail**.

We returned to the willow trees at the start of the valley where we had seen so many great birds yesterday. Now the bushes were practically empty and the strong wind made it almost impossible to find birds. Only bird seen decently was the female **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** again. After lunch it was time to say goodbye to this wonderful place and have some final looks at the local **Amur Falcons**, **Sakers** and **Golden Eagles**.

We left this magical valley and drove southwest across the seemingly empty plains. A short stop at a 1300 year old Turkic gravestone produced a fly-by **Saker**. In the town of Jargalt we did some shopping and took the tar road to Baganuur city. A bit west of Bayanmod we drove up the hills south of the road to find the last campsite and birds of the trip. Wooded hills, lush valleys and fields full of flowers were crossed and found a nice campsite near the edge of a forest. Near camp we had singing **Pine Bunting**, **Siberian Rubythroat** and a fly-by **Peregrine Falcon**, **Hobby** and **Cinereous Vulture**.



Khurkh Bird Observatory in a side valley of the main Khurkh River Valley, also known as the 'Valley of the Cranes'

Saturday 08/06/2019

On the last field day of this trip most of us slept until the sun came over the hilltops. **Chinese Bush Warbler** and **Lanceolated Warbler** were found and most had glimpses of these skulkers. In the sky we saw a pair of **Golden Eagles**, **Booted Eagle**, **Black-eared Kites** and **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**. And one guy of our group flushed a pair of **Daurian Partridge**.

After breakfast we drove towards Baganuur city. Making good time, we veered left for Gungaluut Nuur just south of the coal mines near Baganuur. This lake had two parts, one with deep water and lots of diving ducks and a smaller shallower part with some waders. Along the shores of the shallow side we found a group of five breeding plumaged **Red-necked Stints** forming a larger group with about 20 breeding plumaged **Little Stints**. Nice to compare this difficult to ID pair of species up-close-and-personal. **Marsh Sandpipers**, **Black-winged Stilts**, **Pied Avocet** and a pair of **White-naped Cranes** were almost neglected. The deeper part of the lake had 40 **Common Goldeneye**, 5 **Stejneger's Scoters** and 2 male **Falcated Ducks** amongst many **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Gadwall** and other ducks. Lunch was had near Agyiin Nuur, yet another small lake just to the north of Gungaluut Nuur. Here we ended the birding part of the trip with final views of **Common Goldeneye**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **White-naped Crane** and **Long-legged Buzzard**. A huge **Cinereous Vulture** with a **Steppe Eagle** tailing it put in a final show by circling right over head.

The last stretch of driving saw us going directly to Ulaanbaatar, passing the impressive statue of Chinggis Khaan. We arrived at the Flower Hotel near the city center around late afternoon. Back to reality and a decent shower... In the evening we had a farewell-dinner together with the entire crew. It must be said: all of them did a great job in making it as comfortable and enjoyable as much as possible for us, strangers in their country.

And many more last glasses later celebrated this very successful birding trip with an amazing result of 295 bird species seen or heard!!!

Sunday 09/06/2019

Waking up very early and we got picked up by Bogi for a short drive to Chinggis Khaan airport. There we said goodbye to our fantastic guide. We flew via Moscow Sheremetyevo International Airport and after a long transfer time we boarded for Brussels ending the trip and this great adventure.



A yurt of ger, west of Bayanmod, symbol of the Mongolian nomadic style of life

Systematic list of species recorded during the tour

Taxonomy strictly follows the IOC checklist version 9.2. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

English names are following the same list, with at times regularly other used names added. E.g. Cinereous (Monk) Vulture.

The list only contains species positively identified by at least one of our group. Birds identified by guides or other people only are not included, presumed species neither... Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from Threatened Birds of the World, BirdLife International's website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critically endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened

Birds

Hazel Grouse - *Bonasa bonasia*. After trying at several places, we saw 2 birds at Terelj NP

Black-billed Capercaillie - *Tetrao urogalloides*. Several were seen at several locations by all members of the group. The last place in Terelj NP was the best with several seen displaying.

Black Grouse (H) - *Tetrao tetrix*. Heard morning and evenings at the 'Owl Valley' in the Khentii Mts.

Willow Grouse - *Lagopus lagopus*. Seen in the Khangai Mountains and on our way to the Khurkh Valley.

Altai Snowcock - *Tetraogallus altaicus*. Two distant birds in the Gobi Altai.

Chukar Partridge - *Alectoris chukar*. Several, mostly heard only in the Gobi Altai Mountains.

Daurian Partridge - *Perdix dauurica*. Seen by 2 people in the group.

Common Quail (H) - *Coturnix coturnix*. One was singing mornings and evenings at Ogii Nuur.

Japanese Quail - *Coturnix japonica* (NT). Several were flushed in the Khurkh Valley.

Swan Goose - *Anser cygnoides* (VU). Regular sightings on or near the steppe lakes.

Greylag Goose - *Anser anser ssp. rubrirostris*. Common near water.

Bar-headed Goose - *Anser indicus*. Regular sightings of this beautiful species, albeit with a strange feeling, since in W-Europe it is a common escape.

Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*. At Orog and Ogii Nuur.

