



Pallas's Sandgrouse epitomize the wildness of this fantastic country (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

MONGOLIA

26 MAY – 9/13 JUNE 2012

LEADER: MARK VAN BEIRS

Mongolia is one of our classic eastern Palearctic destinations and although it does not yield a long birdlist, it holds a fabulous array of attractive specialities, including many species that are only known as vagrants to Europe and North America. The bird of the trip was the magnificent Black-billed Capercaillie that showed so very, very well in its pine-larch habitat. We first found a female at her nest and later saw two cracking males at close range on our first morning on the mountain. Oriental Plovers also gave a heart-warming show as three males performed their superb petrel-like display for us. 221 species were recorded on the tour and other highlights included Swan Goose, Stejneger's Scoter, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Lammergeier, Amur and Saker Falcons, Altai Snowcock, Daurian Partridge, Eastern Water Rail, White-naped and Demoiselle Cranes, Macqueen's Bustard, Pallas's and Relict Gulls, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Eurasian Eagle Owl, White-backed and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Mongolian Lark, Blyth's Pipit, Kozlov's Accentor, Siberian

Rubythroat, Güldenstädt's and Eversmann's Redstarts, Hodgson's Bushchat, Pallas's Grasshopper, Lanceolated and Asian Desert Warblers, Azure and White-crowned Penduline Tits, Henderson's Ground Jay, Saxaul Sparrow, Asian Rosy Finch and Pine, Meadow, Grey-necked, Yellow-breasted and Pallas's Reed Buntings. Interesting mammals included Corsac Fox, Mongolian Gazelle and Przevalski's Horse. Camping is the only way to discover the real Mongolia, as there are no hotels or ger camps away from the well-known tourist haunts. Our camping crew did a terrific job and provided tasty food and more than adequate facilities. Travelling in Mongolia is a fantastic experience as the scenery is some of the best in the world. We wandered for 19 days through the wide and wild steppes, deserts and semi-deserts, mountains, marshes and taiga of this thinly-populated country. The unfamiliar feeling of 'space' charged our batteries and we experienced both icy cold and rather hot circumstances.

A lovely flight in very clear weather took us from various cities in Europe to Moscow and allowed us to admire broad meandering rivers, enormous bright yellow rapeseed fields and small towns. The onward flight to Ulaanbaatar was during the dark hours and early in the morning we landed at Mongolia's international airport just outside the capital. After a bit of a rest and an excellent lunch, we explored the willow and poplar groves along the Tuul river at the edge of the sprawling capital. Traffic had increased even more since my last visit and as it was also a local holiday, lots of people were enjoying the fine weather. It didn't take long to locate the endearing Azure and White-crowned Penduline Tits in the riverine vegetation. We obtained great views of these jewels and also observed Black Stork, Ruddy Shelduck, Black-eared Kite, Eurasian Black Vulture, Goosander, Eurasian Hobby, Common Tern, Common Cuckoo, Fork-tailed Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, Olive-backed Pipit, Grey and Baikal Wagtails, Lesser Whitethroat, Arctic Warbler, Great Tit, Brown Shrike, Eurasian Magpie, Eastern Crow and Rook, Daurian Jackdaw, Red-billed Chough, Common Raven and Common Rosefinch. A great introduction to Mongolian birding!



A smart Eurasian Red Squirrel and an Eurasian Nuthatch at its nest (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Next morning, due to a flat tyre, we first walked about in an area of steppe on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, where Isabelline and Northern Wheatears, a male Amur Falcon, Common Kestrel, Demoiselle Crane, Horned Lark and Tarbagan Marmot showed. In a scrubby, rocky valley of the Bogd Khan National Park we found Black Woodpecker, Pied Wheatear, Meadow Bunting and Long-tailed Ground Squirrel. A pine covered slope bordering a valley dotted with birches and willows gave us Eurasian Nuthatch at its nest, Willow Tit, Dark-sided Flycatcher, Black-faced Bunting and a smart, totally black Eurasian Red Squirrel. In mid afternoon we boarded a flight south to the Gobi, where three sturdy Russian minibuses waited for us. We stocked up on drinks and drove the short distance to our ger camp at the base of the Gobi Altai mountains, accompanied by several Pallas's Sandgrouse and Asian Short-toed Larks.

After the exciting experience of sleeping in a Mongolian ger, we visited the spectacular settings of the scenic Gurvansaikhan National Park. We first concentrated on the rolling rocky hills and climbed a steep juniper-covered hill slope from where the fantastic, very picturesque surroundings could be appreciated. Sadly, upon arriving at the top cloud blocked our view, but on the way down the veil lifted and we soon found a couple of Altai Snowcocks walking about, allowing for great looks. They showed off a bit of display and the male could be seen uttering its distinctive calls. Great stuff! We also noted Brown and endemic Kozlov's Accentors,

Water Pipit, White-winged Snowfinch and a couple of fickle Argali. We then visited the gorge area of Yolyn Am, the Valley of the Lammergeier, where along the partly frozen stream amongst the steep rock faces and scree slopes we encountered lots of bird activity. Green Sandpiper, Eastern Grey-headed Wagtail, Black Redstart (of a red-bellied race), Twite, Mongolian Finch, Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch and Black-faced, Godlewski's, Little and Ortolan Buntings vied for attention. Cute Pallas's Pikas were everywhere and overhead we noted Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon and Eurasian Black Vultures, Eurasian Sparrowhawk and Eurasian Crag Martin. Our lunch at the ger camp was interrupted by Steppe Eagle, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Asian Brown Flycatcher and later we started driving west across gravelly plains and undulating foothills into the real wilds of Mongolia. A couple of unique Henderson's Ground Jays performed beautifully and we also saw our first dashing Saker Falcon. In late afternoon we arrived at another ger camp, where we enjoyed excellent food and hot showers.

