

MONGOLIA BIRDING TRIP REPORT

JUNE 5TH TO JUNE 20TH 2018

Participants: Gail Mackiernan, Barry Cooper, Peter Colston, Anthony Quinn
Guide: Frank Lambert

Introduction:

After hearing an enthusiastic report from our friends Liz and Roger Charlwood about their spring 2017 birding trip to Mongolia, we decided to arrange a similar trip in 2018. We were fortunate to have Tony Quinn and Peter Colston join us, as they are long-time friends as well as great birders!

We made the same arrangements as the Charlwoods, with Frank Lambert as our guide. Frank is a Brit who has spent years birding in Asia, South America and many other locations around the world, and who has made several trips to Mongolia. Our in-country arrangements were through Tum-Ecotour Ltd. The owner, Khumbaa Tumendelger (Tumen for short), probably the most experienced birder in Mongolia, accompanied us through most of the trip.



General impression of Mongolia:

We all agreed Mongolia is a truly incredible birding destination. Moreover, the immense grasslands, incredible Gobi Desert, surprisingly varied wetlands, and the limited human habitation over much of the country outside of the capital made this an unforgettable experience. While it is not a place for a long bird list, it holds some of the most-wanted species and these in fair number. (Mammals are also interesting, in fact, at the right time of year Mongolia is possibly the best place in the world to see Snow Leopard.) The total population of Mongolia is only about 3 million, of which half live in Ulaanbaatar; making it one of the least densely populated nations on the planet.

The spring of 2018 had been very dry, and with no significant rain in many areas for months. This impacted the level of lakes, especially Bayan Lake, as well as the overall condition of the grasslands. Overgrazing is an ongoing problem in Mongolia, and is also causing significant environmental degradation. Climate change is impacting rainfall as well. In recent years, a series of very cold winters followed by dry springs caused a catastrophic die-off of livestock, and the resulting movement of tens of thousands of pastoralists to the cities. So despite the low population density, the country does face significant environmental challenges.

The dates: We visited Mongolia in June; this was primarily due to Tumen's availability between his other tours. A trip in May would have yielded far more migrants, although weather at that time of year can be unsettled, with snow and high winds more likely. In general, we had pleasant weather, with occasional windy periods, and only two partial days of rain. Not unexpectedly, we recorded few migrants. (However, some birders visiting in June in previous years have in fact seen a good variety of migrants, so obviously there can be considerable year-to-year variation).

Flights and trip logistics:

The distance between Washington D.C and Ulaanbaatar (UB) is about 6,000 miles. We flew from Dulles on JetBlue and Aeroflot, with flight changes at Kennedy Airport, New York and

Sheremetyevo Airport, Moscow. We arrived at the Chinggis Khaan International Airport in UB very early on June 4th, a day early. Upon arrival at the airport in Mongolia we connected with Tony and Peter who had arrived a couple of hours earlier. Tumen's wife Oyunaa and son Zolboo were there to take us to Hotel Mongolica.



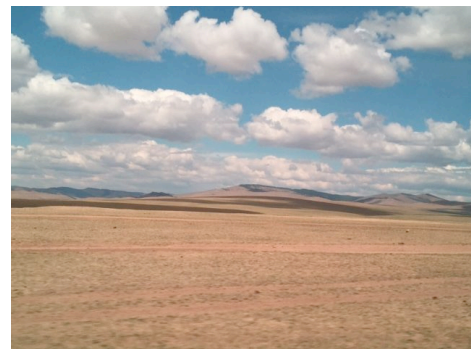
This hotel was an excellent choice, being a modern establishment with extensive grounds that enabled us to relax and do some initial birding prior to the formal start of the trip. Frank was to arrive later that evening and the formal tour to start the next day. The first two days was with a van and driver as we were doing sites near the capital. Tumen, along with our field support crew, would meet us on the 7th to start the long overland portion of the trip.

June 4th 2018 After a late breakfast and some unwinding, we were soon out in the field! The area around the hotel supports an extensive willow and poplar woodland, with some quite sizeable trees; the Tuul River (unfortunately much polluted) runs nearby. Birds seen around the hotel included great views of three Amur Falcons and a total of at least four Azure Tits. The latter species was on our "most wanted" list and, in fact, this was only site where we saw it. There was a good selection of other birds, including Common Tern, Red-billed Chough, Azure-winged Magpie, Daurian Jackdaw, Hoopoe, Two-barred Greenish Warbler, Red Crossbill, and Hawfinch (the latter three on migration). Peter also saw us off with a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker!



June 5th 2018 We met Frank at breakfast, and soon were exploring other areas around the hotel, and later, more distant sites around UB. These included the "Airport Lake," Tuul River south of Ulaanbaatar and in the afternoon the Ulanbaatar "sewage ponds" (unfortunately virtually dry). Behind the hotel we located a pair of White-crowned Penduline Tits, another target species. The ponds near the airport were active, and we ticked our first Demoiselle Cranes and White-winged Terns (both proved common throughout the trip) as well as a good selection of ducks and other water birds. A visit to the brushy margin of the Tuul River for Long-tailed Rosefinch was successful with a single bird. The afternoon sewage pond visit literally came up dry, except for a well-viewed Blyth's Pipit.

June 6th 2018 The day started off overcast with light rain, as we left on the two-hour drive to Hustai National Park, west of UB. Today was our first taste of the massive scale of Mongolia's grasslands, a constant theme throughout the trip. The grasslands, although



stunted by overgrazing (and dry from drought), are very productive for birds including several species of lark. One of most-wanted, the large and beautiful Mongolian Lark, was abundant – we recorded over 60 of them! Asian Short-toed and Shore (Horned) Larks were also numerous. The grassland also hosts vast numbers of ground rodents and other mammals. As consequence, raptors are also common, and during our drive Steppe Eagles (most grounded by the weather) were a constant presence. In all, we saw six raptor species, including two Saker Falcon nests located on power poles. These provided great views of eight almost full-grown young and at least two adults. Also impressive were several groups of the huge Black (Cinereous) Vulture.