Whooper Swan - *Cygnus cygnus*. Fairly common at several lakes.

Common Shelduck - *Tadorna tadorna*. Common.

Ruddy Shelduck - *Tadorna ferruginea*. Widespread. Seen in most locations, sometimes at places surprisingly far from water.

Mandarin Duck - *Aix galericulata*. Seen only at the Tuul River in Ulaanbaatar. Said to be wild.

Garganey - *Spatula querquedula*. Regularly seen.

Northern Shoveler - *Spatula clypeata*. Fairly common at most lakes.

Gadwall - *Mareca strepera*. Common on lakes.

Falcated Duck - *Mareca falcata*. Seen near Ulaanbaatar and then on Ogii and Bayan Nuur.



Falcated Duck, good numbers of this ultra-rare - from European perspective - duck

Eurasian Wigeon - *Mareca penelope*. Regular, but small numbers at several lakes.

Eastern Spot-billed Duck - *Anas zonorhyncha*. At Bayan Nuur and in the Khurkh Valley.

Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*. Regular occurrences.

Northern Pintail - *Anas acuta*. Good numbers on the lakes.

Eurasian Teal - *Anas crecca*. Seen at most lakes, in small numbers, only common in Ulaanbaatar.

Red-crested Pochard - *Netta rufina*. Small numbers at larger lakes.

Common Pochard - *Aythya ferina* (V). Common.

Ferruginous Duck – *Aythya nyroca*. Seen in Ulaanbaatar, Orog and Bayan Nuur, singles.

Tufted Duck - *Aythya fuligula*. Less common than Common Pochard.

Velvet Scoter - *Melanitta fusca*. One with the next species at Ogii Nuur, 2nd record for Mongolia after one that was seen at Gungaluut Nuur a few years earlier.

Stejneger's Scoter - *Melanitta stejnegeri*. Seen at Ogii Nuur in good numbers.

Long-tailed Duck - *Clangula hyemalis*. Seen at Kholbooj Nuur. Rare sighting on trips to Mongolia.

Common Goldeneye - *Bucephala clangula*. Fair numbers were noted on the northern lakes.

Common Merganser - *Mergus merganser*. On the Tuul and the taiga rivers.

Red-breasted Merganser - *Mergus serrator*. Seen at Ogii Nuur. A rare encounter.

White-headed Duck – *Oxyura leucocephala*. A female at Bayan Nuur was an unexpected find, since it occurs normally far more to the west.

European Nightjar - *Caprimulgus europaeus*. One evening, one was hawking insects at Khurkh B.O.

White-throated Needletail - *Hirundapus caudacutus*. One migrant was seen over our hotel on the 19th.

Common Swift - *Apus apus*. Regular in open places and near villages/towns. All were ssp. *pekinensis*

Pacific Swift - *Apus pacificus*. Equally common encountered as previous species.

Great Bustard - *Otis tarda* ssp. *dybowskii* (VU). At fields in the Khurkh Valley, 3 males were displaying.



Great Bustard ssp. dybowski

Oriental Cuckoo - *Cuculus optatus*. Often heard in the taiga. The first ever tagged Oriental Cuckoo was caught in our presence.

Common Cuckoo - *Cuculus canorus*. Common in the mountains and in the taiga, occurring side by side with the previous species.

Pallas's Sandgrouse - *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*. Regular in the first half of the tour.

Rock Pigeon - *Columba livia*. Wild/genuine ones at Yolyn Am Gorge and Bayunug Sum Gorge.

Hill Pigeon - *Columba rupestris*. Bridge near Khongoryn Els and Bayunug Sum Gorge

Eurasian Collared Dove - *Streptopelia decaocto*. Few birds seen only.

Oriental Turtle Dove - *Streptopelia orientalis ssp. meena*. Seen on a few days, uncommon.

Brown-cheeked Rail (H) - *Rallus indicus*. Heard at Bayan Lake and in the Khurkh Valley

Baillon's Crake (H) - *Porzana pusilla*. Heard at Bayan Lake.

Spotted Crake (H) - *Porzana porzana*. Heard at Bayan Nuur.

Eurasian Coot - *Fulica atra*. Common throughout on lakes and ponds.

Siberian Crane - *Leucogeranus leucogeranus* (CR). One found in the Khurkh Valley, the reason we went this far east!

White-naped Crane - *Antigone vipio* (VU). Seen in numbers at the bigger lakes, some not yet breeding, others with small young.

Demoiselle Crane - *Anthropoides virgo*. Common sight on the steppes and valleys.

Common Crane - *Grus grus*. Less common than the previous species, but still regularly encountered.

Hooded Crane - *Grus monacha*. Five birds foraging in the Khurkh Valley was a bonus.



