



TOUR REPORT – SNOW LEOPARD TOUR IN WESTERN MONGOLIA



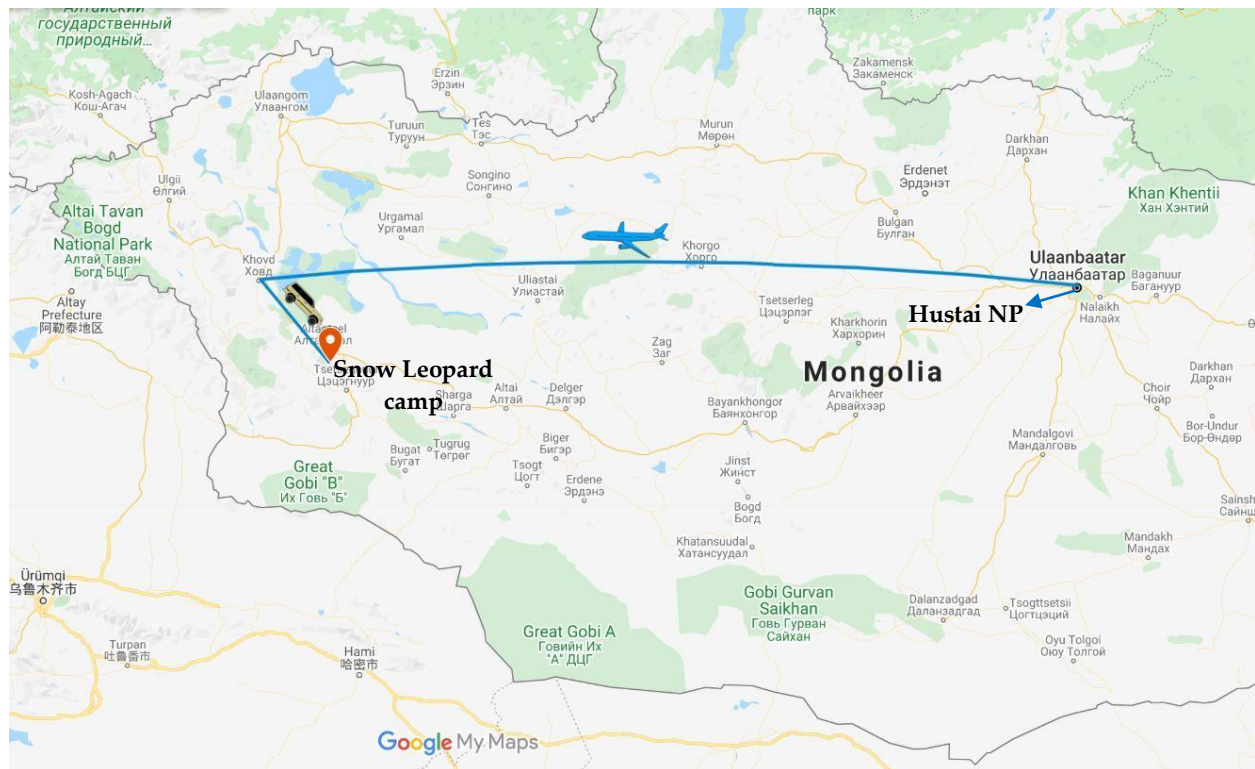
Compiled by: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav

Tour dates: 07-18th February 2023

Participants: Purevsuren Tsolmonjav (leader),
Nedko Nedkov, Gregory Garnich and Beate
Oswald (clients)

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

Background information: Mongolia is home to the second largest population of Snow Leopard in the world. Snow Leopard watching and photography tours are becoming more and more popular in Mongolia because there are higher chances to see and photograph this elusive cat at much lower altitudes like 2,000-3,000 m. The winter months are better for the Snow Leopard tours as they come down to lower altitudes due to scarcity of their natural prey. The Siberian Ibex (*Capra sibirica*) and Mongolian Marmot (*Marmota sibirica*) are the main prey for the Snow Leopards throughout most of its range in Mongolia. Siberian Ibex and other large wild preys are not easy to catch, and the marmots hibernate in winter. Thus, they prefer to feed on domestic animals, predominantly goats in winter. The Snow Leopards take domestic animals while grazing as well as from the campsite at night. This winter diet probably increases the chances of seeing this majestic animal.