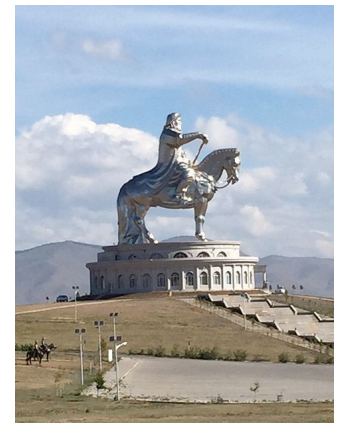
our
a



Hustai Park is famous for its large numbers of the endangered Przewalski's Horse. This species, the only true wild horse, was reintroduced to Mongolia in 1992, after becoming extinct in the wild in 1969. After much searching we were pleased to see a stallion accompanied by two mares and a foal. He approached very close to us, prancing and showing off his dominance. We also saw Asian Red Deer, Siberian Marmots and a host of small rodents.

June 7th, 2018 In the morning, Tumen and our support team arrived; all would be with us for the balance of the trip. Transportation consisted of two large and rugged Toyota Land Cruisers plus a Russian 4WD van that looked like a relic from WW2. Support personnel included three drivers, including Tumen's brother Gaana and Oggi, an accomplished mechanic, plus Tumen's son Zolboo (who speaks good English) and a young lady who was the cook and prepared all our meals.

Our first destination was the Mungun Forest, at the edge of the boreal taiga, an extensive area of larch and pines. The target here was our most-wanted bird, Black-billed Capercaillie. We had tentatively set aside two nights of camping at this site, feeling the birds would be difficult at the end of their lekking season. The forest was about a four-hour drive north of the capital. En route we passed the immense monument to Chinngis Khaan which dominates the surroundings. We stopped for lunch at a very scenic hilly area, overlooking a vast plain. The area was covered with shrubs and brambles that proved to be a good site for buntings. We managed to see three Pine buntings here, plus heard a Yellow-breasted Bunting. In a small town north of Baganuur, we added our only Hill Pigeons of the trip.



Our crew planned to set up camouflaged tents near an open area where the Capercaillies are known to display. Amazingly, as the staff arrived at the campsite, they surprised a male Capercaillie who froze in place long enough for all of us to arrive - we had been birding elsewhere - and see him! (Or at least his head and shoulders)

June 8th, 2018 The night was fairly cold and none of us had much sleep. Around 3.45 am a male Capercaillie started making its strange clicking call just behind our tents! Another bird was heard flying in and landing heavily nearby. Frustratingly, most of the tents looked out in a different direction, and even after it got light, we were hard pressed to see much. However, Frank managed to creep out of his tent and get one bird in his scope. We followed, using our best commando techniques, and had adequate views of two males at the lek. Later we saw three

amazingly huge males in flight as they left the lek. All in all a big success, despite a little “mud” episode with the SUV!



After breakfast, we birded the forest edge, with good looks at a singing Chinese Grasshopper Warbler, a top bird! We also added our only Siberian Rubythroat and Oriental Cuckoo of the trip, as well as a few Dusky, Hume’s Leaf and Yellow-browed Warblers. Leaving the forest around 10.00 am, we headed back to UB. Another stop at the bunting site provided nice views of four singing Yellow-breasted Buntings. A short visit was also made to Lake Gun Galutut, the first of several lakes we visited during the trip. It was loaded with a great variety of ducks and other water birds, but not the reported Stejneger’s Scoter, unfortunately. We arrived back at the Hotel Mongolica at about 5.30 p.m.

June 9th, 2018 Tumen and his crew met us at 7:00 am for the long drive SW to Dalanazadgad (DZ), across the fringes of the Gobi Desert. We enjoyed several interesting roadside stops at water holes that were magnets for birds. Today was the best day of the trip for one of our most wanted species, Pallas’s Sandgrouse. We watched excitedly as several flocks flew rapidly passed us and landed at a flooded area right by the road. All in all, over 100 were recorded on the drive. Also, a number of passerines were attracted to the water. These included superb views of a Pallas’s Grasshopper Warbler feeding on insects at the water’s edge and viewed by us from just a couple of feet! Other species seen en route included Shore (Horned) Lark, Pere David’s Snowfinch, and Mongolian Finch.



Dalanazadgad is a small city where Tumen owns a very nice, spacious house. The upper floor has a balcony that provides an excellent view over a brushy area with a small wetland. We were pleasantly surprised to watch a migratory flock of 30+ Lesser Kestrels from the balcony while we were drinking coffee. We spent this and the following night at the house and the kestrels entertained us both evenings

An afternoon walk around the wetland yielded Chinese Pond Heron, Richard's Pipits, Citrine Wagtails, a nice male White (Amur) Wagtail, Crested Larks and our first Isabelline Shrikes. Later that evening Barry was treated to a surprise birthday party engineered by Tumen!

June 10th, 2018 We took an early morning drive to a nearby Henderson's Ground Jay site, near the foothills of low mountains south of the city. Happily, we easily found four of these unique birds. Following this, the two SUVs explored an extensive area of a stony plain near the city, looking for the uncommon, elusive and very beautiful Oriental Plover. This proved not so easy! However, after several hours we managed to see two individuals of this very attractive shorebird, one very cooperative and photogenic!



