



Displaying male Black-billed Capercaillie – certainly a major highlight of our fantastic tour (János Oláh)!

MONGOLIA

19 MAY – 6 JUNE 2018

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Mongolia is a very special country with amazing landscape, long and fascinating history and very special wildlife. There are several sought-after birds in Mongolia though participants often come along just as much for experiencing the atmosphere of this last wilderness of the World. The enormous, landlocked country of Mongolia is the 19th largest and the most sparsely populated fully sovereign country in the world. Its size is just over 1.5 million square kilometres but this is larger than the combined areas of Germany, France and Spain. Wedged between Russia and China with a population of three million, however, makes life very different in every aspect. It is one of our classic eastern Palearctic destinations where Birdquest has been pioneering a lot of sites as we have been running tours to this remote part of the World since 1989. Camping is the only way to discover the real Mongolia and it is a great experience so I can only recommend it to every birder! This year we have had a twist in our 'standard' tour itinerary and it was a very successful one! We decided to start our tour in the Khentii Mountains and try to look for the once mythical Black-billed or Spotted Capercaillie. It took some work but finally it was a magical and unforgettable experience seeing the lekking males in a remote larch forest on a very cold dawn in the taiga! On our 19 days long and mostly off-road odyssey we wandered through the wide and wild steppes, deserts, semi-deserts, mountains, marshes and taiga of Genghis Khan and recorded a total of 224 bird and an outstanding 30 mammal species!

The weather was typically cold and windy for this time of the year – but it was a cold spring even in Mongolia standards. Spring is usually very windy and it was the case on our tour as well, we had 14 days of sometimes gale force wind. Our coldest night was around -14C when we were camping near the Black-billed Capercaillie area, so a good sleeping bag is essential for this tour! However, we also had windless days, superb sunny weather, sandstorm, rain and snow so all in all proper variable spring weather. On our day on the top of Ih Bogd Uul we had absolutely perfect conditions though even this did not help us finding the rare White-throated Bush Chat this year which has simply not arrived at its breeding ground in time.



Mongolian Larks were common in some parts of the tour and a truly spectacular lark species (János Oláh)!

Mongolia does not yield a long birdlist, but it holds a fabulous array of attractive specialities, including many species that are only known as vagrants to Europe and North America. Late May is the peak of the spring migration and various Siberia-bound migrants were encountered at wetlands and migrant hotspots. Kozlov's Accentor is probably the only near-endemic (now found in China too) which is a must see bird but nowadays the critically endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting is also a major target. The rare and increasingly difficult-to-see (on this circuit) Relict Gull was the Bird of the Trip as we came across four breeding plumaged birds on our first full day of the tour! It was unexpected and very welcome and little we know that we will not see any other on the 'usual' spots further west. We had excellent looks of about 45 Asian Dowitchers, three different male Oriental Plovers and an incubating female, repeated sightings of Henderson's Ground Jays in their bushy desert habitat, hundreds of Pallas's Sandgrouses coming to drink, as many as 16 Saker Falcons, several huge Lammergeiers, splendid Wallcreeper and a singing male Yellow-breasted Bunting on our last afternoon! Other highlights included Swan Goose, Black Grouse, Altai Snowcock, Black-throated Loon, Cinereous Vulture (still so marvellously common), Pallas's Fish Eagle, Amur Falcon, Baillon's Crake, White-naped and Demoiselle Cranes, Pallas's Gull, Grey Nightjar, Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Azure Tit, Mongolian Lark, Pallas's Grasshopper and Asian Desert Warblers, Siberian Rubythroat, Gldenstdt's and Eversmann's Redstarts, Saxaul Sparrow, Kozlov's Accentor, Blyth's Pipit, Asian (Khangai) Rosy Finch and Pine, Godlewski's, Meadow, Ortolan, Little, Black-faced and Pallas's Reed Buntings. We also put a lot of effort to see mammals and we recorded an amazing 30 species which included goodies like Daurian Pika,

Marbled and Steppe Polecats, Pallas's Cat, Gobi Jerboa, Alashan Ground Squirrel, Grey Wolf, Mongolian and Goitered Gazelles, Siberian Ibex and Przewalski's Horse.



Male Asian Dowitcher (top) and Three-toed (or Hairy-footed) Jerboa (János Oláh).

We arrived in Ulaanbaatar in early morning and after a quick change into birding gear we were already out birding regardless how tired some of us were! We had a leisurely walk along the willow and poplar-lined Tuul River, at the edge of the ever expanding capital. Fine Amur Falcons were flying overhead and as soon as we stepped into the willow habitat we heard the distinctive high pitched calls of White-crowned Penduline Tits and managed to get great looks at close range. A drumming Lesser Spotted Woodpecker stole the show until we located our first fluffy-looking Azure Tit. We found at least ten Azure Tits on our walk, certainly the highlight of the morning! We could not locate any Long-tailed Rosefinches though, we might have been just a touch early in the season. We managed to find a pair of Mandarin Ducks, several Daurian Jackdaws and a party of Hawfinches. A short drive took us to Bogd Khan, where at the edge of a nice stretch of larch and spruce forest we obtained brilliant looks of a female Black Woodpecker and several singing male Pine Buntings. We gradually walked higher in the hills and soon had a fantastic panoramic view over the chaotic city of Ulaanbataar, home to almost half the Mongolian population. Purple and yellow pasqueflowers and violet irises added a splash of colour to the brown grassy hill slopes. We found Grey-headed Woodpecker, male Taiga Flycatchers, Willow Tit and Olive-backed Pipits. This highly enjoyable introduction to Mongolian birding was followed by an excellent dinner in a traditional Mongolian restaurant.



Azure Tit was the highlight of our arrival day near Ulaanbaatar (János Oláh).

Next morning, we boarded our two Russian-built minibuses and left for the east. After a two-hour ride we arrived to the Gun Galuut Lake (Nuur) which was absolutely packed with migrants. We were greeted by lots of wildfowl, waders, gulls and marsh terns. On the shore we got our first good looks of Asian Short-toed, Brandt's Horned and Mongolian Larks. Scanning through the waterbirds we found and counted 16 White-winged Scoters, breeding plumaged Black-necked Grebes, Eurasian Spoonbills, as many as 20 Demoiselle Cranes and much to our great surprise four breeding plumaged Relict Gulls! We all got very excited knowing how difficult this major target can be and positioned ourselves into better light for observation. We spent a good hour watching and photographing these rare gulls while a flock of 300 breeding plumaged White-winged Terns were swirling around and a migrating flock of 13 Pacific Golden Plovers arrived. Fantastic birding and our stay seemed like a moment only. Our next focus was on the marshy part of the same area and while having our first of many excellent picnic lunches we scanned for White-naped Cranes. Sure

enough we found two pairs of these beautiful cranes, one of them was sitting on a nest. After lunch we watched the cranes, as well as found Eastern Marsh Harrier, Marsh Sandpiper, Long-toed Stint, 'Mongolian' Pallas's Buntings and migrant Little Buntings. What a great morning birding it was!



Breeding plumaged Relict Gulls were voted the 'Bird of the trip' – a difficult-to-see species nowadays (János Oláh).

In the afternoon we drove into the Khentii Mountains where we set up camp in a hidden valley. While looking for the suitable campsite the cars were separated. One car had a brief views of a Hazel Grouse pair as they ran into bushy habitat and disappeared quickly while the other car located some Red-throated Thrushes. Finally we managed to complete our camp amongst a carpet of *Pulsatilla* flowers while a Eurasian

Woodcock was seen flying overhead by some. It was difficult to find a place for the tents as there were Steppe Zockor mounds everywhere. This underground mammal is very difficult to see unfortunately and we had no luck finding one. We were admiring the opposite peak and also discussing the best strategy to get up there next morning. The enigmatic Black-billed Capercaillies live up there somewhere. Exciting!



Female Amur Falcon (top left), Pacific Golden Plovers (top right), Black-billed Capercaillie habitat with Rhododendron bushes and a male Pine Bunting (János Oláh).



Pulsatilla patens ssp. flavescens at our camp (top, Liz Charter) and Cinereous Vulture on nest (János Oláh).