Hooded Cranes, one of 5 species of Crane we saw on this trip

- Little Grebe** - *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. A pair was foraging on a lake in the Khurkh Valley.
- Great Crested Grebe** - *Podiceps cristatus*. Regular at the greater lakes.
- Horned Grebe** - *Podiceps auritus* (VU). Several encounters at Kholbooj and Ogii Nuur.
- Black-necked Grebe** - *Podiceps nigricollis*. At Ogii and Bayan Nuur.
- Black-winged Stilt** - *Himantopus himantopus*. A regular bird at the steppe and desert lakes.
- Pied Avocet** - *Recurvirostra avosetta*. Common wader of the steppe and desert lakes.
- Northern Lapwing** - *Vanellus vanellus* (NT). Regular in the steppes and Khurkh Valley.
- Pacific Golden Plover** - *Pluvialis fulva*. At Kholbooj Nuur and Ogii Nuur.
- Common Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius hiaticula*. Seen at Kholbooj Nuur. Apparently rare in Mongolia.
- Little Ringed Plover** - *Charadrius dubius*. Regular observations.
- Kentish Plover** - *Charadrius alexandrinus*. Common at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Lesser Sand Plover** - *Charadrius mongolus*. Many at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Greater Sand Plover** - *Charadrius leschenaultii*. Small numbers were found in the Gobi and at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Oriental Plover** - *Charadrius veredus*. 4-5 birds seen. Great show when birds take flight during display, very petrel like.
- Whimbrel** - *Numenius phaeopus*. 3 at Kholbooj Nuur
- Eurasian Curlew** - *Numenius arquata orientalis*. One at the Khurkh Valley.
- Eastern Black-tailed Godwit** - *Limosa limosa melanuroides* (NT). Many and regularly at the steppe lakes.
- Ruddy Turnstone** - *Arenaria interpres*. At both Kholbooj and Ogii Nuur a few birds.
- Ruff** - *Philomachus pugnax*. Only in numbers at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Broad-billed Sandpiper** - *Calidris falcinellus*. A few at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Curlew Sandpiper** - *Calidris ferruginea* (NT). Only at Kholbooj Nuur.
- Temminck's Stint** - *Calidris temminckii*. Regular and typically at sometimes small waters.
- Long-toed Stint** - *Calidris subminuta*. Frequent encounters, often together with the previous species.
- Red-necked Stint** - *Calidris ruficollis*. Hard work to find one in the big groups of Little Stint and/or Sanderlings. We found a couple at Kholbooj Nuur and then splendid comparable with Little Stints when several birds were foraging at Gungaluut Nuur near Ulaanbaatar.
- Sanderling** - *Calidris alba*. Many at Kholbooj Nuur
- Dunlin** - *Calidris alpina*. Few noted at Kholbooj Nuur and Ogii Nuur.
- Little Stint** - *Calidris minuta*. Many at the steppe lakes and 10s at Gungaluut Nuur.
- Asian Dowitcher** - *Limnodromus semiplamatus* (NT). Craking summer plumaged birds at the steppe lakes, but also at the waste water factory in UB and in Khurkh Valley. Curious weird display sound!



Asian Dowitcher with 'Eastern' Black-tailed Godwit frequented wet meadows or marshy edges of the steppe lakes

Eurasian Woodcock - *Scolopax rusticola*. Flushed on the 19th May at the Tuul River and one in the semi-desert that almost landed on someones lap.

Pintail snipe - *Gallinago stenura*. Only seen in the first half of the trip.

Swinhoe's Snipe - *Gallinago megala*. Good observations and comparable with Pintail Snipe in the field, but only identified for sure on the computer screen. The first day near the power plant in Ulaanbaatar.



Swinhoe's Snipe (left) and Pin-tail Snipe (right)

Common Snipe - *Gallinago gallinago*. Regular encounters, often displaying.

Red-necked Phalarope - *Phalaropus lobatus*. Kholbooj Nuur and at Bayan Nuur, a few.

Common Sandpiper - *Actitis hypoleucos*. Regular encounters.

Green Sandpiper - *Tringa ochropus*. Seen on the first and second day near UB.

Common Redshank - *Tringa totanus*. Regular, in numbers.

Marsh Sandpiper - *Tringa stagnatilis*. Few were seen at shallow waters.

Wood Sandpiper - *Tringa glareola*. Again, Kholbooj Nuur and Ogii Nuur were the hotspots.

Spotted Redshank - *Tringa erythropus*. Few birds in splendid breeding plumage.

Common Greenshank - *Tringa nebularia*. Common at Kholbooj Nuur and also seen in the Khurkh Valley.

Slender-billed Gull - *Chroicocephalus genei*. One at Orog Nuur.

Brown-headed Gull - *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*. Surprisingly frequently encountered, but not easily discovered between the many Black-headed Gulls.

Black-headed Gull - *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. Common at the steppe lakes.

Relict Gull - *Ichthyaetus relictus*. At Kholbooj Nuur and Ogii Nuur, very good views at close range at times of this enigmatic gull.

Pallas's Gull - *Ichthyaetus ichthyaeus*. Not common but seen at same places as Relict Gull.

Common Gull - *Larus canus* ssp. *heinei*. Carefull searching for that one more, revealed two at Orog and Ogii Nuur.

Vega (Mongolian) Gull - *Larus vegae* ssp. *mongolicus*. Common throughout.

Gull-billed Tern - *Gelochelidon nilotica*. Many seen, also at breeding colonies mixed with gulls.

Caspian Tern - *Hydroprogne caspia*. Frequently seen at the steppe lakes.

Little Tern - *Sternula albifrons*. At Kholbooj Nuur a few and one or two at Ogii Nuur.

Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo longipennis*. Common, nice to see numbers of this ssp., from a European perspective...

Whiskered Tern - *Chlidonias hybrida*. A couple were seen in a large group of White-winged Terns at Orog Nuur.

White-winged Tern - *Chlidonias leucopterus*. Common and seen in large numbers at some places.

Black Tern - *Chlidonias niger*. Seen hat Kholbooj and Ogii Nuur, in small numbers.

Black-throated Loon - *Gavia arctica*. One at Ogii Nuur close to shore in immaculate breeding plumage.

Black Stork - *Ciconia nigra*. Two observations of migrating birds.

Great Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax carbo*. Common.

Eurasian Spoonbill - *Platalea leucorodia*. Seen at the steppe lakes.

Eurasian Bittern - *Botaurus stellaris*. Several birds taking air at Orog Nuur.

Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*. Common.

Great Egret - *Ardea alba*. Seen at the steppe lakes.

Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*. One in Ulaanbaatar and one roosting in the Gobi Desert.

Bearded Vulture - *Gypaetus barbatus* (NT). Common and spectacular sightings, even one swallowing a sizeable bone.

Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard - *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. Several small groups during the first week of the trip were migrating north.

Himalayan Vulture - *Gyps himalayensis* (NT). Common in the Gobi Altai.

Cinereous (Monk) Vulture - *Aegypius monachus* (NT). Common and seen all over the country. Sometimes in large groups. Good to see good numbers of this near-threatened bird.

Greater Spotted Eagle - *Clanga clanga*. One definite sighting at our campsite on the way to Ogii Nuur and one in the Khurkh.

Booted Eagle - *Hieraetus pennatus*. Several sightings of singles.

Steppe Eagle - *Aquila nipalensis* (EN). Regularly seen in the steppes and taiga.

Eastern Imperial Eagle - *Aquila heliaca* (VU). One was seen by one member of the group when watching the Hodgson's Bushchats.

Golden Eagle - *Aquila chrysaetos*. Regular and often good observations at close range, e.g. at the Yolyn Am gorge.

Japanese Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter gularis*. Surprise for our guide, we saw 3 individuals during the trip.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk - *Accipiter nisus*. Couple of fly-by's at several places.

Northern Goshawk - *Accipiter gentilis*. One sighting in the Terelj National Park.

Western Marsh Harrier - *Circus aeruginosus*. Two sightings: one at Orog and one at Ogii Nuur.

Eastern Marsh Harrier - *Circus spilonotus*. Seen at the steppe lakes and in Khurkh Valley. At Bayan Nuur 10+ birds together.

Hen Harrier - *Circus cyaneus*. One female-type at Ogii Nuur.

Pied harrier - *Circus melanoleucos*. Twice a pair was seen, first seen at Ogii Nuur (very rare this far west!) and again in the Khurkh Valley.

Black-eared Kite - *Milvus migrans lineatus*. Very common.

Pallas's Fish Eagle - *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* (VU). A brief sighting of an immature at Ogii Nuur by one member of the group while watching a pair of Relict Gulls...

White-tailed Eagle - *Haliaeetus albicilla*. At Ogii Nuur an adult and 2 adults at the Khurkh Valley.



Bearded Vulture, just like Cinereous Vulture a common sight!

Upland Buzzard - *Buteo hemilasius*. Common in the steppes and Khangai Mountains.

Eastern Buzzard - *Buteo japonicus*. Regular, some very dark birds, especially in the Gobi Altai.

Long-legged Buzzard - *Buteo rufinus*. Seen only in the Gobi Desert.

Steppe buzzard - *Buteo buteo vulpinus*. Few birds seen, in the steppes.

Eurasian Eagle-Owl - *Bubo bubo*. One adult in Bayunug Sum Gorge.

Ural Owl - *Strix uralensis*. One was seen in the Khangai taiga and one at the Terelj NP.

Little Owl - *Athene noctua plumipes*. One was seen in the steppes and one in the Khangai Mountains.

Long-eared Owl - *Asio otus*. At the Tuul River one was flushed, clearly a migrant.

Eurasian Hoopoe - *Upupa epops*. Regular sightings.

Eurasian Wryneck - *Jynx torquilla*. At the Tuul River, in plantations and then in the taiga forest.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker - *Picoides tridactylus*. A bonus after seeing our first Black-billed Capercaillie in the taiga forest along the Tuin River. Then 2 more were seen in the taiga.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker - *Dryobates minor*. One at the Tuul River and then once more in the taiga.

Great Spotted Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos major*. Seen in the taiga forest in the Khangai Mountains.

White-backed Woodpecker - *Dendrocopos leucotos*. Only seen on the first day at the Tuul River.

Black Woodpecker - *Dryocopus martius*. Seen in the Khangai Mountains.

Grey-headed Woodpecker - *Picus canus*. At the 'owl valley' one was found after an intense search.

Lesser Kestrel - *Falco naumanni*. At Khongoryn Els and again in the Khurkh Valley and again west of UB.

Common Kestrel - *Falco tinnunculus*.

Sparse sightings of mostly singles.

Amur Falcon - *Falco amurensis*.

Second day one flew over the Mongolia Hotel and then common at the Khurkh Valley Bird Observatory.