Soon after dawn we were admiring the enormous and magnificent barchan (sickle) dunes of Khongoryn Els in beautiful early morning light. In a patch of gnarled saxaul bushes (*Haloxylon ammodendron* – Amaranthaceae) we soon encountered several pretty Saxaul Sparrows showing off at their nests. We also saw Isabelline and Steppe Grey Shrikes, Little Ringed Plover, Pallas's Sandgrouse uttering their lovely calls, a pair of Upland Buzzards at their eyrie in a low bush, Northern Lapwing, Asian Short-toed Lark, Desert Wheatear and Pallas's Leaf Warbler.



The magnificent barchan dunes of Khongoryn Els (Mark Van Beirs) and a Saxaul Sparrow (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

For the next ten days we roamed, often far away from civilization, the deserts, steppes, hills and mountains of southern central Mongolia, admired spectacular sunsets and dawns, watched jaw dropping mountain scenery more than hundred kilometres away, stood in awe at shimmering sand dunes of enormous proportions and enjoyed amazing vistas with no sign of human presence visible. We experienced some extreme weather, as we got chilled to the bone on several occasions and got roasted by a fierce sun on others. There are now very few places in the world where one can undergo this unique feeling of nothingness, remoteness and wildness while observing some of the rarest birds in the world. Our party was totally self-contained with a sturdy kitchen truck and three minibuses, manned by a knowledgeable trekmaster, three experienced drivers and two excellent cooks. The latter managed to provide us with three course lunches and four course dinners every day and we never ate the same dish twice! The drivers were regularly seen to dismantle their engines overnight and they did an admirable job. This is the only real way to explore this extraordinary country, and most of us enjoyed it very much.

The wide expanses of desert and semi-desert of the Gobi extend over most of southern Mongolia, but hold relatively few bird targets. Our main bird here was the unfathomable Pallas's Sandgrouse. This year, they were everywhere and on many occasions we were able to admire this baffling species at close range, allowing us detailed looks at their subtly soft colours and delicate markings. We even managed to study the feathered tarsi and in flight the spiky tail, pointed wings and purring call attracted lots of attention. We could only wonder about the mysterious westward eruptions of this much-wanted species. It took a while before we found the smart Oriental Plover this year. We couldn't locate them at our favourite gravelly plain, but

eventually three pairs showed extremely well on a nearby greener expanse of semi desert. The handsome males really showed off and the joint, unique petrel-like display flight of three males was one of the highlights of the tour. While searching for the plovers Janice found us a splendid Macqueen's Bustard. In these sandy or stony wastes we also observed Greater Sand Plover, and several interesting reptiles like Toad-headed Agama, Gobi Racerunner and Kaspischer Even-fingered Gecko. We encountered lots of beautiful Camels almost looking like the really wild ones which only survive in the extreme southwest of the country.



A displaying Oriental Plover and a pair of Pallas's Sandgrouse on the deck (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

In desert areas with man-high bushes we several times bumped into the wacky Henderson's Ground Jay, a member of one of the most sought after Palearctic bird genera. We studied this snazzy species as it perched on top of a bush or as it was running about in search of prey. In flight the white wing patches really drew our attention. Here too we had amazing eye-ball to eye-ball views of a singing Asian Desert Warbler with its pale eyes, rufous tail and yellow legs. A couple of immaculate Rose-coloured Starlings posed for us and the mammal department was represented by a large Great Gerbil.

Several major mountain ranges like the Gobi Altai and the Khangai crisscross central Mongolia and by the end of May we found the hard to reach higher areas virtually snow free. Altai Snowcocks behaved very well on the barren slopes, but our main target in these little visited uplands was the rare Hodgson's Bushchat. Although it is sometimes seen on its wintering grounds in the terai of India or Nepal, very, very few birdwatchers have ever observed it on its breeding grounds. After a bit of searching we were able to study two males and a female foraging in the rock-strewn alpine meadows. We saw the male utter its simple song from the top of a boulder or bush. A heart-warming experience. The rocky ridges, scree fields and meadows also held singing Brown and Altai Accentors and some superb Gldenstdt's Redstarts. Hardy Brandt's Rosefinches eked out a living at the edge of remaining snow patches. Lower down, on north facing slopes stretches of larch forest were found to hold Eversmann's Redstart, but the birds remained rather distant. A small crag showing a big patch of whitewash gave away the location of a raptor's eyrie and a closer look produced great views of an adult and a youngster Lammergeier on their huge stick nest. Northern Goshawk, formidable Saker Falcons, Chukar, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Alpine Accentor, Rock Sparrow, lovely Mongolian Finches and Grey-necked Bunting favoured the warmer rocky slopes of the lower reaches. The alpine meadows were ablaze with lots of splendid flowers including anemones, pasque flowers, buttercups, louseworts, gentians, saxifrages, stonecrops, primroses, violets, etc. The biggest surprise of the tour was finding a pair of nest building Asian Rosy Finches at one of the high mountain passes. A scenic valley dotted with willows amongst larch covered slopes held Pine Bunting, a close Eversmann's Redstart, Red-throated Thrush, Siberian Stonechat and several Dusky Warblers.