An early start allowed us to reach high altitude mixed pine larch forest after a stiff climb. We took the climb at a gentle pace but it was still difficult. On the way up we came across Red-flanked Bluetails, Coal and Willow

Tits and also had great looks at Spotted Nutcracker. As we were getting higher we flushed two female Black-billed Capercaillies but only some people had the briefest of a view. The open forest with its undergrowth of different kinds of *Vaccinium* (berries) is the favourite habitat of the enigmatic Black-billed Capercaillie, but sadly we could not find any birds in this fantastic habitat. There were lots of signs and droppings in this real wild forest with flowering *Rhododendron* bushes but we were out of luck. In this habitat we also had Black Woodpecker again though Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers was only heard rumming distantly. After a few hours we decided to get back to camp but it was not easy – we climbed a fair way on the mountain. Our best encounter on the descent was a Cinereous Vulture on its nest. It is not often that you get eye-level views of these huge raptors! We were back to camp for an early lunch and a decision was quickly made that we move out from here and try another area for the capers. It took us several hours to reach our second campsite. We noted Common Mergansers, Amur Falcons, a few Demoiselle Cranes, Red-billed Choughs, Mongolian Larks and other roadside birds along the way. We arrived at our second campsite where we were greeted by Red-throated Thrushes, Daurian Redstarts and a Red-flanked Bluetail. We went on an exploratory walk for the last hour of the day to see our chances for the next morning. We decided what the best area going to be to concentrate our efforts next day. As we got back to camp the weather was distinctly cooler and even started to snow. It was going to be a cold night indeed. We were up at 0345 for a hot tea by the stove in the main tent. We needed it after the temperature dropped to -14C and as always the coldest time is just before the dawn. It was an amazing experience though as already from camp we could hear the lekking noise of the Black-billed Capercaillies distantly. So we wasted no time and started to hike towards the noise and within half an hour we were watching several male Capers displaying in a nice forest patch! This was exactly we were all waiting and hoping for. WOW! We stayed with the birds for 2 hours until the last male also left the displaying area. A truly memorable experience and something not to be forgotten for a long time, or in fact for the rest of our lives indeed. The very cold Siberian weather did the trick and even at this late time of the year it was a proper display this morning with about 9-10 males on the lek. Leisurely birding along the forest edge followed a superb breakfast, while our crew was packing up camp. We had a nice selection of birds, which included Black Woodpecker, Brown and Isabelline Shrikes, Yellow-browed Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, more Red-throated Thrushes, Siberian Rubythroats, Daurian Redstart and Little Bunting. We left this great place with superb memories and we were ready to change scenery. Most of the afternoon we were driving and by the evening we set up camp about 200 kilometers south of Uulanbaatar.



Black-billed or Spotted Capercaillie males lekking (János Oláh).



Male Black-billed or Spotted Capercaillie (János Oláh).

It was very windy indeed but after dinner we still had a spotlighting session which became the norm for the next two weeks. This time we were exploring on foot around camp and we were in luck! First we spotted a few migrant Brown Shrikes and several Horned Larks when eye shine was spotted and we were soon admiring a fantastic Marbled Polecat. One of the most stunning of the possible mammals. We could watch it for some time and even observed as it gone into a hole and emerged with a Mongolian Gerbil catch. It was unbelievable and what a finish to the most amazing day! This was the second WOW of the day!



Marbled Polecat with a Mongolian Gerbil catch (János Oláh).

We were up early next morning for a quick pre-breakfast birding around camp. We had several Pallas's Sandgrouse in flight, Horned Lark, Asian Short-toed Lark and a single Greater Short-toed Lark for some. Also migrant male Siberian Rubythroat, Dusky Warbler and Tree Pipits as well as Rock Sparrow and a Pere David's Snowfinch. There were also many Mongolian Gerbils around – no wonder this was a great area for the polecat. Breaking camp was not easy in the strong wind and one of the tents got blown away and was retrieved about 3 kilometers away. Finally we left and started our long drive to the Gobi Altai and we were hoping to reach the valley of the vultures: Yoli Am. However, within a few kilometres we stopped at a roadside pool where large numbers of Pallas's Sandgrouses were gathering for drinking in the late morning. We spent some time with this bird spectacle, enjoying superb looks at these emblematic birds!



Male Pallas's Sandgrouse in flight (top) and on the ground (János Oláh).

We continued driving south along a new, quite smooth and fast tarmac road towards the town of Dalanzadgad and saw the habitat change from steppe and patches of agricultural development to semi desert. Herds of sheep, cattle and horses became a very common sight and we encountered our first smart-looking Bactrian Camels (not wild) and also several herds of shy Mongolian (or White-tailed) Gazelles. We had a long drive with a few roadside comfort stops where bizarre-looking Toad-headed Agamas and Multiocellated Racerunners started the reptile list. We arrived at the large town after lunch and we stocked up our reserves before we continued towards the Gobi Altai. On the edge of town a cultivated area held Dusky Warbler, Pallas's Leaf Warbler, Asian Brown and Taiga Flycatchers while not much further a carcass was attended by Himalayan Vultures. In the next two hours we were looking for a 'needle in the haystack' as we tried to locate Oriental Plover in the endless habitat. After covering about 30 kilometers without success we decided to give up for the day and continued towards Yoli Am. Finally we arrived to the entrance gate of the Gobi-Altai National Park where we negotiated our way in – though they were already closed for the day – and set up camp inside the park. After dinner we did our spotlighting session for those who were interested. This is a great place and we had high hopes for some good mammal. It was rather disappointing however as over an hour did not produce anything of note, apart from a Red Fox. Most of the group was rather tired after a long travel day so we decided to finish this late night adventure when we suddenly spotted a Pallas's Cat walking on a nearby hillside. We all got out of the cars and got good looks of this much sought-after goodie with bins but sadly it was too distant for any flash photography. WOW!



Himalayan Vulture (left) and male Oriental Plover near Dalanzadgad (János Oláh).

After a very short sleep for those out spotlighting the coffee at 0345 was essential. This morning we were about to climb into the higher reaches of the Gobi-Altai mountains to try to find the shy Altai Snowcock at the edge of the snow patches. It was a great hike in magnificent mountain scenery. When we got to the first viewpoint we spotted a few Argalis walking about in the sunrise. Fantastic moment and long to be remembered! We scanned and scanned for the snowcock but there were no sign of any. It was strangely quiet as well, no snowcocks were calling. All the snowcocks usually vocal in the first hour of the day so the silence was not very promising for us. This used to be a great place to see them and we had many excellent looks in previous years however in 2016 the group struggled to find one. There were Brown Accentors, Water Pipits and White-winged Snowfinches around while Lammergeiers and Saker Falcons were patrolling

in the air. We climbed even higher, to the very top of the closest peak area and continued scanning. We found a few snowcock droppings – just like Capercaillie droppings on our first unsuccessful morning in the taiga – but still could not find any Altai Snococks though a few Siberian Ibexes were spotted. It was an amazing sunny morning and as it was getting mid-morning so we decided to retreat to our minibuses. On the descent to the cars we managed to find a singing Kozlov's Accentor in its special low juniper habitat which allowed amazing looks at close range. This rather dull and drab looking accentor (the dullest of the genus) is certainly the key bird for us in this area so we were delighted to get such a great looks. Breeding Blyth's Pipites and Isabelline Wheatears were common too. We were certainly ready for our great al fresco breakfast when we get to the cars.



Kozlov's Accentor (top) was our prime target in Yoli Am; our view at sunrise in the Gobi-Altai (left) and Argalis (János Oláh).

Following our morning climb we walked into the main gorge which was very busy with many migrant and resident birds. There were lots of Yaks gathering along the stream and the snowmelt pools and we saw Pallas's Leaf Warbler, Citrine and Amur Wagtails, Mongolian Finches, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches, Twites, Godlewski's, Little, Black-faced and Pallas's Reed Buntings in this habitat. Slightly further inside the

very scenic gorge itself we had great looks at Wallcreeper, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Black Redstarts (of the red-bellied race *phoenicuroides*), Brown Accentor and many Pallas's Pikas and even spotted a nice Halys Viper. Around midday we returned to our camp and after a quick lunch drove west towards the famous dune area of Khongoryn Els. We took the longer 'northern route' so we could give another try for the Oriental Plover. We were soon back on the endless gravelly plain but this time after a few kilometers a male bird was spotted and we got excellent looks of this superb-looking mega wader. We have even seen him doing its strange display flight. Excellent! All left for us is in the afternoon is to sit back and enjoy the ever changing display. Most notable birds on the journey were Little Owl, a few Pallas's Sandgrouse, Isabelline and Steppe Grey Shrikes. Mammals were more prominent and we had our first Red-cheeked Ground Squirrels, Goitered and Mongolian Gazelles and as we were getting closer to our Ger camp a few nice Siberian Ibexes showed up as well. It was dark when we rolled into camp and we were certainly ready for a shower!



Halys Viper (top), a breeding plumaged Wallcreeper (right) and Brown Accentor in the gorge of Yoli Am (János Oláh).

While having dinner we were called to see two Long-eared Hedgehogs outside the restaurant. As usual the day was not over for those who wanted to do a nightdrive. We were now in proper 'semi desert' habitat and tonight was certainly our best chance to see jerboas. These desert-loving 'jumping mice' are mainly nocturnal and there are several species in the Gobi. We were not disappointed as our spotlighting session

resulted in many sightings of jerboas. It is a very good idea to take pictures for identification purposes if you are not familiar with these mammals. You need to look at the size, tail flags, ear length and even then some can only be safely determined by teeth formula. We probably saw about 50 jerboas this evening and managed to identify three species. We even saw a rare Gobi Jerboa though sadly no pygmy jerboa species were located though János and Nasta kept on looking for a few hours after the official spotlighting too.



Gobi Jerboa (top left), Siberian Jerboa (top right, bottom left) and Three-toed Jerboa near Khongoryn Els (János Oláh).