Snow Leopard Trip route in February 2023

Day 1. Ulaanbaatar to Hustai National Park

Our clients arrived in Ulaanbaatar in the morning of February 07th, 2023 with the Turkish Airlines. After meeting, we headed to the Hustai National Park. We arrived at the Hustai ger camp by noon and had lunch soon after. The weather was perfect today (warm & no wind). We encountered a good number of Siberian Wapiti Deer and Przewalski's Horses along the main road and stopped multiple times for photos when the animals were close to us. Usually, Mongolian Gazelles are seen on the southern steppe of the park, but we were fortunate to see some in the park in a close range.



A herd of Mongolian Gazelle in Hustai National Park (Photo by Nedko Nedkov)



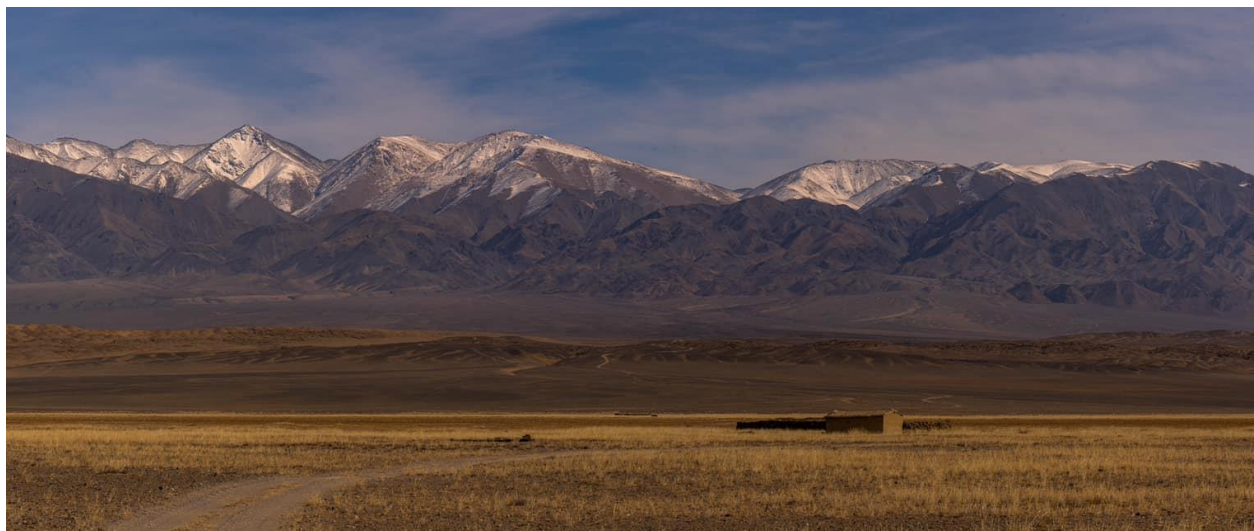
Przewalski's Horses in Hustai National Park (Photo by Gregory Garnich)

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After spending a few hours watching and photographing the wildlife of the Hustai National Park, we drove back to the hotel in Ulaanbaatar to get some rest before our flight to Khovd where we would spend next 8 days in search of Snow Leopard and other wildlife.

Day 2-11. Altai Mountains

We met at the hotel at around 11:00 and had lunch before we went to the airport. Our flight from Ulaanbaatar to Khovd was at 14:30 and it took about 2 hours. We landed at the airport in Khovd at around 15:30 pm. We were picked up by our Toyota land cruiser and headed to our Snow Leopard camp directly. After one and a half hours of driving on the paved and dirt roads, we reached our Snow Leopard camp. We had several stops on the way for landscape photography. We were welcomed by camp staff and had a delicious dinner made by our professional cook Bogi.



Our Snow Leopard (Jargalant) Mountain (Photo by Gregory Garnich)

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



Our Snow Leopard camp in the Altai Mountain (Photo by Gregory Garnich)



Interior view of our guest's yurt at Snow Leopard camp (Photo by Gregory Garnich)

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We explored the valley for the next few days. As the valley is not fully accessible by car, we walked 4-8 km along the valley each day. We scanned the mountain slopes with binoculars and spotting scope and did not see anything for the first three days.