Our camp in the Khangai mountains (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Further north, on the famous steppes, which in the days of Genghis Khan produced the multitudes of fleet riding warriors and their hardy horses, we saw many Eurasian Black Vultures. Elegant Demoiselle Cranes were dotted over the extensive greens and could often be seen displaying. We encountered several large gatherings of non breeding birds, and one of these held a splendid White-naped Crane! Colonies of Long-tailed Ground Squirrels were usually attended by unpretentious Père David's Snowfinches and colourful Mongolian Larks hovered over the wide expanses singing their ebullient songs. Here and there we found Upland Buzzards perched above breeding cliffs. Once, we managed to observe a Corsac Fox cautiously in pursuit of prey.

Mongolia is dotted with both fresh, brackish and salt water lakes and these proved to be the most productive habitat for wildlife. Sadly, during the past twenty years many of the lakes in central Mongolia have started to dry up, not only because of an ongoing drought, but mainly because a lot of the water has been piped away to be used in gold mining ventures. Both famous Orog Nuur and Boon Tsagaan Nuur have greatly suffered from this and are now only a shadow of their former self. It was great to see that this year Orog Nuur held more water than ever and a good variety of well-known species was noted, including Mute Swan (a REAL one and our only one of the tour!) Greylag Goose, Eurasian Wigeon, Common Shelduck, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Tufted Duck, Western Marsh Harrier, Common Crane, Coot, Northern Lapwing, Black-tailed Godwit, Redshank, Eurasian Skylark and Pale Martins, while Oriental Reed Warblers and Bearded Reedlings were singing away in the reedbeds. Best of all was an unexpected Greater Spotted Eagle.

At celebrated Boon Tsagaan Nuur, put on the birding map through Birdquest's first historical tour there in 1989, birds were everywhere, but it was sad to see that the shoreline had receded even more since our last visit. Our productive stay produced Great Cormorant, Great Egret, good numbers of Swan Geese, two adult Pallas's Fish Eagle, Grey Plover, Eurasian Whimbrel, Terek Sandpiper, a Red-necked Phalarope in breeding

plumage, many handsome Pallas's Gulls, scores of Mongolian Gulls, Little, Whiskered, Black and many Caspian Terns and a flourishing Pale Martin colony.

At another large lake we were amazed by the sheer numbers of birds and during our afternoon and morning visit we amassed a long list including goodies like Great Crested and Horned Grebes, Whooper Swan, Swan Goose, Eurasian Spoonbill, Bar-headed Goose, Eurasian Teal, Garganey, Northern Pintail, Red-crested Pochard, Common Goldeneye, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Kentish and Mongolian Plovers, Pacific Golden Plovers in breeding plumage, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Snipe, several smart adult Relict Gulls, Gull-billed Tern, scores of magnificent White-winged Terns, Greater Short-toed Lark, Citrine Wagtail, a female Siberian Rubythroat, Daurian Redstart and a flighty White's Thrush.

On the more northern steppe lakes just south of the forest belt, we found a different avifauna. Highlights here were the extremely handsome Black-throated Divers, Black-necked and Horned Grebes (in the same scope view), the many extremely vocal Whooper Swans, the remarkable Stejneger's Scoters, Eastern Water Rail, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, many displaying Blyth's Pipits and a smart male Pallas's Reed Bunting. Brandt's Voles were swarming all over the place, behaving like lemmings and we even saw them swimming in the lake. The resident Upland Buzzards and Steppe Eagles were feasting.



A pair of Whooper Swans with chicks (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Villages or towns, consisting of communist grey, concrete blocks surrounded by more colourful private houses and gers, were usually few and far in between, but now and then we needed to replenish our petrol and water supply. Only here we found the unobtrusive Hill Pigeons and Lesser Kestrels, while in one green area of a town, some willow bushes held migratory Thick-billed and Dusky Warblers and Two-barred Greenish Warbler. On one occasion we visited an active Buddhist Monastery, where orange-clad monks preyed. Buddhism is obviously doing well after it was clamped down upon for decades by the Soviets. On our final day before returning to UB, we again hit a smooth metalled road! Quite a surprise after ten days on bumpy sandy tracks through desert and steppe.



A Buddhist monastery (Mark Van Beirs) and a Steppe Eagle (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

We ended the main part of the tour by visiting the rolling hills and grassy expanses of the famous Hustai National Park, one of the three locations where twenty years ago Przevalski's Horses had been reintroduced. We were able to admire these attractive horses at close range and were told their tragic story. Luckily they are doing very well now. Here too we found a Saker Falcon eyrie on a low pylon with three large chicks, several Amur Falcons, friendly Daurian Partridges, Daurian Redstart, Meadow Bunting, Red Deer, Red Fox and Mongolian Gazelles. Our drive into Ulaanbaatar is best forgotten as the hellish traffic was not fun at all.



Attractive Przevalski's Horses (Mark Van Beirs)

The extension started with a much reduced group. The lake and marsh of Gun Galuut produced a pair of distant White-naped Cranes, – luckily we had obtained good views earlier in the tour - Eared Grebe with a nest, several Stejneger's Scoters, a large concentration of Demoiselle Cranes and lots of low-flying Fork-tailed Swifts. We then drove northwest into the Terelj National Park through a wide open valley leading through steppe/forest habitat. An Eurasian Hobby was hunting insects over a herd of goats and Daurian Jackdaws became a common sight. We chose our camping spot near the Tuul river within easy reach of several distinctive habitats. In late afternoon we explored the river valley with its patches of dense willow shrub and cinquefoil scrub amongst big elm and poplar trees. This produced a female Goldeneye with cute ducklings, Japanese Buzzard, a dark morph Booted Eagle, Siberian Rubythroat, Lesser Whitethroat, fabulous Long-tailed Rosefinches and Pine and Black-faced Buntings. In late evening we took a walk in a nearby river valley but nothing of note was moving about.