After breakfast we drove towards the sand dunes of Khongoryn Els. The weather was hazy but we could definitely see the sun through the dust as it was getting up. Closer to the scenic dunes we stopped by a stretch of Saxaul bushes (*Haloxylon ammodendron* – *Amaranthaceae*), where we soon encountered our target species one by one. Lovely Desert Wheatear male and an Asian Desert Warbler was singing around us and finally several pretty Saxaul Sparrows were also found breeding in the hole of an old bridge. Sparrows are a much underrated group of birds despite being superbly coloured and this enigmatic species was no exception! In this area we also obtained good looks at several Hill Pigeons, Rock Doves (probably as wild as it gets), Asian Short-toed Lark, Isabelline and Steppe Grey Shrikes and a lone male Rose-coloured Starling. The early morning light on the splendid barchan dunes created a terrific background to our birding. We had to move on however so we were soon driving towards the Bogd Mountains. Most of the day our little

caravan consisting of two minibuses and a sturdy kitchen truck made its way northwestwards through the endless semidesert of the Gobi, always surrounded by outstanding scenery. Our first stop was in a proper and very extensive Saxaul forest where we had Upland Buzzard, migrant Pallas's Warbler and yet another Saxaul Sparrow. However our search for Great Gerbil was fruitless.



Male Saxaul Sparrow (top), Asian Desert Warbler (left) and male Desert Wheatear near Khongoryn Els (János Oláh).

The wind was blowing quite hard by lunchtime and we ended up in a proper sandstorm finally. Our progress was slower than expected and by late afternoon we set up camp in a suitable looking watercourse as we had no real hope to get across the pass in the Bogd Mountains. Our campsite was in a sheltered spot and we enjoyed a superb sunset with Bactrian Camels. There were also many strange 'flowers' growing out from the hardest barren sandy areas identified by Liz as Desert Thumb. Our night session produced no new

mammals despite the excellent habitat but we had good looks of Long-eared Hedgehog and Three-toed Jerboas again. Desert birding is slow and not very rewarding but the few available species are usually very interesting. We had a short pre-breakfast birding around camp next morning. It was cold and windy again but the sunrise was great and we found a migrant Long-toed Stint and saw several Pallas's Sandgrouse.



Saxaul bushes (top left) with barchan dunes (top right) in the background. Desert Thumb (bottom left, Liz Charter) and Long-eared Hedgehog (János Oláh).

It took us most of the morning to get across the Bogd Mountain pass and down into the plains. We could not find the rather small (in Mongolian standard it is) Lake Kholboolj for the first attempt but this little diversion gave us fantastic looks of Henderson's or Mongolian Ground Jay. This is such a sought-after bird, a member of the *Podoces* genus which has only four members. They all enigmatic desert birds related to corvids and it was one of our main target in this area of Mongolia. But finally we did reach the lake which was heaven for waterbirds in this semi-desert environment. We had a nice walk along the western shores where we saw a few rare Swan Goose, many Greylag and Bar-headed Geese, Whooper Swan, Gadwall, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, some lovely Garganey, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard and Tufted Duck. We also found Eurasian Spoonbill, Great Cormorant, Common Crane, Black-headed and Brown-headed Gulls, Common and dainty White-winged Terns and there was also a nice breeding colony of Gull-billed Terns. Waders included several Greater Sand Plovers and a few more scarce migrants such as Whimbrel and Eurasian Curlew. There were no Asian Dowitchers around this side of the lake so we were hesitant where to set up camp or whether stay at this lake for the night at all. Luckily as we drove around we found a magical spot for

camping and while our crew was setting up camp overlooking the lake, we enjoyed a delightful final hour of daylight along the shore of this superb body of water, most probably a soda pan by chemical definition. The best bird of the evening was Asian Dowitcher as we enjoyed superb looks of about three pairs as they were selecting breeding location and nest-building. We could watch them from close range in their immaculate rufous-brown breeding attire. Such a fantastic evening it was.



Henderson's (or Mongolian) Ground Jay was amongst the must-see birds in Mongolia (János Oláh).

The morning around camp was just as busy as last evening and the Asian Dowitchers were still around in good numbers. It was such an excellent and windless morning! Some of us started early and found an 'Eastern' Baillon's Crake feeding along a small patch of reedy vegetation. Luckily it stayed around until we all

got great looks! There were plenty of migrants around too and while we admired Pallas's Grashopper and Dusky Warblers in the lakeside vegetation, there were many 'Mongolian' Pallas's Reed Buntings and two Red-throated Thrushes on the grass. Other new birds to our list included Great Crested Grebe, Eurasian Wigeon and Black Tern.



Male 'Eastern' Baillon's Crake (top) and our campsite at Kholboolj Nuur (János Oláh).

After a leisurely breakfast at this superb location we drove to Orog Lake (Nuur) where we had a few hours birding. This long lake stretches about 27 kilometers and has much more vegetation than the previous soda pan. We managed to find a proper wild Mute Swans and saw our first Grey Heron, Great Egret, Western Marsh Harrier, Pallas's Gull, Caspian Tern, Little Tern and wide range of waders we have already seen in the morning. There were some superb small sand dunes and we also had excellent close looks of some elegant Demoiselle Cranes as well as a pale morph Booted Eagle and enjoyed yet another pair of the delightful Henderson's Ground Jays as they were giving their piping call and showing off their black-and-

white wing-pattern in flight. The strong wind sabotaged our efforts to find any reed-loving passerines so we continued our travels and started to climb higher in the Bogd Mountains.



Scanning (top left, Liz Charter) and Demoiselle Crane at Orog Nuur (top right). Chukar (bottom left) and the scarce Alashan Ground Squirrel in the Bogd Mountains (János Oláh).

We made several stops in steep, dry, rocky valleys adorned with just a few bushes. On our slow climb up to 2500 meters we saw a pair of Chukar Partridge, several stunning Common Rock Thrushes, immaculate-looking Pied Wheatears, Mongolian Finches and even a Pere David's Snow Finch at higher elevations. We were also lucky to find the scarce Alashan Ground Squirrel which was a welcome write-in for our mammal list! In late afternoon we set up camp in a delightful mountain valley amongst rolling foothills. There were Lammergeiers and Himalayan and Cinereous Vultures above our head. Early next morning found us driving up and up to the barren habitat of our targets: Altai Snowcock and the very little-known White-throated (or Hodgson's) Bushchat. We reached the tundra-like, rocky strewn snow fields by dawn after a fairly tough drive. We still had to hike slightly higher to reach a ridge top with excellent view all around us. We started to scan for Snowcocks and finally Rob spotted a calling bird a fair distant away. We could watch this bird calling and with scope you could see all main features. Finally after two hard climbs we got the snowcock! After about 30 minutes we heard more snowcocks but much closer to us, on a slope right below us. We tried hard to locate them but we only managed to see them as they took off and flew away allowing pretty good flight

views. While enjoying the Altai Snowcocks and the amazing scenery at 3300 meters we got absolutely incredible looks of several Lammergeiers too! We were very lucky with the weather as it was totally windless though rather cold. Now it was time look for our second target, the rare White-throated Bush Chat. We explored thoroughly the usual area in its special orange lichen-covered rocky habitat without any success. We were at the very same spot on the very same day as the last tour saw this bird in 2016. We expanded our search in the surrounding suitable habitat and covered several kilometres in the next few hours. The same habitat was also attended by Altai Accentors and the fantastic Gldenstadt's Redstarts. The latter species holds rather large territories but we saw a total of nine different male through our search. Sadly we could not locate any White-throated Bush Chat despite our heroic efforts. They simply had not arrived back from their wintering grounds this year probably because being a cold and late spring in Mongolia. Even the Gldenstadt's Redstarts must have just moved in as we saw only males and not a single female (those arrive a few days later then the males). Rather disappointed we left the top of Ih Bogd Uul and drove back to camp for lunch.



Gldenstadt's Redstart male (top and left; Jnos Olh) and Altai Accentor in the Bogd Mountains (Andras Mazula).

We packed up and soon descended back to Orog Nuur and continued our journey west towards one of the largest lakes called Boontsagaan Nuur. It was a long and interesting drive where the actual track was sometimes not visible or even totally lacking. By sunset we were close to the lake but decided to set up camp in daylight. The spotlighting session yielded Tolai Hare and several Andrew's Three-toed Jerboas. Next morning we drove to this large lake and set up camp along a small estuary and spent all day birding in this fantastic area. A thorough exploration of the nearby river mouth yielded great views of adult and two immature Pallas's Fish Eagles and many waders, bathing gulls and terns. Mongolian Gulls were decidedly common and very attractive breeding plumaged Pallas's Gulls were also present. There were thousands of Great Cormorants resting on the shoreline and wildfowls were abundant too. Small shallow pools with marshy edges were dotted about the lake's edge and different sized sand and mud banks held a marvellous variety of waterbirds. We spotted a still winter plumaged Red-throated Diver and some fantastic waders included Pacific Golden Plovers, Broad-billed and Curlew Sandpipers, Long-toed Stints, Marsh and Terek Sandpipers and as many as 16 Asian Dowitchers. Migrant passerines were also seen along the shore and we picked up Dusky Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Brown Shrike, Little Bunting and Grey Wagtail while the grassy lakeshore held over a 100 Citrine Wagtail and many Richard's Pipits. The non waterbird highlight of our walk was definitely a very obliging Siberian Rubythroat and a tame Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler that tried to hide unsuccessfully in the short grass. A beautifully marbled Mongolian Toad was much photographed by some.