Our Snow Leopard Valley in the Altai Mountain (Photo by Gregory Garnich)

Our local guide has recently seen a female Snow Leopard with 2 cubs preying on a Siberian Ibex farther up the valley. That area looked excellent for Snow Leopards. On the fourth day, we walked a bit farther up the valley and scanned the rocky mountain slope for a few hours. After hard searches, we finally spotted an adult Snow Leopard sleeping on the southern slope of the valley with aid of spotting scope. Our guests Nedko and Beate were a few hundred meters away from us and we went to them to show the location of the leopard. I helped them to find the leopard in their camera viewfinder. Greg caught a bad cold and he was not feeling well today. He stayed at the small cabin that belong to our local guide on the way. We sent two of our guys to Greg and they helped carrying Greg's stuff. The Snow Leopard was still sleeping and looked at us occasionally. We watched and photographed the leopard for several hours and finally it went on a hunt before it got dark. It allowed our guest to take photos of the Snow Leopard in motion.



Snow Leopard seen in February 2023 (Photo by Nedko Nedkov)



Snow Leopard seen in February 2023 (Photo by Nedko Nedkov)



Snow Leopard seen in February 2023 (Photo by Gregory Garnich)

Next day, our guests stayed at the camp to rest as we had some hard walks on a previous day. I decided to go to the location where we saw the Snow Leopard yesterday with our local guide Bavaa. We did not find the leopard again and went back to the camp.

Following day, we went down to the desert steppe to look for Saiga Antelopes. We found a bunch of them and had chance to photograph them. On the way, we also stopped for landscape and camel photos. We came across a few Goitered Gazelles on the way.



A male Saiga Antelope in the Mankhan Steppe (Photo by Nedko Nedkov)



Bactrian Camels with Jargalant mountain in the background (Photo by: Nedko Nedkov)

On Day 8, we decided to go to Khovd town and go around some rocky areas to look for Pallas's Cat. We tried in the morning and evening of Day 9, but we were not lucky. On Day 10, we went around the town to see some wintering birds such as White-throated Dipper and Rosefinches like Great, Red-mantled and Long-tailed. We saw only one White-throated Dipper on the small unfrozen stream, but no luck for the rosefinches. On Day 11, Greg, Ned and I flew back to Ulaanbatar, while Beate continued her trip to Bayan-Ulgii province to visit some Eagle hunters she has previously met during a trip in 2016.

Day 12. City tour in Ulaanbaatar

I picked up Greg and Ned from the hotel and we went to the central square. After that we visited a newly opened Ghingis Khaan museum.

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Our Snow Leopard tour ended here with many successes and lots of good memories. We would like to thank our wonderful clients Gregory Garnich from the USA, Nedko Nedkov and Beate Oswald from Germany for travelling with us. Indeed, it was one of our best tours as well.



Our Snow Leopard team in February 2023

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Full species list:

#	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	SIGHTING LOCATION
MAMMALS			
1.	Pallas's Pika	<i>Ochotona pallasi</i>	Altai Mountain
2.	Siberian Ibex	<i>Capra sibirica</i>	Altai Mountain
3.	Mongolian Gazelle	<i>Procapra gutturosa</i>	Hustai NP
4.	Goitered Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa</i>	Altai Mountain
5.	Saiga Antelope	<i>Saiga tatarica mongolica</i>	Altai Mountain
6.	Siberian Wapiti Deer	<i>Cervus canadensis</i>	Hustai NP
7.	Przewalski's Horse	<i>Equus przewalskii</i>	Hustai NP
8.	Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>	Ulaanbaatar
9.	Snow Leopard	<i>Panthera uncia</i>	Altai Mountain
BIRDS			
1.	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	Altai Mountain, Ikh Nart NR
2.	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Altai Mountain
3.	Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Altai Mountain
4.	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Altai Mountain, Ikh Nart NR
5.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Altai Mountain
6.	Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	Altai Mountain
7.	Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Altai Mountain
8.	Saker Falcon	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Altai Mountain
9.	Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Hustai NP & Altai Mountain
10.	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax</i>	Altai Mountain
11.	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Altai Mountain
12.	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Altai Mountain
13.	Mongolian Lark	<i>Melanocorypha mongolica</i>	Hustai NP
14.	Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Everywhere
15.	Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	Altai Mountain
16.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Khovd town
17.	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Altai Mountain
18.	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Khovd town
19.	Eurasian Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	Altai Mountain