Eurasian Hobby - *Falco subbuteo*.

One hunting hirundines on the first day and then regular in the Khurkh Valley.

Saker Falcon - *Falco cherrug milvipes* (EN). Regular sightings of this impressive falcons.

Peregrine Falcon - *Falco peregrinus*.

Two observations of singles.

Brown Shrike - *Lanius cristatus*. Seen at many places, common.

Isabelline Shrike - *Lanius isabellinus*.

Only found in the Gobi-Altai region, but frequent encounters.

Steppe Grey Shrike - *Lanius excubitor* ssp. *pallidirostris*. Technically again lumped with Great Grey Shrike... but only found in the (semi-)desert at Khongoryn Els.

Siberian Jay - *Perisoreus infaustus*. Disappointing views of one in Terelj NP, part of a gang of Spotted Nutcrackers, scolding at something we couldn't find.

Eurasian (Brandt's) Jay - *Garrulus glandarius* ssp. *brandti*. A few in the taiga zone of this distinct subspecies.

Azure-winged Magpie - *Cyanopica cyanus*. Only at the Tuul River near Ulaanbaatar. Once found, very confiding.

Eurasian Magpie - *Pica pica* ssp. *leucoptera*. Pretty common in Mongolia, but absent in the south.

Henderson's Ground Jay - *Podoces hendersoni*. Restricted to the semi-desert near Khongoryn Els. Despite its large size, quite difficult to find, but once found, very confiding.

Spotted Nutcracker - *Nucifraga caryocatactes*. A large group was scolding at something in the Terelj National Park. Only seen in the northern taiga.



Brown Shrikes in Terelj NP, common both on migration in the south and in the north on the breeding grounds

Red-billed Chough - *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax*. Common throughout.

Daurian Jackdaw - *Coloeus dauuricus*. Many around Ulaanbaatar and in the 'northern' part of our journey.

Eastern Rook - *Corvus frugilegus ssp. pastinator*. Common everywhere.

Oriental crow - *Corvus corone ssp. orientalis*. Seen at most places.

Northern Raven - *Corvus corax*. Same as previous two species, common.

Coal Tit - *Periparus ater*. Only in the Terelj NP, few.

Eastern Marsh Tit - *Poecile palustris ssp. brevirostris*. Seen in the Terelj NP at a small river valley.

Willow Tit - *Poecile montanus*. Common in the taiga zone.

Azure Tit - *Cyanistes cyanus*. Only seen at the Tuul River near Ulaanbaatar. Several were singing.



Azure Tit, a much sought after Siberian specialty

Great Tit - *Parus major*. Uncommon, scattered. Plantations and forests.

White-crowned Penduline Tit - *Remiz coronatus*. In deciduous woods and willows along rivers, once heard, sometimes very confiding.

Bearded Reedling - *Panurus biarmicus ruscicus*. Only heard at Bayan Nuur.

Eurasian Skylark - *Alauda arvensis*. Heard in the steppes and in open places in the north.

Crested Lark - *Galerida cristata*. Only one or two seen in the beginning of the trip.

Horned Lark - *Eremophila alpestris ssp. brandti*. Common everywhere.

Mongolian Short-toed Lark - *Calandrella dukhunensis*. A small party of about 10-15 was seen at only one place in the steppes.

Mongolian Lark - *Melanocorypha mongolica*. This wonderful lark was common in the steppes and in the Khurkh Valley.

Asian Short-toed Lark - *Alaudala cheleensis*. Common in the steppes.

Sand Martin - *Riparia riparia*. Common near water.

Pale Martin - *Riparia diluta*. Seen with Sand Martins at Bayan Lake, nice to compare!

Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica ssp. tytleri*. Common throughout.

Eurasian Crag Martin - *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*. Frequently seen in the Altai mountains.

Common House Martin - *Delichon urbicum ssp. lagopodum*. Only in Shivee and Yolyn Am gorges.

Asian House Martin - *Delichon dasypus*. One or two seen collecting nest material in Shivee Am gorge.

Long-tailed Tit - *Aegithalos caudatus*. Seen in the Khangai Mountains. Few.

Hume's Leaf Warbler - *Phylloscopus humei*. Seen and heard frequently in the taiga zone.

Yellow-browed Warbler - *Phylloscopus inornatus*. Common in the taiga zone.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler - *Phylloscopus proregulus*. Seen in the plantations on migration, but also singing in the taiga zone and at e.g. Terelj NP.

Radde's Warbler - *Phylloscopus schwarzi*. One singing in willow-tickets in the Khangai taiga-zone.

Sulphur-bellied warbler - *Phylloscopus griseolus*. Seen and heard briefly at the Yolyn Am gorge.

Dusky Warbler - *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. Common everywhere and easily seen

Siberian Chiffchaff - *Phylloscopus collybita ssp. tristis*. Seen as a migrant and also breeding at Terelj NP.



Arctic warbler (top left), Two-barred warbler (bottom left) and Dusky warbler, Pallas's leaf warbler and Siberian chiffchaff (top right to bottom)

Two-barred Warbler - *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*. Many seen and heard, hard to find the diagnostic features to ID it from Arctic and Greenish Warbler.