In the late afternoon we visited Mukhar Shivert, an attractive park consisting of a rocky canyon with steep cliffs and scattered thick vegetation. Our target here was Barred Warbler, and after some playback we found a couple of pairs on territory. One male was seen doing a wing-fluttering, puff-up display to a female. Other interesting birds included Golden Eagle, Lammergeier, Crag Martin, White-winged Snowfinch, and Brown Accentor.

June 11th, 2018 We initially stopped at a couple of local migrant hotspots en route to the Yol Valley. The first, just outside DZ, was quiet. The other proved a little more productive -- permanent flowing water, trees and cropland in the middle of barren desert. Unfortunately, only a few migrants were around: Asian Broan Flycatcher, Pallas' Leaf Warbler, three Pallas' Grasshopper Warblers, an unidentified large *Acrocephalus* (possibly Thick-billed Warbler) and several Hawfinches. But one could see that this site would be a magnet for migrants earlier in the spring!



The Yol Valley, in Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park, was our site for Mongolia's only endemic -- Koslov's Accentor. We quickly located a family party just adjacent to the car park; although plain in appearance, they are active little birds and quite confiding. A short walk into the valley located our only Daurian Redstart, as well as Twite and Godlewski's Bunting. We also saw a Lammergeier (Yol in



Mongolian) for which the valley is named.

Lunch that day was in a deep, narrow canyon with permanent water; while driving in our only Chukar of the trip crossed in front of the cars. After lunch our trek continued, through increasingly arid surroundings, to the famous Khongor Sand Dunes. These

impressive dunes rise to about 900 feet or more in height, and extend for over 100 miles. A distant group of camels at the base of the dunes looked minute in comparison. We stayed in a ger (yurt) campground that night, which provided quite comfortable accommodations.



Some afternoon birding in the vicinity located five sought-after Saxaul Sparrows nesting in the ruins of an old building. The saxaul woodland here is increasingly degraded due to cutting for firewood, but we still managed to locate a single Steppe (Saxaul) Grey Shrike. A pair of Desert Wheatears was found nesting in the campground. A night drive after supper targeted mammals, with good looks at two species of Jerboa, Tolai Hare and Black-tailed Gazelle.

June 12th, 2018 Today, some early morning birding in the saxaul woods relocated the shrike but little else. A short drive to a nearby area of sparse, low bushes was successful for our target Desert Warbler. Following this, we had a very long drive to Baga Bogd. This entailed about a two-hour slog across a very remote portion of the Gobi Desert. Initially this drive was on



indistinct dirt tracks, with the final climb to a remote valley on no roads at all!! An unique woodland of large, widely spaced trees growing right from the barren, rocky ground greeted us. Beyond this was a steep, wild valley where we camped. Scanning the heights above us eventually



revealed several Altai Snowcocks. Other good birds today were a couple of Golden Eagles, the now almost daily Black Vultures plus Lammergeiers and a noisy pair of Saker Falcons hunting the cliffs. We spent a cold night in the tents.

June 13th, 2018 Up early at this extremely remote site as we were hoping to see more Altai Snowcocks. We were not disappointed, both hearing and seeing at least 3-4 more birds high up on the rocks. During the morning we broke camp and made the long drive back. On the way out of Baga Bogd we had unforgettable views over the Gobi Desert spreading below us. Unexpectedly, five Henderson's Ground Jays were seen in the rocky ravines just below the woodland. We retraced our route to the main "road" – essentially two tire tracks in the sand – before turning northwest.



At lunchtime, we stopped at a very productive lake, Orog Noor, hosting many shorebirds and waterfowl. This included our first Common Cranes, accompanied by an unexpected vagrant Hooded Crane. We arrived at Kholboolj Noor, another large lake, about 6.00 p.m. Camp was set up on the crest of the hill overlooking the lake. This lake supported large numbers of waders

and waterfowl, the highlight being excellent views of a pair of Asian Dowitchers in full breeding plumage.



Just before midnight, a tremendous windstorm blew up – which soon became a sandstorm threatening to blow the tents away. The crew responded quickly, manouvering our vehicles to block the wind and tying the tents down firmly. Despite this, most everyone’s luggage disgorged sand for days to come!

June 14th, 2018 We birded Kholboolj Noor during the early morning, recording at least thirteen species of shorebirds and twelve species of waterfowl both on the lake itself, and in the boggy pools behind the crescent dunes. Breaking camp around 9.00 am, we began our 4 hour drive to Bayankhongor, with no more birding that day. BK is a fair sized city, and tonight we stayed in a rather austere hotel – grateful for a real bed!

June 15th, 2018 Unfortunately, Tony awoke this morning quite ill with digestive issues. When he felt somewhat better, we drove about three hours from Bayanhongor to the Barig Mountains and set up camp. This area is the most reliable site for the Hodgson’s Bushchat. Taking the vehicles up to the summit of a nearby hill, we spread out in search of this rare bird. Eventually Peter’s sharp eyes located a pair. All of us, including Tony, spent quite a while enjoying these very attractive (and confiding) chats. After lunch, we set off for a patch of remnant larch forest about 45 minutes away where the rare



Eversmann’s Redstart can be found. Tony was still feeling under the weather, so he stayed in camp. After considerable searching, Frank, Gail, Peter and Barry had brief but clear views of a perched male Redstart. On the way back, we stopped at a prehistoric site to see some of the mysterious “deer stones” which are found throughout Mongolia. Dating to about 3500 years ago, the stylized reindeer resemble Scythian motifs, but no one actually knows who made them.