A posing Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker and a Daurian Jackdaw (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Our early morning walk in the forested river valley gave us Grey-headed Woodpecker, Eye-browed Thrush, Yellow-browed Warbler and Long-tailed Tit. After a scrumptious breakfast we surveyed nearby and more distant larch-covered slopes, but no grouse at all were found. An exquisite male Siberian Rubythroat and a pair of Red-throated Flycatchers stole the show. A bit disillusioned, we packed up and drove to the base of our favourite mountain. An unscheduled stop due to engine trouble took us into a marvellous stretch of riverine forest with many dead and dying trees – woodpecker heaven! A pair of Eurasian Wrynecks showed at their nest hole, a White-backed Woodpecker performed very well and a pair of Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers posed brilliantly at very close range. We flushed a Japanese Quail and admired several White-cheeked Starlings.



The nest and a male of the cracking Black-billed Capercaillie (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Very early next morning, we started our fairly strenuous hike up Capercaillie Mountain. We soon reached the prime habitat for Chinese Bush Warbler, but not a sniff was heard, although we sure put in a fair amount of effort. Further up we flushed a Hazel Grouse and not much later we found ourselves in the beloved habitat of

our quarry: open pine woodland with a dense undergrowth of blueberry. An Eurasian Nutcracker showed well and after some intense exploring we suddenly flushed a female Black-billed Capercaillie from her very open, obvious nest containing four eggs. She allowed for mega views, and we immediately left the area to leave her in peace. Some more intrepid walking later Chris spotted two male Capercaillies walking slowly ahead of us and soon after we all had fantastic views of this very much desired bird. Seeing a male so very well was definitely the highlight of the tour for most of us. After a bit of a rest we returned to base without really adding anything of importance. We listened carefully for the Chinese Bush warbler in its preferred habitat and heard nothing. They probably weren't there this spring. We then decided to move camp to a spot where a couple more new birds were likely to be found.



Lesser Spotted and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

The following morning, next to fabulous views of Siberian Rubythroat, Dusky Warbler and Citrine Wagtail, we soon made contact with a much-wanted, very handsome Yellow-breasted Bunting. The singing male posed and although he missed most of his tail we still stood in awe while admiring this fast declining species. A bit of further exploring didn't really produce anything new, but Siberian Stonechat, Red-throated Thrush, Japanese Quail, several displaying Blyth's Pipits and an extremely small, but mute Cuckoo (?) were noted. We packed up (for the last time) and at our picnic stop in a riverine grove we added our final bird to the tour list: a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was found feeding her young in a gnarled poplar. We also heard a few quiet notes of an European Scops Owl, but we were unable to locate it. Mongolia had delivered the goods again.



The magnificent Lanceolated Warbler that performed so very well (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

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>

E = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **DD** = Data Deficient.

Black-throated Loon (Black-throated Diver) *Gavia arctica* Excellent views of several in pristine breeding plumage.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* Lovely displaying pairs were commonly encountered.

Horned Grebe (Slavonian Grebe) *Podiceps auritus* ◊ Excellent studies in magnificent breeding attire. See Note.

Black-necked Grebe (Eared Grebe) *Podiceps nigricollis* Several of these gems in exquisite breeding plumage.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* This well known species was common at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (NL) A single bird was seen at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Great Egret *Egretta alba*

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Regular encounters with this widespread species (nominate). Reedbed nests.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* Several splendid observations of this attractive, almost prehistoric-looking bird.

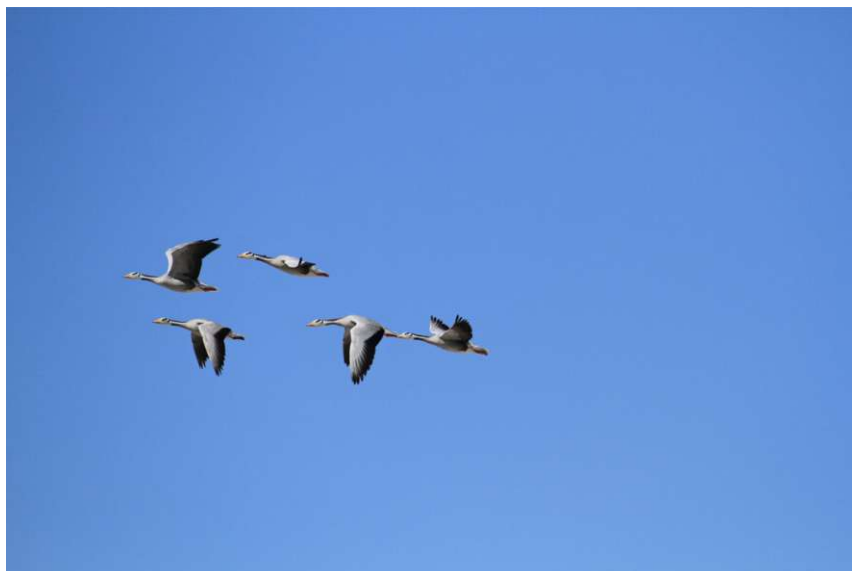
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Regular sightings of adults in breeding condition.

Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* ♦ A single, really wild bird showed on Orog Nuur.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Good numbers were noted on several steppe lakes.

Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* ♦ (V) Lots of great looks at this magnificent species. See Note.

Greylag Goose *Anser anser* Small numbers on Boon Tsagaan Nuur and several other lakes (*rubrirostris*).