Greenish Warbler - *Phylloscopus trochiloides ssp. viridanus*. Frequently in the taiga zone from Khangai Mountains eastwards.

Arctic Warbler - *Phylloscopus borealis*. Less common than previous two species. But still nice to compare with these, since they were often in mixed groups.

Oriental Reed Warbler - *Acrocephalus orientalis*. At Bayan Nuur and in the Khurkh Valley. Singing.

Paddyfield Warbler - *Acrocephalus agricola*. One seen on migration and then more frequently at reedbeds at Bayan Nuur.

Thick-billed Warbler - *Arundinax aedon*. Late migrant, but good views or birds trapped at sometimes tree-less places as e.g. one was found under our vehicles one morning in the Khurkh Valley.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler - *Locustella certhiola*. Very confiding in the short grass at Orog Nuur and then again in the Khurkh Valley. Great to have nice view of this super skulker!

Lanceolated Warbler - *Locustella lanceolata*. One was seen at our last campsite by few members of our group.

Chinese Bush Warbler - *Locustella tacsanowskia*. Late migrant and only heard and seen (luckily quite well after long wait) on the last days of the trip.

Siberian Lesser Whitethroat - *Sylvia curruca* ssp. *blythi*. Many at several locations. Quite different song than its European counterparts.

Asian Desert Warbler - *Sylvia nana*. In a sexual grove in the semi-desert of the Gobi.

Common Whitethroat - *Sylvia communis*. Few birds seen at the Terelj NP.

Eurasian Nuthatch - *Sitta europaea* ssp. *asiatica*. At the Khangai Mountains commonly seen and heard.

Wallcreeper - *Tichodroma muraria*. Seen at Yolyn Am, even a pair displaying and mating!

Eurasian Treecreeper - *Certhia familiaris*. Only a few at Khangai and in Terelj NP.

White-cheeked Starling - *Spodiopsar cineraceus*. Seen in several places. Small groups or solo birds, like at the Tuul River.

Daurian Starling - *Agropsar sturninus*. One at a small plantation near a well on route to Khongoryn Els. Rare species in these parts of Mongolia.

Rosy Starling - *Pastor roseus*. Small groups at Orog Nuur and in the steppes.

White's Thrush - *Zoothera aurea*. One flushed at the Tuul River and then heard in the Khangai Mountains.

Eyebrowed Thrush - *Turdus obscurus*. Many during the first part of the trip, migrants that quickly moved on northwards.

Black-throated Thrush - *Turdus atrogularis*. One amongst many other thrushes on the first day.

Red-throated Thrush - *Turdus ruficollis*. Many migrating, but also breeding pairs in the taiga.

Naumann's Thrush - *Turdus naumanni*. First days seen near the Tuul River in Ulaanbaatar.

Dusky Thrush - *Turdus eunomus*. Somewhat more common later migrant than the previous species. Frequently seen in the first half of the trip.

Fieldfare - *Turdus pilaris*. One amongst thrushes at the Tuul River is a good record for Ulaanbaatar.

Dark-sided Flycatcher - *Muscicapa sibirica*. One at Orog Nuur and in the Khurk Valley.

Asian Brown Flycatcher - *Muscicapa dauurica*. Regular encounters of both migrants and territorial birds in the taiga.

Siberian Blue Robin - *Larvivora cyane*. One female type spotted in the field and then the same day one handled at Khurkh Bird Observatory.

Bluethroat - *Luscinia svecica*. One at Bayan Nuur was the only one of the entire trip.



Asian Desert Warbler in a Sexual grove in the semi-desert of the Gobi



White-cheeked Starling (top), Daurian Starling (left) and Rosy Starling (right)

Siberian Rubythroat - *Calliope calliope*. Regular encounters, both on migration and birds on the breeding grounds. Nice to hear them singing.

Red-flanked Bluetail - *Tarsiger cyanurus*. Most birds had already migrated north while searching plantations in the desert, but we found several obliging ones on their breeding grounds in the taiga.

Yellow-rumped Flycatcher - *Ficedula zanthopygia*. Encountered on 2 days in the Khurkh Valley, splendid species indeed!

Taiga Flycatcher - *Ficedula albicilla*. Regular. One individual showed mixed characters of both Red-breasted and Taiga Flycatcher. See pictures. Consensus is that it was a Taiga Flycatcher. The female accompanying that male also showed characters of a Red-breasted Flycatcher, but we were not able to take pictures of that one. A paper is apparently underway to explain the findings on these birds showing mixed characters for this already hard to identify species pair.

Eversmann's Redstart - *Phoenicurus erythronotus*. Few birds on territory in the Khangai Mountains.

Eastern Black Redstart - *Phoenicurus ochruros* ssp. *phoenicuroides*. Higher altitude species in both the Altai and Khangai Mountains.

Common Redstart - *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. A few birds seen in the Khangai region.

Daurian Redstart - *Phoenicurus aureus*. Several seen in the first week, probable migrants.

Güldenstädt's Redstart - *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*. After long search, one at great distance in the high Altai Mountains.



male Evermann's Redstart, a stunning species!