It seemed all was well, but at supper Barry suddenly fell ill with the same problem as Tony! Frank and Tumen made the executive decision to break camp, and to return to Bayankhongor and a hotel. The first vehicle left with Tumen, taking Tony and Barry to a comfortable hotel, soon to be joined by the others. By late evening everyone felt better, so we looked forward to the next day with more optimism.

June 16th, 2018 Early morning was spent along the tree-lined river next to town, which we hoped would be a good site for migrants. Unfortunately all we found were two Dusky Warblers. Leaving the hotel, we returned to the Barig Mountains to relocate the beautiful male Eversmann's Redstart for Tony. This excursion was even more successful, the bird being found almost next to where the vehicles were parked! Meanwhile, Gail and Tumen made a steep climb, in very windy conditions, in an unsuccessful effort to find Gldenstadt's Redstart on the nearby rocky cliffs. In the afternoon we drove to Abaikheer, a mid-size town. En route, we experienced a massive hailstorm lasting about 30 minutes, that made the arid countryside look like it was covered in snow. We upgraded our sleeping arrangements for tonight by staying at the Palace Hotel!



June 17th, 2018 It was raining in the morning, beneficial for the arid countryside but not for birding. We stopped briefly at an unnamed lake, in cold rain and gradually increasing wind, seeing little new. The poor weather altered our plans, so instead of camping we opted to stay at a ger campground at Elsen Tasarkhai. Naturally, once we got settled, the rain and wind stopped and the sun came out! The lake and wetland next to the camp proved excellent for birds, with several firsts including a family party of Swan Geese, two pairs of White-necked Cranes and a Black-necked Grebe. A bonus was up to eight Asian Dowitchers as well as a number of other waders.

June 18th, 2018 In the morning we again visited the lake, where we enjoyed a beautiful pair of Black-throated Divers. The number of Dowitchers had grown to thirteen! Later we explored the nearby dunes for Desert (Lesser) Whitethroat, obtaining good views of this fairly recent split. We also spent some time getting confident with our identification of two Mongolian Short-toed Larks seen along the lake edge.

Next was an overland drive to much-anticipated Bayan Lake, arriving to find it exceptionally low and almost devoid of waterfowl. Best were some White-naped Cranes and a small party of Eastern Yellow Wagtails (amazingly, new to our list). To add insult to injury, a hatch of some extraordinarily abundant and annoying small fly had occurred – they were everywhere! Camp was set up well above the lake, in hopes that a breeze would discourage the pests, to no avail.

The area around Bayan Lake is the site for the distinctive race *lydiae* of Pallas's Reed Bunting. Now proposed as a split (Mongolian Bunting) due to its habitat preference, plumage, bill size and highly divergent song. Frank searched nearby while camp was being set up, and managed to find a nice male in short order. A visit to the lakeside was less productive except for common waders and ducks; we heard not a single whiff of the Brown-cheeked (Eastern Water) Rails often encountered here.

June, 19th 2018 In the morning we made an early start to try and see the Rail, but a few grunts from deep in the reeds was the only response to Frank's tape. We did see our only Paddyfield

Warblers of the trip and Peter got lucky with a flyby Yellow Bittern. Searching near a quarry up on the hillside, we encountered several pairs of the enigmatic bunting and both Tony and Peter obtained good photographs.

Breaking camp, we left the rather disappointing lake and drove east to Hustai National Park. After lunch and some shopping at the visitor's center, we drove into the park, staying at the somewhat run-down Ranger Station. Tumen, who had developed a serious infection in his foot in the last couple of days, left for a hospital in Ulaanbaatar. The rest of the group made a trip to Tumen's best site for Daurian Partridge, with no success after much searching. After supper we visited a site for the Partridge recommended by one of the park biologists, but again came up empty.

June 20, 2018 Staying inside the park allowed us to get into the field before the day tourists showed up. This proved a great move, as we had brilliant, prolonged views of over 150 Przewalski's Horses as we drove out in the morning. The horses were watering at a stream the road, in small parties consisting of an adult stallion and several mares and usually one or two foals. We saw a number of interesting interactions between members of the competing bands. Watching these rare animals up so close has to be one of the most enjoyable and memorable memories of the trip. We spent most of the morning at Tumen's recommended site for the Partridge, but again failed to connect. Another time!



In the afternoon we headed back to the Hotel Mongolica just outside of Ulanbaatar. A short excursion outside the hotel located a couple of Azure Tits, a fitting closure to our birding days.

In the evening we all enjoyed a wonderful last dinner with Frank, Tumen (now on the mend), Zoolool and his family, and the whole crew. A great way to end a very enjoyable and successful trip!

Bird Species List:

We recorded a total of 171 bird species seen, with a few others heard-only. More species would have been recorded had we visited earlier in the spring, during peak migration. However, we still managed to tick most of the birds on our wish lists

Swan Goose : Despite visiting a number of lakes and wetlands, this species was not seen until almost the end of the trip with a pair plus young seen at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Greylag Goose: A party of thirty-five birds (adults and chicks) seen at Orog Noor was our only record.

Bar-headed Goose [photo]: Fairly common at various wetland visited, with numerous family parties seen.



Whooper Swan: A surprisingly widespread species, breeding at numerous lakes and several nests noted. In all, recorded seven days with a daily maximum of twenty-five birds.

Common Shelduck: Common and widespread in suitable wetland habitats.

Ruddy Shelduck: Another common and widespread species, being seen virtually every day of the trip.

Gadwall: Fairly common and widespread .

Eurasian Wigeon : Quite scarce, being recorded on three days with daily maximum of six birds.

Mallard; Common and widespread.

Northern Shoveller: Recorded on five days with daily maximum of forty birds.

Northern Pintail: A scarce species with a total of seven birds seen during the trip.