Immature Pallas's Fish Eagle was seen exceedingly well at Boontsagaan Nuur (János Oláh).

As evening approached there were more and more birds back at the estuary by the camp. We counted up to 36 individuals of the globally threatened Swan Goose, 76 Eurasian Spoonbills, 142 Caspian Terns and about 20 Pallas's Gulls amongst about 200 Mongolian Gulls. Next early morning was still spent along the shoreline of this enormous lake but it was mostly the same birds as last night. We tried to locate Lesser Sand Plover amongst the many Greater Sand, Kentish and Little Ringed Plovers but could not find any. On the lake edge a migrant Black-faced Bunting was new and an unidentified thrush got away. We got our best and closest looks of the very attractive Pallas's Gulls and several intricately patterned Pallas's Sandgrouse allowed fairly close approach too. Although we scanned and scanned for more Relict Gulls none could be found. This site

is usually the most reliable for this rare gull but luckily we did not need to worry much about it this time after the superb looks we had earlier on the trip. After breakfast we left this very birdy area and started our drive to the provincial capital of Bayankhongor. Along the way we found a female Oriental Plover incubating and there were many Pallas's Sandgrouses around. Finally we arrived to the rather large town of Bayankhongor to restock our supplies and birded in the willow thickets lining the nearby stream while having a picnic lunch.



Male 'Mongolian' Pallas's Reed Bunting (top) and White-winged Terns at Boontsagaan Nuur. Incubating Oriental Plover (János Oláh).

After lunch we drove north into the Khangai Mountains. A female Saker Falcon was seen very well with its chick on a rocky cliff just outside town. We continued our travels via a wide U-shaped valley and the scenery was superb as we drove past rocky outcrops and rolling hills, crossing the pebbly river many times. We passed by the famous Buddhist monastery of Erdenesogt, where a large flock of Daurian Jackdaws was following a herd of sheep and goats. In the early evening we reached our camp site in a forested side valley. We wasted no time to stroll up from the campsite and sure enough we found many singing Hume's Leaf Warblers and a male and two female Eversmann's Redstarts. As this localised redstart was one of our two prime targets in this area it was great to have it as soon as we arrived. Next morning we still birded around camp seeing more Eversmann's Redstarts and a male Ortolan Bunting and then we left for the White Rock Pass. A distinctive group of rocks high in the pass was our target to reach and although it took us a while but we finally found a gorgeous male 'Khangai' Asian Rosy Finch. Other goodies here included the local Twite form and more Brown Acentors and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes. As we got both of our main target birds in the Khangai Mountains we decided to cut our visit short and make an unplanned visit to the Barig Mountains. We wanted to give another chance for the White-throated Bush Chat at a pretty unknown location where Dani Lopez Velasco saw a pair last year. So after lunch we started our long drive to locate this unknown area.



Male 'Khangai' Asian Rosy Finch at the White Rock Pass (János Oláh).

It took a bit of adventure and bit of navigation but we finally set camp at dusk within 'walking distance' of the bush chat site. We were up and ready to climb very early morning and after a short drive we hiked to the top of a small plateau where we found the same orange lichen-covered rocky habitat as the one we searched in the Bogd Mountains. It was now the first of June and 4 days later in time but luck was not our side. After an extensive search of the area we decided to quit and descent back to camp. We had to admit defeat on this species and continue to drive back to the east. Late afternoon we arrived to the Sangiin Dalai Nuur. It was an excellent area with many birds but the wind became really strong so birding was not easy. First we birded the western side of the main lake where two migrant male Orinetal Plovers were a surprise and we also had a distant family of Corsac Foxes. There were several Demosielle Cranes around the lake and somehow the abundance of Steppe Eagles were so much more prominent than elsewhere on the tour so far. Later we drove to the other side of the lake and made camp on the south side with a few other small lakes and a

marsh. The wind was still very strong and the temperature significantly dropped. The late afternoon light was fantastic around camp and we could enjoy superb looks of some familiar birds. There were many Asian Short-toed and stunning Mongolian Larks and we finally found another Greater Short-toed lark too. Around the waters edge there were Asian Dowitchers, Black-tailed Godwits, Redshanks, Avocets, Marsh Sandpipers and many Citrine Wagtails. We also spotted a breeding plumaged Red-necked Stint on a nearby mudflat - a rather scarce migrant. It was a very enjoyable end of the day despite the very strong wind.



Demoiselle Crane (top) and Steppe Eagle in flight (János Oláh).



We had fantastic evening light in Sangiin Dalai Nuur with Brandt's Vole (top left), Citrine Wagtail (top right), Mongolian Lark (center), Asian Dowitcher (left) and Asian Short-toed Lark (János Oláh).

Next morning the conditions changed and now the sleet and snow was blown horizontally by the strong wind. It was difficult to set up scope without shelter. Scanning from the camp we did spot two breeding plumaged Black-throated Divers and several Slavonian Grebes. It was not easy to pack up camp in these conditions but we were certainly ready to move on while the sleet gradually turned into rain. A few hours driving along a tarmac road with a small detour took us to the Hustai National Park close to Ulaanbataar. When we arrived to the visitor center in the early afternoon it was still raining. We were hoping to camp in the park but conditions made us to change our mind and we settled for the Ger camp with hot shower and a proper restaurant. It has been a while we last seen a tented camp. In the afternoon we drove into the park and while

it was still raining we managed to see Saker and Amur Falcons, Golden Eagle, Pied Wheatears, Blyth's Pipits and a few Meadow Buntings. We also managed to find large numbers of Przewalski's Horses, Red Deer and a Mongolian or Tarbagan Marmots. After a nice dinner we made a spotlighting session as usual and managed to find a few Daurian Pikas which are mostly nocturnal but there were no sign of any polecats.



Cinereous Vulture (top) and Meadow Bunting in the rain (János Oláh).

It was sunny next morning and we were back to Hustai National Park. We saw several Przewalski's Horses again but our search for Daurian Partridge was unsuccessful despite covering several scrubby valleys. During our walks we saw several Golden Eagles, Amur Falcons, Eurasian Hobby, Dusky Warbler, Daurian Redstart and more Meadow Buntings. There were lots of Tarbagan Marmots and Red Deer plus we saw a Daurian Pika as well. Late morning we left Hustai and drove back to the taiga northeast of the capital city.

We decided to return to this area again as both Yellow-breasted Bunting and Chinese Bush Warblers are rather late arriving birds and we had no chance to look for these rare and localised birds at the beginning of the tour. We had several stops in suitable riverine scubby habitat where Yellow-breasted Buntings used to breed but we could not find any. We saw Black Stork, a migrant Greater Spotted Eagle, Brown Shrike, Common Whitethroat, White-cheeked Starling and Red-throated Thrush. We set up camp at the same location as on our first day of the tour and saw Oriental Cuckoo, Siberian Rubythroat and Pine Bunting from the campsite. The evening spotlighting session gave us an unexpected Steppe Polecat – the second species of polecat of the tour and one we were hoping to see at several places earlier on the tour and connected with it where we least expected it!



Przewalski's Horse (top left), Daurian Pika (top right), Tarbogan Marmot (bottom left) and Mongolian Gerbil (János Oláh).

It was a very cold night again, the temperature dropped below zero and while dozing in the sleeping bag a distant familiar sound gradually waked me up: lekking Black Grouse! It was dawn and just walking a few meters from camp I could scope up two or three lekking birds. I announced the news and some sleepy heads appeared from the various tents. Finally, most of us got to see three Black Grouse while lekking or for some when flying away towards the forest. After breakfast an easy day of birding followed as we were exploring riverine bushy habitat - several locations where the critically endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting used to breed. Our first walk was in a marshy (though rather dry) river valley where we had great looks at Black Woodpecker, a singing pair of Eurasian Wryneck, lots of singing Dusky Warblers, fantastic male Siberian Rubythroats, Lesser Whitethroat, several Siberian Stonechats, Common Redstarts, a few Blyth's

Pipits and Common Rosefinch. Closer to the Tuul River we saw White-crowned Penduline Tit and heard a distant Long-tailed Rosefinches. There was no sign of any buntings at any of the locations we used to see. So sad. In the afternoon we drove to the Ghorkij -Terelj National Park where we pitched our tents for the last time in a lovely location close to a river valley. We wasted no time and in the late afternoon we explored the breeding habitat of the Chinese Bush Warbler. We walked for miles in superb habitat but there were no bush warblers singing. Later it turned out we were just two days too early as the first singing male was seen at the very same location two days later. We saw Two-barred, Yellow-browed and Dusky Warblers, Great and Willow Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Red-throated Thrush, Olive-backed Pipits, Pine and Black-faced Buntings. There were no takers for the last evening spotlighting session, but the leaders went out anyway for a few minutes and just about 150 meters from camp spotlighted a Grey Wolf. WOW.



Tuul River with riverine willow bushy habitat (János Oláh).