Common Rock Thrush - *Monticola saxatilis*. Contrary of what you think from a European perspective, but Mongolia is actually the main Central Asia center of its distribution. Further west it occurs rather patchy. Several single and pairs very well seen.

White-throated Bush Chat - *Saxicola insignis* (V). One of the star birds of the trip, only recently the breeding distribution was found of this rare and seldom seen species. We found a pair in the Khangai Mountains.

Siberian Stonechat - *Saxicola maurus*. It is notoriously difficult to identify the two 'eastern stonechats'. Though we presumably encountered a few of this taxon in the desert.

Stejneger's Stonechat - *Saxicola stejnegeri*. A few in the open bogs in the taiga and on low scrub in river valleys on the north.

Northern Wheatear - *Oenanthe oenanthe*. Regularly seen in all kinds of habitats.

Isabelline Wheatear - *Oenanthe isabellina*. Nightingale of the desert, imitating many other species and sounds. Common.

Desert Wheatear - *Oenanthe deserti*. Few birds in the (semi-)desert of the Gobi.

Pied Wheatear - *Oenanthe pleschanka*. Migratory birds on the first half of the trip.

Saxaul Sparrow - *Passer ammodendri*. At Khongoryn Els a pair performed well eventually, after some searching, and the next day 10s were seen in the middle of the semi-desert nearby.



Brown Accentor, restricted mainly to the mountain ranges in the south

House Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*. Rare around settlements and villages in the south.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow - *Passer montanus*. Common, everywhere.

Rock Sparrow - *Petronia petronia*. Regularly in the Gobi, Altai and Khangai Mountains.

White-winged Snowfinch - *Montifringilla nivalis*. Seen at Yolyn Am.

Pere David's Snowfinch - *Pyrgilauda davidiana*. Quite common in the Khangai steppe areas.

Altai Accentor - *Prunella himalayana*. One pair and 1 singing male was found after a long search in the high Altai Mountains.

Brown Accentor - *Prunella fulvescens*. Both in the Altai and Khangai Mountain ranges.

Kozlov's Accentor - *Prunella koslowi*. A mongolian speciality. Seen at Shivee and Yolyn Am gorges.

Western Yellow Wagtail - *Motacilla flava*. Seen on migration in the Gobi and the Valley of the Lakes.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail - *Motacilla tschutschensis*.

- ssp. *tschutschensis* seen migrating near UB and breeding in Khurkh
- ssp. *macronyx* Breeding in Bayan lake

Citrine Wagtail - *Motacilla citreola*. Regular encounters, always near water. Both the *citreola* and *calcarata* (Black-backed) subspecies seen.

Grey Wagtail - *Motacilla cinerea*. Regular, always near streams.

White Wagtail - *Motacilla alba*. Frequently seen in all kinds of habitats.

- ssp. *baicalensis* is the 'normal' or 'common' subspecies;
- ssp. *leucopsis* near UB and at Orog ;
- ssp. *ocularis* twice in the desert ;
- ssp. *personata* at Kholbooj Nuur inside the compound where we spent the night



White Wagtail ssp. *baicalensis* (top left), *leucopsis* (top right), *ocularis* (bottom left) and *personata* (bottom right)



Chinese Grosbeak a rare migrant so far west

Richard's Pipit - *Anthus richardi*. In wetter habitats (frequently marshes) with long grass than Blyth's Pipit. Frequently encountered, singing, displaying...

Blyth's Pipit - *Anthus godlewski*. On mountain slopes in Altai and Khangai steppe like habitats. Regular.

Tawny Pipit - *Anthus campestris*. A few were identified in the semi-steppe areas.

Tree Pipit - *Anthus trivialis*. Surprisingly common and in the same habitats with Olive-backed Pipit, though maybe somewhat more dry, open forest.

Olive-backed Pipit - *Anthus hodgsoni*. Common in all kinds of habitats on migration and then alongside the previous species in the taiga zone, often singing.

Central Asian Water Pipit - *Anthus spinoletta* ssp. *blakistoni*. One at Kholbooj Nuur and in Khangai mountain

Hawfinch - *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. Common near UB and on migration in the desert. Sometimes quite large groups in the few bushes in towns.

Chinese Grosbeak - *Eophona migratoria*. One was found during a pit-stop in a group of Hawfinches.

Baikal Bullfinch - *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* ssp. *cineracea*. Quietly foraging in wet scrub along a stream in a taiga forest in the Khangai Mountain range. Unexpected bonus.

Mongolian Finch - *Bucanetes mongolicus*. Common in

the Gobi Desert and in the steppes.

Common Rosefinch - *Carpodacus erythrinus*. Common breeding bird and migrant.

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch - *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*. At the Shivee and Yolyn Am gorges seen together with the next species.

Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch - *Carpodacus davidianus*. A few were found in the same habitat as Koslov's Accentor and other mountain slope species at the Shivee Am gorge.

Long-tailed Rosefinch - *Carpodacus sibiricus*. In riverine habitats – semi- low willows and alders – but a bit unexpectedly scarce for some reason.

Twite - *Linaria flavirostris* ssp. *altaica*. With a bit of work, nice observations in the Altai Mountains.



Chinese Beautiful rosefinch. Male (left) and female (right)

Red Crossbill - *Loxia curvirostra*. Seen in the Khangai Mountain taiga zone.