Spot-billed Duck: Just a single bird seen at Elsen Tasarkhai..

Garganey: This attractive duck was quite common at various wetlands. In all we recorded on five days with daily maximum of twenty birds.

Eurasian Teal: Recorded on four days with daily maximum of eight birds.

Falcated Teal: Just a single male seen.

Ferruginous Duck: Another scarce species with just two birds seen at Orog Nuur.

Red-crested Pochard: A total of fourteen birds recorded over three days.

Common Pochard: Recorded on three days with daily maximum of at least 50 birds.

Tufted Duck: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum estimated at two hundred birds.

Common Goldeneye: Recorded on two days including ten birds seen at Lake Gun Galuut.

Mandarin Duck: Recorded on two days, as flyovers near the Tuul River at the Mongolica Hotel with maximum of six birds .

Goosander: Only seen on the Tuul River near the Mongolica Hotel. Surprisingly, not seen elsewhere on the trip.

Black-billed Capercaillie: One of our most anticipated birds. We camped overnight in the forest to improve our chances of seeing this spectacular species. In fact, our first sighting was brief view of a male shortly after arriving in mid-afternoon. Around 3:45 the following morning we heard a male making its distinctive clicking call right behind our tent [in fact Tony had the good fortune to see this bird from his tent!] This continued for hours as other birds joined the lek. Eventually, we all had good views of at least three males during the early morning.

Altai Snowcock: Another highly anticipated species. Getting to the breeding site was quite an epic drive across a remote portion of the Gobi Desert. The final stages of the trip involved crossing a steep roadless area that challenged both the drivers and our rugged SUVs. Still it

was well worth it as we had excellent views of about 4-5 of these striking birds high up on the rugged cliffs. (In autumn this is a good area for Snow Leopard!)

Chukar Partridge: Just a single bird seen on the 11th and others heard calling at the Snowcock site.

Black-throated Diver: This was very much an unexpected sighting. We had good views of a pair in breeding plumage on the lake at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Great Crested Grebe: Recorded in small numbers over six days.

Black-necked Grebe: A breeding plumaged bird seen in close company with a Great Crested Grebe at the lake at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Black Stork: Just a single bird flying over on our first day at the Hotel Mongolica. Presumably, a late spring migrant.

Grey Heron: A fairly common bird recorded at various wetlands. A herony with over a dozen nest was seen at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Eurasian Bittern: One unseen bird heard booming at Orog Noor.

Night Heron: Just a single bird seen at Orog Noor.

Eurasian Spoonbill: Quite a widespread species at the various wetlands we visited. Recorded on six days, with daily maximum of about fifteen birds at several locations.

Great Cormorant: Much less common than expected, with 3 birds seen at Orog Nuur and a single at Kholboolj Nuur.

Cattle Egret: A total of eight birds recorded over two days in the wetland across from Tumen's home in DZ.

Chinese Pond Heron: Recorded on three days, with a daily maximum of three birds in the wetland near Tumen's home in DZ.

Yellow Bittern: Peter saw a single bird in flight at Bayan Lake.

Lammergeier: This impressive vulture was more numerous than expected, with up to two birds recorded on seven days.

Himalayan Griffon: Recorded on five days including up to fifteen seen at Hustai National Park on our last visit.

Eurasian Black (Cinereous) Vulture [photo]: Impressive numbers seen of this huge vulture. Birds were recorded on eleven days, with a daily maximum of twenty birds. Perhaps as many as seventy vultures were seen throughout the whole trip. Also, two huge nests found on the sides of cliffs.



Steppe Eagle: Easily the most common and widespread eagle. In all, recorded on eight days. The daily maximum was an impressive thirty birds seen on two different days. Most birds were immatures. Also, two nests with incubating birds were seen.

Golden Eagle: A total of nine individuals seen over five days, mainly immatures, but at least two adults recorded.

Eastern Marsh Harrier: At least nine birds recorded (and probably breeding) at several wetland sites.

Black [Eared] Kite: Common and widespread being seen virtually daily with a daily maximum estimated at forty birds.

Upland Buzzard: Quite scarce with two birds identified and two other probables.

Long-legged Buzzard: The common *Buteo*. In all recorded on eleven days with a daily maximum of six birds seen on the drive to Bayan Lake.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk: Just two individuals recorded.

Eurasian Coot: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum of thirty birds at Bayan Lake.

Eastern (Brown-cheeked) Water Rail One bird heard grunting in response to the tape (at Bayan Lake) but none seen.

White-naped Crane: This spectacular species was recorded on three days, at Elsen Tasarkhai and Bayan Lake, where two pairs with three young were seen.

Hooded Crane: We were fortunate to see this beautiful species with a vagrant bird recorded at Orog Noor, in the company of two Common Cranes.

Demoiselle Crane [photo]: Easily the most common and widespread crane. This very attractive species was seen on no less than eleven days with a daily maximum of fifty birds.



Common Crane: This crane was anything but common! In all recorded on three days with a trip total of eight birds including five together at Orog Noor.

Black-winged Stilt: A common and widespread breeding species at the many wetland sites visited.

Eurasian Curlew: Recorded just twice which included a migrant party of fifteen birds at Kholboolj Noor.

Pied Avocet: A common breeding bird at several of the wetlands we visited.

Northern Lapwing: Another common breeder at various lakes and wetlands. It was numerous enough on a couple of days to simply tick it in the daily log.

Little Ringed Plover: A widespread breeder at most wetlands we visited, with a daily maximum of ten birds.

Kentish Plover: Recorded on just two days but with an impressive fifty birds recorded at Kholboolj Noor.