In June the nights are rather short in the taiga forest and it was already getting light around 03:30 when a singing Grey Nightjar woke me up. I knew it was a life bird for Rob so woke him up and we walked down to look at the calling bird. We had flight looks only and heard a distant Ural Owl calling. The forest was already starting to wake-up and it was a superb sky – our last morning of the tour! We did not give up and tried again the best spots for the Chinese Bush Warbler, but we had no luck. We were back to camp for breakfast where we had scope views of Spotted Nutcracker and Hawfinches. After breakfast we drove back to Ulaanbaatar and as a last chance, we visited the old sewage ponds. We explored the mostly dry ponds on foot and the surrounding willow bushes where we finally heard a singing male Yellow-breasted Bunting. We managed to get great looks of this beautiful bird which is now on the brink of extinction. A female bird was also spotted nearby and in the very same habitat we got to see a pair of Long-tailed Rosefinches too. Brilliant! After all the exploration of the former breeding areas it was such a great ending of the tour to see this lovely bunting. We had our last picnic lunch by some roadside pools where we found a female White-winged Scoter, many Tufted Ducks and Common Pochards as well as a vagrant Chinese Pond Heron. In the nearby bushes we found 'Asian' Azure-winged Magpie, Amur Falcon and Azure Tit. All left for us to drive back to the capital and enjoy a hot shower before our final dinner. We had a wonderful tour in this amazing country with many unforgettable memories! We had excellent local guides, drivers and a superb camping crew who looked after

us on the entire tour tirelessly. It was a privilege to have such knowledgeable and wonderful local people with us while exploring one of the last wildernesses in the World.



Male Long-tailed Rosefinch (left), the Critically Endangered male Yellow-breasted Bunting (right) and Azure-winged Magpie near Ulaanbaatar (János Oláh).



The critically endangered Yellow-breasted Bunting is a prime target in Mongolia nowadays. This is stunning male (János Oláh).

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critically Endangered, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened

For polytypic species, the subspecies seen on the tour, where known, is placed in parentheses at the end of the species comment. Generally, species listed with trinomials are not currently split by the IOC.

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows **Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2018. IOC World Bird List (v 8.2)**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>. Please note, this was the current version when the report checklist was created. Some alternative names are given in parentheses.

All of our checklists are powered by our partner iGoTerra (www.igoterra.com) who provide web and mobile applications for bird and wildlife enthusiasts and businesses. Their suite of services cover observations, rankings, lists, photos and trip management tools.

BIRDS

Total of bird species recorded: 224

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* Many sightings of this handsome goose!

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Largest count was on Orog Nuur. Quite common.

Swan Goose ◊ *Anser cygnoides* A few were seen at the steppe lakes, many at Boontsagaan Nuur. **VU** See note



We saw several vulnerable Swan Geese at Kholboolj and Boontsagaan Nuur (János Oláh).

Mute Swan ◊ *Cygnus olor* Just one was seen at Orog Nuur. A real naturally occurring one!

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Fairly common. A couple of nests were also seen.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Quite common.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* The most widespread species of waterfowl in Mongolia.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* A pair was seen on the Tuul River near Ulaanbataar.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* Regular observations of this attractive duck.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Fairly common at most lakes.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* A handful of sightings. Most common at UB sewage works.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Small numbers were noted at various lakes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Fairly common at most lakes.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Small numbers on the larger lakes.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Just a few sightings.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* Only seen at Kholboolj and Orog Nuurs. Smart bird.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Regular. Largest numbers at Gun Galuut and Sangiin Dalai Nuurs. **VU**

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Small numbers. Most common at Gun Galuut and UB sewage works.

White-winged Scoter (Stejneger's S) *Melanitta [deglandi] stejnegeri* Two observations only. See note

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

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser* Fair numbers were noted, especially on the taiga rivers.

Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes bonasia* (LO) A pair was flushed in the Khentii Mountains [sibiricus].

Black-billed Capercaillie ◊ (**Spotted C**) *Tetrao urogalloides* Mega looks in the taiga [*nominata*]. See note

Black Grouse ◊ *Lyrurus tetrix* Three lekking males plus a few more flushed in the Jalman Valley [*mongolicus*].

Altai Snowcock ◊ *Tetraogallus altaicus* A calling bird was seen, two more were flushed at Ih Bogd Uul. See note

Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar* Two pairs were seen on our way to Ih Bogd Uul [*pubescens*].

Black-throated Loon *Gavia arctica* A breeding plumaged pair was seen at Sangiin Dalai Nuur.

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata* One was seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Regular. Largest numbers were seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Horned Grebe ◊ (**Slavonian G**) *Podiceps auritus* Several pairs were seen at Sangiin Dalai Nuur. **VU** See note

Black-necked Grebe (Eared Grebe) *Podiceps nigricollis* A flock of 40 were seen at Gun Galuut.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* A few encounters only.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Many sightings at reed-edged lakes, largest numbers at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* This vagrant was found at UB sewage ponds.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Small numbers were recorded.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Just a few noted at larger lakes.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* About 1500 were counted along the shores of Boontsagaan Nuur.

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* Regular and very impressive! Great looks at Ih Bogd Uul. **NT**

Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* Small numbers were noted in the Gobi-Altai. Seen close on carcasses. **NT**



Himalayan Vulture was fairly common in the Gobi Altai (János Oláh).

Cinereous Vulture (Black V, Monk V) *Aegypius monachus* Still quite common, some excellent looks. **NT** See note

Greater Spotted Eagle ◊ *Aquila clanga* One was seen along the Tuul River – a migrant. **VU**

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* Only two seen at Orog Nuur pale morphs.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* A regularly observed bird of prey, largest gathering at Sangiin Dalai Nuur. **EN**

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Several excellent sightings; also seen perched.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* Two observations in the Khangai Mountains [*nominata*].

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* (H) It was only heard calling at Mungunmorit.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* It was seen at Orog and Sangiin Dalai Nuurs.

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* A female was seen at Gun Galuut marsh.

Black Kite (Black-eared K) *Milvus [migrans] lineatus* The most common bird of prey in Mongolia.

Pallas's Fish Eagle ◊ *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* Terrific looks at three birds at Boontsagaan Nuur. **EN** See note

Upland Buzzard ◊ *Buteo hemilasius* Regular encounters, some interesting looking birds, like Long-legged Buzzard.

Eastern Buzzard ◊ (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus* Two were seen in the Khentii Mountains.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* Fantastic looks at two at Kholboolj Nuur [*nominata*]. See note

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* One was seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Eurasian Coot (Common C) *Fulica atra* Just a few sightings.

White-naped Crane ◊ *Grus vipio* A total of four were seen at Gun Galuut marsh. **VU** See note

Demoiselle Crane ◊ *Grus virgo* Many sightings of these elegant beauties. See note

Common Crane *Grus grus* Just a few were seen at Orog and Kholboolj Nuurs.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* A regular bird of the steppe and desert lakes.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Common at the steppe and desert lakes. 250 were counted on Kholboolj Nuur.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Small numbers of this well-known bird were noted on the various wetlands. **NT**

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* A flock was seen at Gun Galuut and a few at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* Just a few seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Regular observations [*nominata*].

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Common around the steppe and desert lakes [*nominata*].

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* A few were seen at lakes and in semi-desert [*nominata*]. See note



Greater Sand Plover at Kholboolj Nuur (János Oláh).

Oriental Plover ◊ *Charadrius veredus* A displaying male, a female and two more males were seen. See note

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* A flock of 12 was seen at Gun Galuut and a few at Kholboolj Nuur [*variegatus*].

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Just one was seen at Kholbook Nuur [*orientalis*]. **NT**

Black-tailed Godwit ◊ *Limosa limosa* Small numbers were seen at the steppe lakes [*melanuroides*].

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Several were noted on the various lakes.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* About 50 were seen at Gun Galuut.

Broad-billed Sandpiper ◊ *Limicola falcinellus* Just three were seen at Boontsagaan Nuur [*sibirica*].

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Several seen in breeding plumage at Boontsagaan Nuur. **NT**

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* Regular seen at the various steppe lakes.
Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* A few excellent looks along the tour.
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Good numbers were passing through. About 200 were seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.
Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* A nice breeding plumaged bird was a good find at Sangiin Dalai Nuur. **NT**
Dunlin *Calidris alpina* Just two were seen at Boontsagaan Nuur [*centralis*].
Asian Dowitcher ◊ (**Asiatic D**) *Limnodromus semipalmatus* Cracking views of about 45 birds! **NT** See note



Bar-headed Goose (left) and Asian Dowitcher pair at Kholboolj Nuur (János Oláh).