Eurasian Siskin - *Spinus spinus*. Same as previous species. Probably breeding birds;

Pine Bunting - *Emberiza leucocephalos*. In taiga zone of the Khangai, Terelj and around Ulaanbaatar. Common and well seen.

Godlewski's Bunting - *Emberiza godlewskii*. A few at Yolyn Am and surrounding slopes.

Meadow Bunting - *Emberiza cioides*. Surprisingly only seen on the first day, though we searched for it at suitable habitat near Terelj NP as well.

Grey-necked Bunting - *Emberiza buchanani*. Seen at a rocky river slope in the Gobi Altai.

Ortolan Bunting - *Emberiza hortulana*. When entering the Khangai zone, at several places seen, singing.

Tristram's Bunting - *Emberiza tristrami*. One briefly along the Tuul River amongst Little Buntings on the first day.

Little Bunting - *Emberiza pusilla*. Common, migrants during the first half of the trip.

Yellow-breasted Bunting - *Emberiza aureola* (CR). Seen in 3 locations, Tuul River, Kholbooj Nuur and in the Khurkh Valley.

Black-faced Bunting - *Emberiza spodocephala*. Regular, migrants in the plantations and singing males in the taiga forests of the north.

Pallas's Reed Bunting - *Emberiza pallasi*. There are several subspecies involved, most were possible split ssp. *lydiae*, i.e. Mongolian Bunting with most birds in the Khangai area of the latter. Mongolian Bunting is greyer with limited brown on mantle and upperparts compared to ssp. *pallasi*.

Common Reed Bunting - *Emberiza schoeniclus*. Again, several difficult to separate subspecies are involved. Most birds had thick 'swollen' bills. Seen in marshy habitats at e.g. Bayan Nuur and in the Khurkh Valley lakes.



Pallas's bunting subspecies lydiae. Adult male (top left), 2cy male (bottom left) and female (right)

Mammals

Mountain hare - *Lepus timidus*. One was encountered in larch forest of Khangai mountain.

Tolai hare - *Lepus tolai*. Few were seen in the Gobi, one was running from a tree plantation to a stream to drink.

Daurian pika - *Ochotona dauurica*. Few individuals on the first day around the hotel.

Pallas's pika - *Ochotona pallasi*. Up to 10 individuals were seen in Yolyn am gorge. Some could have been Daurian pika.

Alpine pika - *Ochotona alpina*. Few individuals on the rocky scree in Khangai mountain.

Long-tailed ground squirrel - *Urocitellus undulatus*. Common in the meadow, river valleys in the north.

Tarbagan marmot - *Marmota sibirica*. Two were seen on their burrows on our way to Terelj national park on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, surprisingly.

Brandt's vole - *Lasiopodomys brandtii*. Common in the steppe, many seen latter part of the trip.

Mongolian gerbil - *Meriones unguiculatus*. Few in Yolyn am gorge entrance.

Eurasian red squirrel - *Sciurus vulgaris fusconigricans* (black coloured). Only one were seen on our hike in Terelj National park.

Siberian chipmunk - *Tamias sibiricus*. 2 individuals on 2 occasions. First in Khangai mountain and second in Terelj national park.

Least weasel - *Mustela nivalis*. One was hunting abundance of Brandt's vole very actively at southern foothills of Khangai mountain.

Stoat - *Mustela erminea*. One showed very well running along the rocky banks of dry mountain stream up in the Khangai mountain.

Corsac fox - *Vulpes corsac*. Few observations.

Siberian roe deer - *Capreolus pygargus*. Heard near our camp in Khangai mountain and another sighting in Terelj national park. Everyone in the group saw it well as it stood still within 15 meters from us while we are walking in the birch forest.

Altai wapiti - *Cervus canadensis sibiricus*. While we were trying to approach a lekking Black-billed Capercaillie in a tree, about 10 Altai wapiti ran towards us without noticing our presence. All came out to the forest clearing one by one and eventually saw us and gave fantastic views.

Mongolian gazelle - *Procapra gutturosa*. About 100 in a small herd by the road, on our way to Dalanzadgad.

Goitered gazelle - *Gazella subgutturosa*. A total of eight were seen north of Khongoryn els.

Siberian Ibex - *Capra sibirica*. Impressive males were spotted on higher reaches of Yolyn am gorges.

Reptiles and amphibians

Toad-headed agama - *Phrynocephalus versicolor*. Common and widespread in the Gobi.

Gobi racerunner - *Eremias przewalskii*. Two individuals on May 20th.

Multi-ocellated racerunner - *Eremias multiocellata*. One individual on May 23rd.

Mongolian toad - *Pseudepidalea raddei*. Many at Bayan lake.



Toad-headed Agama



Siberian Chipmunk



Cinereous or Monk Vultures



Daurian Redstart, male



Daurian Shrike, male



Demoiselle Crane



Eastern Marsh Harrier, male



Goitred Gazelles



Mongolian Ground Jay



Oriental (Crested) Honey Buzzard



Pallas's Sandgrouse



Siberian Rubythroat, male



Mongolian Toad



White-backed Woodpecker



White-naped Crane



Willow Grouse, female