Lesser Sand Plover: Just one record of a single bird seen at Kholboolj Noor, in swampy pools amongst the dunes.

Greater Sand Plover: Recorded on four days with a daily maximum of ten birds. These were usually encountered in barren, stony desert, where their coloring made them almost invisible.

Oriental Plover: We spent at least couple of hours looking for this plover on a very extensive stony plain. One bird was found very shortly after we started our search, but it immediately flew off and disappeared. Fortunately, we managed to locate a very cooperative bird some time later. A very beautiful elegant wader in full breeding plumage – superb!

Pacific Golden Plover: A single bird seen at the Kholboolj Noor pools.

Common Snipe: Eight birds giving their display flight and call at both Orog Noor and Kholboolj Noor.

Asian Dowitcher: We had great views of this shorebird in stunning breeding plumage. Recorded on three days with a maximum of thirteen birds seen at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Black-tailed Godwit: Fairly common breeder at various lakes being recorded on four dates with a maximum of ten birds seen at Elsen Tasarkha.

Common Redshank: A common and widespread shorebird at suitable wetland habitats. In all, we recorded this species on seven days with a daily maximum of twenty birds.

Marsh Sandpiper: We enjoyed multiple sightings of this elegant shorebird. In all, recorded on seven days with a maximum of thirty birds seen at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Common Greenshank: Just a single bird seen at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Wood Sandpiper: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum of six birds at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Green Sandpiper: Just two records including three birds seen at Elsen Tasarkhai Lake.

Mongolian Gull: Fairly common large gull being recorded on six days with a daily maximum of twenty-five birds.

Black-headed Gull: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum of twenty birds.

Gull-billed Tern: This elegant tern was recorded on three days including a breeding colony of at least thirty birds at Orog Noor.

Little Tern: just a single bird seen at Kholboolj Nuur

Common Tern: A common and widespread species seen at numerous lakes and rivers. In all recorded on at least nine days and so numerous on two days we simply ticked in the daily log! . Also, an estimate of seventy-five birds seen along the Tuul River.

Caspian Tern: Recorded on just one day with an estimated fifteen birds seen at Kholboolj Nuur.

White-winged Black Tern: This beautiful tern was a very common and widespread species, being recorded at virtually every wetland we visited. The daily maximum was at least fifty birds at Orog Noor.

Pallas's Sandgrouse: One of our most wanted birds, which proved every bit as good as we had hoped. Our first sighting was the best, with an estimated one hundred birds flying in extremely fast, calling, and landing to drink at a small waterhole at the edge of Gobi Desert. In all, recorded on a total five days although all in much smaller numbers than our first sighting.

Rock Dove: Recorded virtually daily although we did not attempt to estimate numbers.

Hill Pigeon: A pair recorded on the third day of the trip. in a small town north of Baganuur. This species may well have been overlooked later due to similarity to Rock Dove.

Eurasian Collared Dove: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum of thirty birds.

Common Cuckoo: Common and widespread, although much more often heard than seen.

Oriental Cuckoo: Just one bird seen and others heard in the Mungun Forest.

Ural Owl: Heard distantly calling at night at the Mungun Forest.

Common Swift: Fairly widespread, being recorded on eight days.

Pacific Swift: Common and widespread, being recorded on most days with a daily maximum of at least sixty birds.

Eurasian Hoopoe: Up to three birds recorded on ten days.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker: Just a single bird seen by Peter on the grounds of the Mongolica Hotel.

Great Spotted Woodpecker: Just two birds seen, both at the Mungun Forest.

Black Woodpecker: We were pleased to have nice scope views of this impressive species in the Mungun Forest.

Lesser Kestrel: We experienced a good flight of these attractive falcons, with up to forty-five birds seen from the balcony of Tumen's house over a two day period.

Common Kestrel: Widespread in small numbers with up to two birds recorded over eight days.

Amur Falcon: Easy to see on the grounds the Mongolica Hotel with up to three birds seen and a nest found. The other good site was the bunting site on the drive to the Mungun Forest where up to three birds were seen. On the last day, Peter located a nest on the Mongolica Hotel grounds.

Eurasian Hobby: Another attractive falcon, with a total of three birds seen - presumed to be migrants.

Saker Falcon: This very impressive falcon was quite common. Two nests each containing three or four full-grown young were less than a quarter of a mile apart on the drive into Hustai National Park. In all, we recorded this beautiful falcon on nine days. This included an extremely large female at the Oriental Plover site. Including the full grown young, it is likely we saw close to twenty different individual falcons during our trip – amazing.

Brown Shrike: Recorded on just three days which included three birds at the bunting site.

Isabelline Shrike: The most numerous shrike, with a total of fourteen birds seen including three at the Ground Jay site.

Steppe (Saxaul) Grey Shrike: A single bird probably on territory seen over two days in degraded saxaul woodland near the Khongor Sand Dunes.

Eurasian Magpie : Common and widespread.

Azure-winged Magpie: The grounds around the Mongolica Hotel were easily the best place to see this attractive corvid.

Henderson's Ground Jay: We were quite surprised to see this endemic at three different locations. They were easy at Tumen's traditional site (near DZ) with four birds seen. Also seen from the car while driving to and from the Snowcock site.

Red-billed Chough: This very charismatic species was common on the grounds of the Mongolica Hotel. Gail and Barry had a great time watching the antics of a family party from their bedroom window at the hotel. In all, this species was quite widespread being seen on at least nine days.

Daurian Jackdaw: Fairly common and widespread.

Rook: Common during the first five days of the trip but not seen later.

Carrion Crow: Common and widespread.

Northern Raven: Seen virtually daily with maximum daily estimate of ten birds.