A small flock of Bar-headed Geese (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* Small numbers were seen at various lakes.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* Easily the most widespread and vociferous duck in Mongolia.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Small numbers, both on saline and fresh water lakes.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* Grazing flocks were found on the shores of several lakes.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Moderate numbers were noted on most lakes.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca* Small numbers of the nominate race were observed at several steppe lakes.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Small numbers were noted on most lakes.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Small numbers of these most elegant ducks were counted on several lakes.

Garganey *Anas querquedula* A regular duck of most steppe lakes. Many excellent eye-ball to eye-ball studies.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* Regular sightings of this well known species on most lakes.

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* Just a few observations of this exquisite duck on a couple of steppe lakes.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Many observations of this widespread duck on a variety of lakes.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* Another regularly encountered species of the steppe lakes.

Stejneger's Scoter *Melanitta stejnegeri* ♦ Splendid encounters on a couple of steppe lakes. See Note.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* Regular encounters on steppe lakes. Some splendid display was seen.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Goosander (Common Merganser) *Mergus merganser* Regular sightings of both handsome males and females.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus* Ubiquitous, but in fact only where people live.

Pallas's Fish Eagle (Pallas's Sea Eagle) *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* ♦ (V) Great looks at this rarity. See Note.

Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture) *Gypaetus barbatus* This spectacular raptor was regularly observed.

Himalayan Griffon Vulture *Gyps himalayensis* Small numbers were noted in the Gobi Altai and in the Khangai.

Eurasian Black Vulture (Cinereous Vulture, Monk Vulture) *Aegypius monachus* (NT) Common. See Note.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* Great looks at a male near the capital.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Several observations of this powerful raptor.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*



An Eurasian Black Vulture and a Black-eared Kite (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Japanese Buzzard *Buteo [buteo] japonicus* ♦ Just a few observations in the wooded areas of our itinerary.

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* ♦ A regularly encountered, impressive and distinctive raptor of the steppe.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (V) Great views of an adult at Orog Nuur.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Regular observations of this widespread raptor.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Regular observations of this striking bird of prey.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* A single bird showed well at Terelj.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* Good looks at several of these dainty falcons.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Regular sightings of this well-known raptor.

Amur Falcon (Eastern Red-footed Falcon) *Falco amurensis* ♦ Nice encounters with this unique falcon. See Note.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* A few sightings of this endearing bird of prey.



Juvenile Saker Falcons on the eyrie (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Saker Falcon (Saker) *Falco cherrug* ♦ (E) No fewer than 23 sightings of this powerful raptor! See Note.

Hazel Grouse *Bonasa bonasia* ♦ Good views of a female in the taiga at Terelj (*sibirica*).

Black-billed Capercaillie (Siberian/Rock Capercaillie) *Tetrao parvirostris* ♦ Magical views in the taiga. See Note.

Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus* ♦ Excellent studies of several birds in the mountains. See Note.

Chukar (Chukar Partridge) *Alectoris chukar* Great looks at several in the Gobi Altai mountains.

Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica* ◇ Several birds showed extremely well in the Hustai NP.

Japanese Quail *Coturnix japonica* ◇ (NT) We flushed a couple in the Terelj area.

Eastern Water Rail (Brown-cheeked Rail) *Rallus indicus* ◇ Les found us one at a reedy steppe lake.

Eurasian Coot (Common Coot) *Fulica atra* Small numbers of the nominate race were seen at various steppe lakes.

Common Crane *Grus grus* A few sightings of this vocal species.

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* ◇ (V) A few observations of this rare and magnificent bird. See Note.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* ◇ A common and lovely sight over most of Mongolia. See Note.

Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* ◇ (V) Janice found one of these gems in the steppe.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Several showed at one of the steppe lakes.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* Regular encounters with this delightful bird full of character.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* A common bird of streams and rivers (*curonicus*). Yellow orbital ring!!

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Many were seen at several saline steppe lakes.



A pair of elegant Demoiselle Crane (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus* Good looks at an adult in breeding plumage.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaulti* Regular observations of the nominate race. See Note.

Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus* ◇ Great looks at this truly marvellous and much-wanted plover. See Note.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* Several in resplendent breeding plumage at a steppe lake.

Grey Plover (Black-bellied Plover) *Pluvialis squatarola* A single was found at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* A regular, well-known bird of most wetland meadows.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Just a few observations of this well-known species.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* A few, of which one was in breeding attire, at a steppe lake.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* A few of these well-known waders were found at the same lake.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* A few observations of displaying birds in marshy areas.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* ◇ (NT) Quite a few sightings of this delightful species (*melanuroides*).

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* (NL)

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* A regular bird of most wetland meadows (*ussuriensis*). Lovely display.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* We found this species at a couple of lakes, where they showed really well.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* A single bird was scoped at a steppe lake.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* A single sighting of this well-known species.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* A few observations only. Its Russian name Fifi is onomatopoeic.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* A few at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (H)

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* A single at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Pallas's Gull (Great Black-headed Gull) *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* Great looks at good numbers on steppe lakes.

Relict Gull *Ichthyaetus relictus* ♦ (V) We found four splendid adults on a rich steppe lake. See Note.

Black-headed Gull (Common Black-headed Gull) *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* Fairly common at steppe lakes.

Mongolian Gull *Larus [cachinnans] mongolicus* ♦ A commonly encountered species. See Note.

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica* Fairly commonly encountered at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* This impressive species was commonly observed at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A regular inhabitant of steppe lakes. See Note.

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* Several showed well along the shores of Boon Tsagaan Nuur (*sinensis*).