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* One was seen at dusk in the Khentii Mountains.
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Regular in marshy areas.
Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* One was seen at Boontsagaan Nuur.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A handful of observations.
Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* (**NL**) One was seen at Kholboolj Nuur. **NT**
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Common in marshy areas [*ussuriensis*].
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* Small numbers were observed in marshy areas.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* A few sightings at the various wetlands.
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* Four birds in exquisite breeding plumage were seen.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* About 10 were seen at Gun Galuut.
Brown-headed Gull ◊ *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus* Singletons were seen at Kholboolj and Boontsagaan Nuurs.
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* The most common small gull.
Relict Gull ◊ *Ichthyaetus relictus* Superb looks of four birds at Gun Galuut. **VU** See note
Pallas's Gull (Great Black-headed G) *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* About 20 were **counted** at Boontsagaan Nuur.
Mew Gull *Larus canus* Two were seen at Gun Galuut.
Vega Gull ◊ (**Mongolian G**) *Larus [vegae] mongolicus* Common at the larger steppe lakes. See note
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* It was seen at several lakes. Nice colony of about 35 pairs at Kholboolj Nuur.
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* We counted 142 birds coming to roost at Boontsagaan Nuur.
Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* Just two were seen at Orog Nuur.
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Common breeder [*longipennis*]. See note
White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chlidonias leucopterus* Great looks of several flocks. Stunning bird!
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* A single bird was found together with the previous species at Kholboolj Nuur.
Pallas's Sandgrouse ◊ *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* Many excellent looks. Magical! See note
Rock Dove (R Pigeon) *Columba livia*
Hill Pigeon ◊ *Columba rupestris* A few sightings together with the previous species. See note
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* Two sightings only.
Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus* Regularly heard and a few seen in the taiga.
Common Cuckoo (Eurasian C) *Cuculus canorus* Common in mountains and in the taiga.
Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus jotakae* One was seen by some before dawn at Ghorkij – Terelj NP.
Eurasian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bubo* (**H**) One was heard at Ih Bogd Uul.
Ural Owl ◊ *Strix uralensis* (**H**) One was heard on our last night at Ghorki-Terelj NP.
Little Owl *Athene noctua* Two birds seen in the semi-desert and a single at Sangiin Dalai Nuur [*plumipes*].

Common Swift *Apus apus* Regularly seen throughout the tour [*pekinensis*].
Pacific Swift (Fork-tailed S) *Apus pacificus* Less common than previous species but many sightings.
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Many sightings of this beautiful species.
Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Great views of a pair in the Jalman Valley [*chinensis*].
Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker ◊ *Picoides tridactylus* (H) Heard drumming in the taiga. No luck.
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* Fantastic looks at a female in the Terej area [*kamtschatkensis*].
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* One was seen in the Terej area [*brevirostris*].
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* A female gave extraordinary superb views at Bogd Khan near UB.



Female Black Woodpecker gave superb looks at Bogd Khan (János Oláh).

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* Great looks at a female at Bogd Khan near UB [*jessoensis*].
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Regular encounters.
Amur Falcon ◊ (Eastern Red-footed F) *Falco amurensis* Several excellent sightings. See note
Merlin *Falco columbarius* A superb male was seen towards Mungunmorit [*lymanii*].
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* A single sighting in Hustai NP.
Saker Falcon ◊ (Saker) *Falco cherrug* Regular observations. A total of 16 were seen [*milvipes*] **EN** See note
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* Regular encounters.
Isabelline Shrike (Daurian S) *Lanius isabellinus* Regular encounters especially in the south [*nominata*].
Steppe Grey Shrike ◊ (Saxaul GS) *Lanius pallidirostris* We had about five sightings in the Gobi semi-desert.
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Just one was seen at Bogd Khan [*brandtii*].
Azure-winged Magpie (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus* We saw six on our last day around UB.
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Common.
Henderson's Ground Jay ◊ (Mongolian G J) *Podoces hendersoni* Three pairs were seen well. See note
Spotted Nutcracker (Eurasian N) *Nucifraga caryocatactes* We had two sightings in the taiga [*macrorhynchos*].
Red-billed Chough *Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Very common and vocal.
Daurian Jackdaw ◊ *Coloeus dauuricus* Regularly seen, sometimes in quite large groups.
Rook ◊ (Oriental R) *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator* Fairly localised, a few encounters in the steppe [*pastinator*].
Carrion Crow ◊ (Oriental C) *Corvus [corone] orientalis* Small numbers throughout [*orientalis*].

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax* Common all over Mongolia.
Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Often heard and once seen in the taiga [*nominata*].
Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* Delightfully common in the taiga [*baicalensis*].
Azure Tit ◊ *Cyanistes cyanus* Good looks at about 10 along the Tuul River in Ulaanbaatar.
Great Tit *Parus major* A few sightings.
White-crowned Penduline Tit ◊ *Remiz coronatus* We found three in the willows along the Tuul River in UB.
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Small numbers were recorded [*dulcivox*, *kibortii*].
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* Just three encounters on the tour [*magna*].
Horned Lark ◊ (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris* Commonly seen in the steppe and desert [*brandti*]. See note



Horned Lark was one of the most common species on the tour (János Oláh).

Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis* Surprisingly scarce with only two sightings. See note
Mongolian Lark ◊ *Melanocorypha mongolica* Common in the steppe zone. Cracking lark!
Asian Short-toed Lark ◊ *Alaudala cheleensis* Common in the desert and semi-desert [*nominata*].
Pale Martin ◊ *Riparia diluta* Regular encounters. No active colonies were found [*gavrilovi*]. See note
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Small numbers. The red-bellied breeding race is *tytleri*.
Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* Small numbers in mountain habitat like Yoli Am.
Common House Martin (Northern H M) *Delichon urbicum* Just a handful of observations [*Jagopodum*]. See note
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* A few seen at Khongoryn Els and Boontsagaan Nuur [*tristis*].
Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* Common and very vocal in river valleys in the taiga.
Sulphur-bellied Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus griseolus* Great looks of a pair in Yoli Am.
Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* Seen both on migration and in the taiga. Smart bird!
Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* A few seen in the taiga.
Hume's Leaf Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus humei* Several nice encounters in the Khangai Mountains [*nominata*].
Two-barred Warbler (T-b Greenish W) *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus* Good looks at several in Gorkhi-Terelji NP.
Thick-billed Warbler ◊ *Iduna aedon* (H) Heard only near Bayankhongor in riverine habitat but on wrong side of river.
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler ◊ *Locustella certhiola* Several excellent looks along lake shores.
Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* Three observations on the tour.



Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler at Boontsagaan Nuur (János Oláh).

- Asian Desert Warbler** ◇ *Sylvia nana* We saw one singing at Khongoryn Els in the Gobi desert. Superb!
- Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* A few were seen in shrubby areas in the taiga [*rubicola*].
- Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* The very white *asiatica* race showed well in the taiga [*baicalensis*].
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* Eventually excellent looks of one at Yoli Am. Breeding plumage!
- White-cheeked Starling** ◇ *Spodiopsar cineraceus* Good looks at a single bird in riverine habitat.
- Rose-coloured Starling** ◇ (Rosy S) *Pastor roseus* A single male was seen at Khongoryn Els.
- Red-throated Thrush** ◇ *Turdus ruficollis* Several very nice encounters on migration and in the taiga breeding habitat.
- Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa dauurica* We had two sightings only.
- Siberian Rubythroat** *Calliope calliope* Several fantastic looks at migrants and singing males in the taiga.
- Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* We had a few in the Taiga larch forest.
- Taiga Flycatcher (Red-throated F)** *Ficedula albicilla* A total of seven were observed during the tour.
- Eversmann's Redstart** ◇ *Phoenicurus erythronotus* A total of nine were seen in the Khangai Mountains. See note



Male Taiga Flycatcher (left) and male Eversmann's Redstart (János Oláh).

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Just a few seen on the tour [*phoenicuroides*].

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* Several were seen in the poplar woods at Terelj [*nominata*].

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus* We had repeated nice looks at this smart species. See note

Güldenstädt's Redstart ◊ *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* Nine males were seen at Ih Bogd Uul. See note

Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed RT) *Monticola saxatilis* Many sightings of this beauty along the tour.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* Several observations in the Khangai Mountains. See note

Stejneger's Stonechat *Saxicola stejnegeri* One was identified and probably others NE of UB. See note

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* Regular observations.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* Very common throughout the tour!

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* Small numbers showed well in sandy areas. About 20 seen.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* The least common of the wheatears but regular encounters.

Saxaul Sparrow ◊ *Passer ammodendri* Perfect looks at both sexes at Khongoryn Els. Smart! [*stoliczkae*]. See note

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Fairly common in towns and villages.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common all along our route.

Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia) *Petronia petronia* Several nice observations.

White-winged Snowfinch (Eurasian S) *Montifringilla nivalis* Good looks in the Gobi-Altai mountains at Yoli Am.

Pere David's Snowfinch ◊ *Pyrgilauda davidiana* Just a few seen on the tour. See Note.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* Just a single one was seen in the Khangai Mountains.

Altai Accentor ◊ *Prunella himalayana* We had good looks, four were seen at Ih Bogd Uul.

Brown Accentor ◊ *Prunella fulvescens* Common in the mountains, many excellent looks.

Kozlov's Accentor ◊ (Mongolian A) *Prunella koslowi* We had superb looks at this breeding endemic. See note

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* Two were seen at Gun Galuut marsh.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* Many encounters with this handsome bird [*werae*].

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Regular.

White Wagtail ◊ (Masked W) *Motacilla [alba] personata* A male showed well at Kholboolj Nuur.

White Wagtail ◊ (Baikal W) *Motacilla [alba] baicalensis* Regular in the north.

White Wagtail ◊ (Amur W) *Motacilla [alba] leucopsis* We saw at Gun Galuut and two at Yoli Am.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* Regular around marshy lakes.