Coal Tit: Just a single bird seen in the Mungun Forest.

Willow Tit: Common at the Mungun Forest with ten birds seen over the two days.

Azure Tit: One of our most wanted birds. We managed to obtain excellent views of several birds on the grounds of the Hotel Mongolica. Interestingly, not seen elsewhere on the trip.

Great Tit: Small numbers seen on the grounds of the Hotel Mongolica.

White-crowned Penduline Tit : Two-three birds seen on our first official day of the trip – again on the grounds of the Hotel Mongolica.

Larks: During drives from one site to another we saw many unidentified larks, so the numbers referenced below are very much on the conservative side.

Eurasian Skylark: A common and widespread species on the extensive grasslands habitat. The Skylarks in Mongolia appear different from those in Europe, being smaller, with less obvious crests.

Crested Lark: Surprisingly, only recorded on two days, including two birds seen and another heard, in the wetland area near Tumen's home is DZ.

Shore (Horned) Lark: A very common species, probably the most numerous lark species, especially in barren desert areas where it was often the only bird seen.

Mongolian [Eastern] Short-toed Lark: Two birds recorded at Elsen Teasakhai and one singing at Bayan Lake.

Asian Short-toed Lark: Probably overlooked but we recorded this species on seven days with a maximum of sixty birds between Elsen Tasarkhai and Bayan Lake. Also common our first drive to Hustai Park.

Mongolian Lark [photo]: This striking lark was one of the very top birds on the trip. We recorded it on eight days with a daily maximum of sixty birds seen on the drive to (and within) Hustai National Park.



Barn Swallow: Common and widespread.

Pale Martin: This species was only seen on one day with two birds noted at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Eurasian Crag Martin: Recorded on four days with a daily maximum of ten birds usually seen in rocky canyons such as Bago Bogd.

House Martin: Surprisingly uncommon with sightings on four days.

Dusky Warbler: Recorded on five days with daily maximum of three birds.

Two-barred Greenish Warbler: Recorded on four days; the daily maximum of eight birds seen in the remnant larch forest in the Barig Mountains where they apparently breed.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler: Single birds recorded on three days.

Yellow-browed Warbler: Up to three birds recorded over the two days in the Mungun Forest.

Hume's Leaf Warbler: Three birds recorded over two days, also in the Mungun Forest., and quite common in the remnant forest at Bayankhongor.

Oriental Reed Warbler: A total of nine birds recorded over three days, at Elsen Tasarkhai and Bayan Lake.

Paddyfield Warbler: Several singing birds that provided short glimpses at Bayan Lake.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler: We all got extremely close views of a single migrant at a water hole on the edge of the Gobi Desert. The bird was busy feeding on insects at the edge of the water. Additionally, another five birds were seen at other sites.

Chinese Grasshopper Warbler [photo]: This uncommon species was singing in a damp brushy area at the edge of the Mungun Forest.



Lesser [Desert] Whitethroat: A single bird responded well to playback in dunes at Elsen Tasarkhai. Others were seen flying over.

Common Whitethroat: A total of four birds seen during the trip. The race in Mongolia is much greyer overall than the bird in Europe.

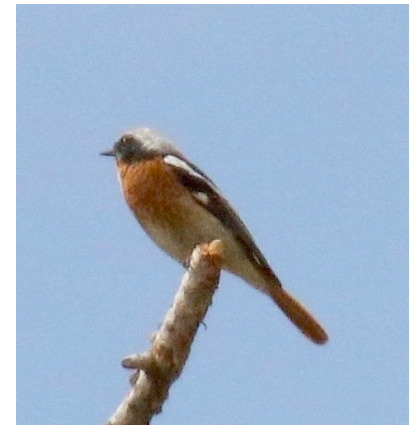
Barred Warbler: We were pleasantly surprised to have such good looks at the normally cryptic species. Three birds (including a male displaying to a female) were at Mukhar Shivert, a pair apparently breeding at the migrant spot just outside DZ and a third pair seen and heard singing in brushy habitat as we were leaving the Snowcock site.

Asian Brown Flycatcher: Just a single bird seen at the migrant trap en route to the Yol Valley.

Siberian Rubythroat: Nice views obtained of a singing male at the Mungun Forest.

Taiga Flycatcher: Heard only at the Mungun Forest.

Eversmann's Redstart [photo]: We managed brief but good views of this attractive redstart over two days, at the edge of the remnant forest at Bayankhongor



Black Redstart: A total of five birds seen during the trip.

Daurian Redstart: A single bird seen at the Yol Valley.

Common Rock Thrush: Recorded on four dates. The birds were particularly numerous as we left the Baga Bogd site, with about ten birds seen.

Hodgson's Bushchat: We arrived at the site where this bird has been seen in previous years, at the summit of a hill with large scattered boulders and open short grass. We spread out over a rather large area and eventually Peter found a pair of this extremely attractive chat. We all enjoyed excellent prolonged views of a pair as the male flew from rock to rock, singing. Based on the birds' activity it appeared that they had a nest in the vicinity.

Northern Wheatear: Fairly common and widespread being recorded on nine days. The most widespread of the wheatears

Isabelline Wheatear: Probably the most numerous wheatear being recorded on thirteen days, almost always in open arid regions. On many days it was numerous enough to just be ticked in the daily log.

Desert Wheatear: This very attractive wheatear was recorded on just three dates with just a few birds on each day. A nest was found with the birds carrying food into the top of a metal power pole, at the ger campground near the Khongor Dunes.

Pied Wheatear: Recorded mainly in rocky habitat, on seven days with daily maximum of twenty birds seen at Hustai National Park.