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* Good views of two birds in breeding plumage at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger* A couple showed well at Boon Tsagaan Nuur (nominate).

White-winged Tern (White-winged Black Tern) *Chlidonias leucopterus* Many excellent encounters.

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptus paradoxus* ♦ A fairly common inhabitant of the semi-desert. See Note.

Rock Dove (Rock Pigeon) *Columba livia* Regular near human settlements.

Hill Pigeon (Blue Hill Pigeon) *Columba rupestris* ♦ Common in a variety of villages (nominate). See Note.

Common Cuckoo (Eurasian Cuckoo) *Cuculus canorus* Many splendid views of the nominate race.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus* Quite a few could be heard in the taiga.

European Scops Owl *Otus scops* (H) We heard it in riverine forest at Terelj.

Eurasian Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* Good looks at one in the Gobi Altai (*yenisseeensis*).

Little Owl *Athene noctua* A single encounter with this well-known bird.

Common Swift *Apus apus* Very common and highly vocal (*pekinensis*).

Fork-tailed Swift (Pacific Swift) *Apus pacificus* Very common all over Mongolia (nominate).

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Regular encounters with this adorable species (*saturata*).

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Magical views of two at their nest hole in the Terelj taiga.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* A single excellent sighting of this often unobtrusive woodpecker at Terelj.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* Another species that showed really very well in the taiga.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus major* A few sightings of the race *brevirostris*.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopus leucotos* A fantastic observation of two cooperative birds at Terelj.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopus minor* A cracking observation of this diminutive critter at Terelj.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus* ♦ Splendid studies of this species at Terelj. See Note.

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica* ♦ This very handsome lark is a regular sight on the Mongolian steppes.

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* A few encounters.

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis* ♦ A very common bird of the sandy desert (nominate).

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Regular in meadows near lakes (*kibortii*).

Horned Lark (Shore Lark) *Eremophila alpestris* One of the more common birds of the semi-deserts and steppes.

Pale Martin *Riparia diluta* ♦ Regular sightings. See Note.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* Small numbers showed beautifully near rock faces in mountain areas.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Small numbers. The race involved is *tytleri*.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* (NL)

Common House Martin *Delichon urbica* Regular observations of the race *lagopoda*.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* A regular bird of most habitats.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* ♦ Repeated good sightings. See Note.

Olive-backed Pipit (Indian Tree Pipit/Hodgson's Tree Pipit) *Anthus hodgsoni* A common species of the taiga.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* A couple of migrants were found at one of the steppe lakes.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* A common species of the alpine meadows of the Gobi Altai.

Eastern Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] macronyx* A few sightings in marshy meadows.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* We observed this beauty regularly in marshy habitat (*citreola*).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Regular observations of the race *melanope*.

Baikal Wagtail *Motacilla [alba] baicalensis* ♦ Regular sightings in the northern part of the country.

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens* ♦ Regularly encountered in the sparsely-vegetated, rocky Gobi Altai.

Kozlov's Accentor (Mongolian Accentor) *Prunella koslowi* ♦ Several excellent scope studies. See Note.

Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana* ♦ Regular sightings in the higher reaches of the Gobi Altai.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* Quite common above 2200m in the Gobi Altai and the Khangai (*erythropygia*).

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* Fantastic eye-ball to eye-ball scope studies on a number of occasions.

Eversmann's Redstart (Rufous-backed Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythronota* ♦ Great looks at males. See Note.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* A common species of the higher altitudes. See Note.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* A regular species of the river valleys at Terelj (nominate).

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus* This smart species was noted on migration and at Terelj. See Note.

Güldenstädt's Redstart (White-winged Redstart) *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* ♦ We saw a pair. See Note.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maura* A few in the north.

Hodgson's Bushchat (White-throated Bushchat) *Saxicola insignis* ♦ (VU) Cracking views of this rarity. See Note.

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* Regular in the steppes and the foothills. Most common where pikas live.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* A common species of the mountains (*libanotica*).

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* Regular observations in rocky areas. Pleshanka is the Russian name.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* This lovely species was quite common in the sandy desert (*atroregularis*).

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* This handsome bird was commonly found in rocky outcrops.

White's Thrush *Zoothera aureus* ♦ A migrant showed all too briefly at one of the steppe lakes.

Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* ♦ A single was found in the Terelj taiga.

Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* ♦ Regular excellent encounters with this attractive bird. See Note.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* ♦ Splendid scope views of this inveterate skulker.

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* An amazing eye-ball to eye-ball encounter at Terelj.

Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis* Fair scope studies of singing birds in a reedbed at Orog Nuur.

Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* ♦ Perfect views of this distinctive *Acrocephalus* on migration.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* ♦ A bird performed extremely well in the semi-desert. Pale eye! See Note.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria* (H) We heard it in the Hustai NP.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* A few encounters with this well-known species (*blythi/telengitica?*).

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* (H)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* Regular observations of distinctively-plumaged migrants.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* Our best encounters were with cooperative migrants in the Gobi.

Yellow-browed Warbler (Inornate Warbler) *Phylloscopus inornatus* Just a few sightings.

Hume's Leaf warbler (Hume's Warbler) *Phylloscopus humei* A few encounters in conifers near Orkhon Falls.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* A few immaculate observations of this usually ground-hugging *Phylloscopus*.

Dark-sided Flycatcher (Siberian Flycatcher) *Muscicapa sibirica* Two observations of migrants.

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* Several excellent sightings.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* Two showed very well in the forested gully near Orkhon Falls.

Red-throated Flycatcher (Taiga Flycatcher) *Ficedula albicilla* Great looks on territory in the Terelj taiga. See Note.