Blyth's Pipit ◊ *Anthus godlewskii* Fairly common on stony slopes. See note

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A few migrants were noted at Boontsagaan Nuur and in the Khangai Mountains.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Common in the taiga.

Water Pipit ◊ *Anthus spinoletta* Regular at higher elevations in the Gobi-Altai [*blakistonii*]. See note

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Four seen along the Tuul River and three at Gorkhi-Terelj NP.

Mongolian Finch ◊ (M Trumpeter F) *Bucanetes mongolicus* Many sightings this year. Great looking bird.



Pere David's Snowfinch (left) and Mongolian Finch (János Oláh).

Asian Rosy Finch ◊ *Leucosticte arctoa* Just a male was seen in the Khangai Mountains [*sushkini*]. See note

Common Rosefinch (Scarlet R) *Carpodacus erythrinus* Several seen in the Khangai Mountains and Terelj area.

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch ◊ *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* About five were seen well at Yoli Am. See note

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Carpodacus sibiricus* A pair showed well at UB on our last day.

Twite *Linaria flavirostris* A few sightings only [*altaica*]. See note
Red Crossbill (Common C) *Loxia curvirostra* A single one flew over us in the taiga [*curvirostra*].
Pine Bunting ◊ *Emberiza leucocephalos* Terrific looks at singing males in the north. What a smart bird! See note
Godlewski's Bunting ◊ *Emberiza godlewskii* Four were seen well in the Gobi-Altai at Yoli Am. See note
Meadow Bunting ◊ *Emberiza cioides* Several seen well in the Hustai NP [*cioides*].
Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* A singing male seen in the Khangai Mountains.
Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* Several migrants were seen at various locations.
Yellow-breasted Bunting ◊ *Emberiza aureola* Excellent looks at a pair near UB on our last day [*ornata*]. **CR** See note
Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* One seen at Yoli Am, one at Boontsagaan Nuur and also in the taiga.
Pallas's Reed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza pallasi* Regular sightings of two forms [*nominata*, *lydiae*]. See note



Daurian Jackdaw (top), Hill Pigeon (left) and Brown Shrike (János Oláh).



Pallas's Pika (top) at Yoli Am and Andrew's Jerboa near Boontsagaan Nuur – look at the fat-deposits on the tail, a good ID feature as well (János Oláh).

MAMMALS

Total of mammal species recorded: 30

Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* Just two were seen in the north.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai* Several were seen.

Daurian Pika ◊ *Ochotona daurica* A few seen at night in Hustai NP and one at daylight.

Pallas's Pika *Ochotona pallasii* Very common in the Gobi-Altai and seen in the Khangai too.

Long-eared Hedgehog ◊ *Hemiechinus auritus* We saw two at our Ger camp near Khongoryn Els and one later.

Andrew's Three-toed Jerboa ◊ (Mongolian J) *Stylodipus andersi* A few seen near Boontsagaan Nuur.

Three-toed Jerboa (Hairy-footed J) *Dipus sagitta* Fairly widespread and about 25 seen.

Gobi Jerboa ♦ *Allactaga bullata* A single individual was identified near Khongoryn Els.

Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica* The most common jerboa on the tour, about 50 seen.

Brandt's Vole *Lasiopodomys brandtii* Very common at Sangiin Dalai Nuur.

Mid-day Gerbil ♦ (M-d Jerd) *Meriones meridianus* Just one was seen and identified with the white claws.

Mongolian Gerbil ♦ (M Jerd) *Meriones unguiculatus* Fairly commonly encountered, especially in the Gobi-Altai.

Mongolian Silver Vole (Royle's Mountain V) *Alticola semicanus* One was seen in the Barig Mountain.

Tarbagan Marmot (Siberian/Mongolian M) *Marmota sibirica* Common and widespread. Conspicuous in Hustai NP.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* Both grey and black morphs were seen in the taiga.

Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel (R-c Souslik) *Spermophilus erythrogenys* Just a few observations in semi-deserts.

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel (L-T Souslik) *Spermophilus undulatus* Many sightings of this prairie dog like critter.

Alashan Ground Squirrel ♦ *Spermophilus alashanicus* Just two were seen at Ih Bogd Uul.

Corsac Fox *Vulpes corsac* A family party was seen at Sangiin Dalai Nuur.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Three sightings on the tour.

Grey Wolf *Canis lupus* (LO) One was seen on our last night in Ghorkij – Terelj NP.

Marbled Polecat ♦ *Vormela peregusna* Fantastic looks of this stunner on our way to the Gobi-Altai.

Steppe Polecat ♦ *Mustella eversmanni* One was seen in the Jalman Valley in the north. Interesting data!

Pallas's Cat ♦ *Otocolobus manul* One was spotlighted in Yoli Am in the Gobi-Altai.

Przewalski's Horse *Equus ferus przewalskii* About 70 of these re-introduced horses were seen in the Hustai NP.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* Several showed well in Hustai NP.

Siberian Ibex ♦ *Capra sibirica* About 10 were seen in the Gobi Altai.

Goitered Gazelle (Black-tailed G) *Gazella subgutturosa* A total of twelve were seen in the Gobi desert.

Argali ♦ *Ovis ammon* Just seven were observed in Yoli Am in the Gobi-Altai.

Mongolian Gazelle ♦ (White-tailed G) *Gazella gutturosa* Several sightings, about 100 seen altogether.



Siberian Ibex in the Gobi-Altai Mountains (János Oláh).



Toad-headed Agama (János Oláh).

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Toad-headed Agama *Phrynocephalus versicolor* Common in the semi-desert, many seen in various colours.

Multi-ocellated Racerunner *Eremias multiocellata* About four were seen in semi-desert.

Halys Viper (Central Asian V) *Gloydius halys* One was seen in Yoli Am Valley.

Siberian Sand (Mongolian/Radde's) Toad *Bufo raddei* One was found at Boontsagaan Nuur.

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird Names. Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2018. IOC World Bird List (v 8.2). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*

This rare species only breeds in Russia, Mongolia and China and the border area between these three countries is their key breeding location. They winter in North and South Korea and central China. The world population stands at 60 – 90,000 birds and is sadly declining as a result of habitat loss (drainage) and unsustainable levels of hunting. Considered Vulnerable.

White-winged Scoter (Stejneger's S) *Melanitta [deglandi] stejnegeri*

Leonhard Stejneger (1851-1943) was a Norwegian ornithologist and collector.

Black-billed Capercaillie (Spotted / Siberian Capercaillie) *Tetrao urogalloides*

One of the best experiences of the tour seeing lekking males of this enigmatic species! Both Western and Black-billed Capercaillie occur in Mongolia, but don't seem to overlap. These two species form a

superspecies though in the limited area of overlap in the basin of the Yenisey River (Russia) hybrids are frequently encountered. The male can reach a weight of up to 4.5 kg.

Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus*

This species is quite heavily hunted in Mongolia, because of its supposed medicinal powers. The total population is estimated at 50 – 100,000 individuals and is probably slowly declining. The distinctive Palearctic genus *Tetraogallus* consists of five closely-related species, which all occur in remote and steep mountainous areas and are all highly-desired by Palearctic birding enthusiasts. One has to work to see snowcocks though!

Horned Grebe (Slavonian Grebe) *Podiceps auritus*

Slavonia is a geographical and historical region in eastern Croatia and was wrongly allocated to this bird owing to a mix up with Black-necked Grebe for which it was originally intended.

Cinereous Vulture (Eurasian Black V, Monk V) *Aegypius monachus*

This magnificent raptor is still common in Mongolia and we had many encounters. The total population is less than 20,000 birds.

Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

The world population is likely to be less than 15,000 individuals. It is one of the many birds named after Peter Simon Pallas, a German doctor and scientist, who was invited by Catherine II to become professor at the Academy of Sciences at St Petersburg. He organised a six-year long expedition through central Russia, which reached Transbaikalia and the border of Mongolia. He was one of the greatest of all eighteenth century naturalists.

Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*

We had outstanding looks at Kholboolj Nuur. HBW suggests it might be a future split into four species. It would be Western Baillon's Crake *P. intermedia*, Eastern Baillon's Crake *P. pusilla*, Bornean Baillon's Crake *P. mira* and Australasian Baillon's Crake *P. palustris*. We saw the **Eastern Baillon's Crake** on the tour.

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*

Its population is estimated at around 6,500 individuals and is probably declining.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

The world population is currently estimated at 230,000 – 280,000 birds. Mongolian breeders mostly winter in India, including at the famous Khichan site.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaulti*

We had many excellent looks on lakes and in semi desert breeding habitat. The species is named after Jean Baptiste Leschenault de la Tour (1773-1826), French botanist and collector in Australia, Java and India.

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*

This cracker only breeds in southern Siberia, Mongolia and north-eastern China and winters in north-western and north central Australia. Breeding plumaged birds are not easy to see anywhere on migration – perhaps Cambodia is the best place. It is very special to see them on the breeding grounds! The total population is estimated at 160,000 birds.

Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*

The total population is estimated at 23,000 birds. Another special wader which is rarely seen in breeding plumage on the migration routes. Yet another Mongolian specialty.