Saxaul Sparrow [photo]: This attractive and much-wanted sparrow was located nesting in a ruined stone wall near the Khongor Dunes ger camp.



House Sparrow: Thankfully, recorded on just one day.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow: The common sparrow was seen virtually daily in large numbers, especially around settlements.

Rock Sparrow: Recorded on five days with a daily maximum of twenty birds at Hustai Nat. Park

White-winged Snowfinch: Recorded on five days with a maximum of twenty birds seen at the Yol Valley.

Pere David's Snowfinch: Recorded on four days with a maximum of forty birds watched drinking at a road-side pond near the Gobi Desert and also fairly common at Bayan Lake.

Alpine Accentor: Single bird seen only by Frank and Peter at Baga Bogd.

Brown Accentor: A total of four birds seen including three amongst the rocks at Mukhar Shivert.

Kozlov's Accentor [photo]: A total of six birds recorded over three days including three at the Yol Valley and a pair at a nest at Baga Bogd.



Citrine Wagtail: This attractive wagtail was recorded in small numbers on six days. The daily maximum was three birds.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail: A total of ten birds seen over two days at Bayan Lake.

White Wagtail: Daily maximum of eight birds of the race *baicalensis* (Baikal Wagtail) around Ulaanbaatar. Just a single bird of the of the race *leucopsis* (Amur Wagtail), recorded at the wetland across from Tumen's home in DZ.

Richard's Pipit: Fairly common, being recorded on five days with a daily maximum of ten birds. Probably overlooked to some degree.

Blyth's Pipit: Very similar to the prior species and best separated by differing song, posture and usually more buff colour. In all recorded on eight days with a daily maximum of six birds.

Olive-backed Pipit: A total of three birds recorded on two days at the Mungun Forest.

Water Pipit: Our sole sighting was of three birds at the Barig Mountains while looking for the Bushchat.

Mongolian Finch: A common and fairly widespread species. In all we recorded it on seven days with a conservative daily maximum of thirty birds.

Common Rosefinch: Actually quite uncommon, being recorded on five days with a maximum of three birds.

Long-tailed Rosefinch [photo]: Just a single bird seen on our first day of the trip, along the Tuul River near UB.

Twite: A total of just four birds seen over three days including two at Yol Valley.

Godlewski's Bunting: A total of eight birds of this attractive bunting were seen, in the Yol Valley and Baga Bogd.

Meadow Bunting: A total of four birds seen including two at a nest in Hustai National Park.

Pallas's [Mongolian] Bunting: We were pleased to discover several pairs breeding in dry scrub on a hillside at Bayan Lake. This is considered a potential split from nominate Pallas' Bunting, based on size, plumage and habitat. Numerous photos were taken.



Common Reed Bunting: A total of five birds recorded over three days, in reedbeds at Elsen Tasarkhai and Bayan Lake.

Yellow-breasted Bunting [photo]: A total of four singing males seen at the bunting site en route to the Mungun Forest.

Pine Bunting: Three birds on the first visit to the bunting site (en route to Mungun Forest), and two on the second.

Mammal List:

Mongolia is well-known for mammals, and we did record some of the more interesting species. Many of the small rodents, very numerous in the open grasslands, still remain unidentified despite access to an excellent book, **Mammals of Mongolia**, by Batsaikhan et al. Further examination of photos is required!

Tolai Hare: This large hare was seen on five days, including one on the grounds of the Hotel Mongolica.

Mongolian (Pallas') Pika: We think this is the rather furry pika in the scree slopes at the Altai Snowcock site.

Daurian Pika: This species was seen in more open, steppe habitat,

Siberian Marmot: Most numerous in Hustai NP, where an estimated 80 were seen on our last day there.

Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel: Only recorded en route to Mukhar Shivert

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel: The common ground squirrel, seen even on grounds of Hotel Mongolica. In all, recorded on 8 days.

Alashan Ground Squirrel [photo]: An endangered species, seen in the Yol Valley

Mongolian Gerbil: Seen on several days, with estimated next to the car park in the Yol Valley.

Great Gerbil: A few seen in saxaul woodland while driving from the Khongor dunes.

Mongolian Silver Vole: We think this is the abundant small, very silvery vole seen in most areas of arid steppe.

Brandt's Vole: Only definitely recorded at the Hodson's Bushchat site, but probably overlooked.



20



Campbell's Hamster: A single seen by Gail near the Bayan Lake campsite

Siberian Jerboa: [photo] Two seen on the night drive at the Khongor sand dunes.

Gobi Jerboa: One thought to be this species dashed past our parked cars while we were watching the Oriental Plover.

Khongor dunes.

Corsac Fox: Recorded on three days.

Siberian Ibex: Two seen very distantly at the Altai Snowcock site.

Asian Red Deer: Seen only in Huistai NP, with up to 25 recorded on a day.

Black-tailed Gazelle: [photo]: The more common gazelle, up to 15 seen on the return from Baga Bogd. Both species of gazelle were extremely shy and would dash away at the first sight of a car or human.



Mongolian Gazelle: A few seen distantly at the Oriental Plover site

Bactrian Camel: Some camels were seen in the Gobi Protected Area that seemed more characteristic of the wild Bactrian Camel than the domestic species, based on longer legs, small more pointed humps, and flatter foreheads. Waiting for expert opinion on these.

Kuhlan (Asian Wild Ass): Only two seen, very distantly, on the drive to the Khongor Sand Dunes, and then only by Tumen, Gail and Barry. This species is in serious decline throughout its range.

Przewalski's Horse: Up to 160 seen at Hustai NP on our last day. Unlike other grazers, very unconcerned about humans. This species is the only true wild horse, reintroduced from captive-bred animals in the 1990s.



The Team!