Bearded Reedling (Bearded Tit, Bearded Parrotbill) *Panurus biarmicus* We saw a pair at Orog Nuur.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* A single was noted in the Terelj forests.

Willow Tit *Parus montanus* A regularly encountered species in the Terelj taiga (*baicalensis*). A distinctive voice!!

Coal Tit *Parus ater* Just a few were noted in the taiga at Terelj (nominate).

Azure Tit *Parus cyanus* ♦ Good looks at four in the willow vegetation along the Tuul in Ulaan Baatar.

Great Tit *Parus major* Quite common (*kapustini*).

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Regularly encountered. The race involved is the white-bellied *asiatica*.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* (NL) This well-known bird was seen at Terelj.

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus* ◇ We found two in the poplars along the Tuul river. See Note.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* Regular on migration in the steppe and semi-desert and also on territory at Terelj.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius [isabellinus] isabellinus* Regular encounters with this lovely species in the semi-desert.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris* ◇ A few in saxaul forest and in bushy desert.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Extremely common wherever trees occur (*leucoptera*).

Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni* ◇ Several splendid observations of this attractive species. See Note.

Spotted Nutcracker (Eurasian Nutcracker) *Nucifraga caryocatactes* Several showed very well at Terelj.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Very common all over Mongolia and a town bird in Ulaanbaatar.



The Red-billed Chough is one of the most common birds in Mongolia (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus* ◇ Commonly encountered. Several times seen to attend horses and yaks.

Oriental Rook *Corvus pastinator* ◇ Regular in the Ulaan Bataar area.

Oriental Crow *Corvus cornix* ◇ A common species.

Common Raven *Corvus corax* Common, even in Ulaan Baatar. An attractive voice!

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* Great looks at two in bushy desert. A splendid species.

White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus* ◇ Regular in the open willow and poplar forest along the Tuul river.

Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri* ◇ We scoped three in a patch of Saxaul forest (*stoliczkae*). See Note.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Common in towns and villages.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common in towns and villages, often together with the previous species.

Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia) *Petronia petronia* Several excellent observations. Yellow throat patch!

Père David's Snowfinch *Montifringilla davidiana* ◇ Quite a few showed brilliantly on our wanderings. See Note.

White-winged Snowfinch (Eurasian Snowfinch) *Montifringilla nivalis* Fairly regular and tame in the Gobi Altai.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* (H)

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* Regular and very approachable in the Khangai mountains (*altaica*).

Common Crossbill (Red Crossbill) *Loxia curvirostra* (H) We heard it in the Terelj taiga (nominate).

Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti* ◇ Two birds showed in the higher reaches of the Gobi Altai. See Note.

Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa* ◇ Mega views of a nest-building pair. Our first observation in Mongolia.

Mongolian Finch (Mongolian Trumpeter Finch) *Bucanetes mongolicus* ◇ Regular in the steppes and mountains.

Common Rosefinch (Scarlet Rosefinch) *Carpodacus erythrinus* Regular wherever trees occur. A distinctive song.

Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus davidianus* ◇ Quite common in the Gobi Altai.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* Many in the Terelj willows this year.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* (NL) A single was seen at Terelj (nominate).

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* Many fabulous looks at migrants, but also found on territory.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* ♦ Good looks at many smart males along forest edges at Terelj. See Note.



An Asian Rosy Finch (Mark Van Beirs)

Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii* ♦ Brief views of this handsome bunting in the Gobi Altai. See Note.

Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides* ♦ Several excellent encounters in the Hustai NP. Also seen near Ulaan Bataar.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* A couple of migrants showed well in the Gobi Altai.

Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* ♦ Fabulous looks at several singing males in the Gobi Altai (*neobscura*).

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* A single close up observations of this adorable migrant.

Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* (V) Two males showed very well in willow bushes at Terelj.

Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasii* ♦ A male showed nicely at the Whooper Swan lake.



The cute Pallas's Pika (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

MAMMALS

Alpine Pika *Ochotona alpina* Two were found in the Khangay Mountains.

Daurian Pika *Ochotona dauurica* Regular encounters in the northern steppes.

Northern Pika *Ochotona hyperborea* A few showed on scree areas in the Terelj taiga.

Pallas's Pika *Ochotona pallasi* The common pika of the Gobi Altai.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai* Several observations in the steppe.

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* Several encounters with smart, almost black-coloured animals.

Tarbagan Marmot (Siberian/Mongolian Marmot) *Marmota sibirica* These cuddly creatures are still fairly common.

Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel (Red-cheeked Souslik) *Spermophilus erythrogenys* A few encounters.

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel (Long-tailed Souslik) *Spermophilus undulates* These were regular in the steppes.

Siberian Chipmunk *Tamias sibiricus* Several performed very well in the taiga. See Note.

Brandt's Vole *Microtus brandtii* Very common in the northern steppes.

Great Gerbil *Rhombomys opimus* Good views of one in a patch of sandy desert.



A Siberian Chipmunk in the coniferous forest near UB (Alain & Marie-Paule Perthuis-Schajes)

False Zokor (Steppe Zokor) *Myospalax aspalax* The mounds of this inveterate digger were seen at Terelj.

Corsac Fox *Vulpes corsac* A nice observation of a hunting animal in the northern steppes.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* A single observation of this well-known species.

Grey Wolf *Canis lupus* Scat of this powerful animal was found high up on Capercaillie mountain.

Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* The obvious diggings of this widespread species were seen in the Terelj taiga.

Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* Quite a few were seen well in the Hustai NP.

Mongolian Gazelle (White-tailed Gazelle) *Procapra gutturosa* Several small groups performed well. See Note.