Relict Gull *Larus relictus*

The world population is around 20,000 birds and is declining as a result of predation, disturbance, variable climatic factors at breeding colonies and the development of coastal wetlands in its wintering range. It only breeds in eastern Kazakhstan (two localities), Russia (one spot), China (one or two localities holding the largest known colonies) and Mongolia (several colonies). It was originally described as a race of Mediterranean Gull, known from one specimen, then suspected of being an aberrant Brown-headed Gull or a hybrid Brown-headed x Pallas's Gull. But since breeding colonies were found in 1970 (only!!) it has now universally been considered a distinct species. It is mostly wintering at one single location, which makes it even more vulnerable.

Vega Gull (Mongolian G) *Larus [vegae] mongolicus*

The whole taxonomy of the "Herring Gull/Yellow-legged Gull" complex is indeed very complex and the form involved (*mongolicus*) is now treated by IOC as a subspecies of Vega Gull. Other authors consider it a subspecies of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* or as a separate species (Mongolian Gull *L. mongolicus*).

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

The birds seen were quite variable with most obviously belonging to the race *longipennis*, with totally black bill and greyer plumage, compared to European birds. But there was great variability in the bill coloration with almost anything from all red bill to all dark bill. It was very interesting to see such a large difference.

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus*

We had some excellent looks and great experience with this emblematic species. Such a elegant bird with a real character! This species has a wide breeding range and occurs from the Caspian Sea east to northeastern China, but it is mainly known for its irruptive behaviour. Several major irruptions have taken place in western Europe, notably in 1863, 1888 and 1908, when thousands of birds were observed and whereby some birds settled and bred in countries as far apart as Great-Britain, Sweden and Poland. The epithet *paradoxus* (= unexpected, strange) obviously relates to this unique behaviour.

Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*

This species probably suffers from rivalry with the ever-increasing Rock Dove, although studies in the Ulan Ude area (just across the border in Russia) have shown that hybridization remains limited.

Amur Falcon (Eastern Red-footed Falcon) *Falco amurensis*

This social bird of prey is named after the Amur river of Eastern Siberia and is famous for its amazing migration over the Indian Ocean to its wintering haunts in southern central Africa, where roosts of several thousand birds are known. The disastrous trapping in NE India has now been stopped.

Saker Falcon (Saker) *Falco cherrug*

The total population is estimated at fewer than 30,000 birds and the Mongolian population is considered to be around 4,000 pairs but declining. The illegal trapping of Sakers is a sad fact. A single bird may fetch a price of up to 2,500\$ in a country where the monthly average wage is less than 100\$. *Cherrug* is derived from the Hindi word *charg* for the female Saker. The tiercel (male) is known as *chargela*.

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

It is restricted to southern Mongolia, north-western China and gets just into Kazakhstan. The four species of ground jay (genus *Podoces*) are all enigmatic species of remote, hard to reach places that appeal very much to Palearctic birding fanatics. The bird is named after Lieutenant Colonel George Henderson, a 19th century British soldier, explorer and author.

Horned Lark (Shore L) *Eremophila alpestris*

HBW suggests it might be a future split into six species. It would be American Horned Lark *E. alpestris*, Shore Lark *E. flava*, Steppe Horned Lark *E. brandti*, Atlas Horned Lark *E. atlas*, Caucasian Horned Lark *E. penicillata* and Himalayan Horned Lark *E. longirostris*. We saw the **Steppe Horned Lark** on the tour.

Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis*

Now IOC splits this form from Greater Short-toed Lark *C. barchydactyla*.

Pale Martin *Riparia diluta*

This form has now been split off as a separate species (from Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*) and usually occupies drier habitat and lives in smaller colonies. They overlap in Kazakhstan and probably in western Mongolia.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

The form concerned is *lagopodum* which differs from nominate *urbicum* in having a much more extensive white rump patch and shallower tail fork. In the small area of contact between the two taxa to the south and east of Lake Baikal they reportedly behave as separate species so, pending further research, a split seems possible.

Eversmann's Redstart (Rufous-backed Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythronota*

Eduard Friedrich Eversmann (1794-1860) was a German naturalist, collector and author who travelled in Kirghizia and Siberia.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*

The bird is named after Dauria or Dahuria, in ancient times the name for the area encompassing parts of eastern Mongolia and the Chinese province of Heilongjiang.

Güldenstädt's Redstart (White-winged Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

Johann Anton Güldenstädt (1745-1781) was a botanist and zoologist and a colleague of Peter Simon Pallas. He explored the Caucasus for nearly seven years.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* and Stejneger's Stonechat *S. stejnegeri*

What was formerly Common Stonechat *S. torquatus* has gone through a number of recent revisions including the separation of Palearctic taxa from African Stonechat *S. torquatus* as Common Stonechat *S. rubicola* and more recently the further separation of Eastern Palearctic forms as Siberian Stonechat *S. maurus*. More recently still the easternmost forms of *maurus* have been further split by IOC as Stejneger's Stonechat *S. stejnegeri*, primarily on the basis of genetic evidence though usable field characters are gradually being described. The range limits and migration routes of *maurus* and *stejnegeri* remain poorly understood but based on the most recent evidence both occur as passage migrants and breeding visitors to Mongolia, *stejnegeri* breeding around Ulaanbaatar and mainly to the north and east of there and *maurus* breeding further west – though both could conceivably occur as migrants anywhere in central Mongolia. The subtle plumage differences between the species are at their most obvious in fresh autumn plumage but well-marked individuals are identifiable with a moderate degree of confidence in spring given good views. The birds we saw in the Khangai Mountains were *maurus* while in the Taiga area NE of UB mostly *stejnegeri*.

Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri*

It is only found where the famous Saxaul tree (*Haloxylon ammodendron* - *Amaranthaceae*) survives. Its distribution falls into six disjunct areas across Central Asia, where it is a bird of deserts, favouring areas with shrubs such as the saxaul, near rivers and oases.

Père David's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*

This species is always associated with sousliks or pikas, as they breed in their burrows. The bird is named after the famous Abbé Père Armand David, a 19th century French missionary to China, naturalist, intrepid explorer and author. A splendid book about this amazing man and his incredible accomplishments is: "Travels in Imperial China: The Exploration & Discoveries of Père David" by George Bishop.

Kozlov's Accentor (Mongolian Accentor) *Prunella koslowi*

This is a true Mongolian breeding endemic, although there are several winter observations in China. The bird is named after General Pyotr Kuzmich Kozlov (1863 -1935), a Russian explorer of central Asia and Mongolia.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

It is not always easy to separate from Richard's Pipit, although the display flight and song are quite different. Edward Blyth was an 19th century English zoologist who contributed hugely to early Indian ornithology.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

This species was formerly called Rock Pipit, but that name is now used for the coastal form *petrosus*, which is nowadays split off as a separate species with the name Water Pipit now used for the residual *A. spinoletta*. Recent studies of plumage, voice and genetics suggest that the three races of Water Pipit might be better regarded as three separate species. The HBW suggests it might be a future split into three species. It would be Western Water Pipit *A. spinoletta*, Caucasian Water Pipit *A. coutellii* and Eastern Water Pipit *A. blakistoni*. We saw the **Eastern Water Pipit** on the tour.

Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa*

The form *sushkini* in the Khangai Mountains is distinct. The HBW suggests it might be a future split into five species. It would be Altai Rosy-Finch *L. arctoa*, Tuva Rosy-Finch *L. cognata*, Khangai Rosy-Finch *L. sushkini*, Baikal Rosy-Finch *L. giglioi* and Kolyma Rosy-Finch *L. brunneonucha*. We saw the **Khangai Rosy-Finch** on the tour.

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus*

The form concerned is *argyrophrys* which IOC now regard as a race of the present species rather than, as previously, of Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *C. davidianus*; all were formerly considered conspecific with the name Beautiful Rosefinch *C. pulcherrimus* used for the enlarged species.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Good looks at many smart males along forest edges near Ulaanbaatar and at Terelj (nominate). They really sing almost exactly like a Yellowhammer and in the zone of overlap in the Urals and western Siberia hybrids are well known.

Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii*

The bird is named after Wictor Witold Godlewski, a 19th century Polish farmer and amateur naturalist, who was exiled to Siberia.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*

This once common species now considered Critically Endangered and disappeared from most of its former breeding grounds. The nominate race is practically extinct in Europe now and the *ornata* race we saw is also in grave danger. The biggest problem is the collecting them in the wintering grounds in China.

Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasii*

We saw two forms on the tour. The local form concerned is *lydiae* which differs from other races slightly in plumage but more distinctly in voice and ecology and potentially represents a separate species. The HBW

suggests it might be a future split into two species. It would be Pallas's Bunting *E. pallasi* and Mongolian Bunting *E. kydiae*. We saw both the **Pallas's** and **Mongolian Buntings** on the tour.

APPENDIX 1: Overall results of the 'Bird of the tour' contest

	Species	Points	Nominations
1st	Relict Gull	32	5
2nd	Black-billed Capercaillie	30	3
3rd	Pallas's Sandgrouse	24	4
4th	Siberian Rubythroat	20	3
5th	Güldenstadt's Redstart	14	2



Relict Gulls and Black-billed Capercaillie were voted the top birds and we cannot resist two more images (János Oláh)!



The impressive Chinggis Khaan statue east of Ulaanbataar (János Oláh).