Siberian Ibex (Asiatic Ibex) *Capra sibirica* Fairly common in the Gobi Altai, where we saw some impressive males.

Argali *Ovis ammon* Brief views of these wild sheep in the Gobi Altai mountains.

Przevalski's Horse *Equus ferus przewalskii* Many magnificent encounters at close range in the Hustai NP.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Kaspischer Even-fingered Gecko *Alsophylax pipiens* One of these cuties was found in the southern desert.

Toad-headed Agama *Phrynocephalus versicolor* Common in the semi-desert.

Gobi Racerunner *Eremias przewalskii* A few in the semi-desert, usually near rocky areas.

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 and Donsker, D (Eds). 2012. IOC World Bird Names (v2.11). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Horned Grebe (Slavonian Grebe) *Podiceps auritus*

Slavonia is a geographical and historical region in eastern Croatia.

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 60–80,000 birds and is sadly declining as a result of habitat loss (drainage) and unsustainable levels of hunting.

Stejneger's Scoter *Melanitta stejnegeri*

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

Pallas's Fish Eagle (Pallas's Sea Eagle) *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

The world population is likely to be less than 10,000 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.

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

We had more than 70 encounters, often at close range. The total population is less than 20,000 birds.

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.

Saker Falcon (Saker) *Falco cherrug*

There has been a lot of discussion about Saker Falcons in Mongolia lately, as the government has allowed the export of 300+ Falcons a year to Arabian countries. Mongolian ornithologists have estimated that the population stands at only 3-4,000 birds (c1,600 nests), which definitely could not survive this massive depletion. Biologists of the Ministry of Environment on the other hand estimate a rosy population figure of over 6,500 birds and state that it can easily survive this capture. But the fact that Arabian sponsoring is involved makes this all look very, very fishy!!! The illegal trapping of Sakers is another 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*.

Black-billed Capercaillie (Siberian/Rock Capercaillie) *Tetrao parvirostris*

We obtained fantastic views of this very special bird this year. Both Western and Black-billed Capercaillie occur in Mongolia, but don't seem to overlap here. These two form a superspecies and 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!!!



Our group birding in hilly steppe and a clump of primrose (Maire Morton)

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*

Its population is estimated at c6,500 individuals and is probably declining.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

The world population is currently estimated at 230-280,000 birds. Mongolian birds winter in India, a.o. at the famous Khichan site.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaulti*

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. The total population is estimated at 70,000 birds.

Relict Gull *Larus relictus*

The world population varies between 2,500 and 10,000 birds and is declining as a result of predation, disturbance, variable climatic factors at breeding colonies and the development of coastal wetlands in its presumed 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.

Mongolian Gull *Larus [cachinnans] mongolicus*

The whole taxonomy of the "Herring Gull/Yellow-legged Gull" complex is indeed very complex and the form involved (*mongolicus*) is now usually treated as a separate species. It was formerly considered belonging with Vega or East Siberian Gull *Larus vegae*, while other authors considered it a subspecies of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*. We had close looks at small numbers at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and found the adults to be quite variable, with both yellow and pink legs and with both one and two mirrors in the wing. Even the colour of the mantle varied. The last word on this matter has not been said yet!!

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

The birds seen were quite variable with some obviously belonging to the race *longipennis*, with totally black bill and greyer plumage, compared to European birds. Others looked exactly like our birds or showed intermediate characteristics.

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus*

This species has a wide breeding range and occurs from the Caspian Sea east to north-eastern 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 (Blue 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.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

The Nearctic form is now split off as a separate species: American Three-toed Woodpecker *P. dorsalis*.



A Saxaul tree (Mark Van Beirs) and the Gobi-Altai mountains (Maire Morton)

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.

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.

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.

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.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

We saw the subspecies *phoenicuroides*, one of the red-bellied races.

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 erythrogaster*

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.

Hodgson's Bushchat (White-throated Bushchat) *Saxicola insignis*

It only breeds very locally in the mountains of Mongolia and adjacent parts of Russia and winters in the terai of northern India and Nepal. Its population is probably only a few thousand birds and the species is virtually unknown on its breeding grounds. Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800-1894) was an English diplomat, ethnologist, naturalist and author.

Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis*

Black-throated Thrush *T. atrogularis* is often lumped in this species, whereby the name Dark-throated Thrush is used for the enlarged species.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*

The form in northern Africa is now split off as African Desert Warbler *Sylvia deserti*.

Red-throated Flycatcher (Taiga Flycatcher) *Ficedula albicilla*

This form is now usually split off from the more western Red-breasted Flycatcher *F. parva*.

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*

This form is now usually split off as a separate species from Eurasian Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*.

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.

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 *Montifringilla davidiana*

This species is always associated with sousliks or pikas, as they breed in their burrows. Sometimes separated generically (together with 3 other species) from *Montifringilla* in the genus *Pyrgilauda*. 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.

Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*

This modestly-clad species is known to occur up to the amazing altitude of 6,000m in summer!

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Good looks at many smart males along forest edges 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.

Siberian Chipmunk *Tamias sibiricus*

This is the only Old World representative of the genus *Tamias* (25 species).

Mongolian Gazelle (White-tailed Gazelle) *Procapra gutturosa*

It is still common in eastern Mongolia, but is only rarely seen further west. It is not a real Gazelle in se (different genus) and its nearest relatives are the Tibetan and Przevalski's Gazelles of Tibet and China. The Duff & Lawson checklist place it in the genus *Gazella*.



Mongolia offers some magnificent scenery (Mark Van Beirs)