

A mammal and bird-watching trip to -

Mongolia

(and a short stay, for Dave and I, in Beijing)

12-7-04 to 13-8-04

(with Dave Sheils, Barry Virtue, Sue Waugh and Steve Anyon-Smith from Australia and Nancy Gallagher and Larry Simpkins from the USA)

“road (noun) – way, usually open to the public for the passage of vehicles, persons and animals, except in Mongolia”

Chinggis Khan is buried somewhere in Mongolia. Nobody knows where he is buried, although some may think they do. One thing is certain, nobody will ever forget what he looks like, his image is easily spotted in this most curious country, commonly on the labels of vodka bottles and beer cans.

Mongolia is one of those places that everyone has heard about even if some are unclear on whether it is a real country or part of China. Not too many people live there (in fact no-one at all) and less than three million people survive there. Surviving means emerging unfrozen at the end of winter. Here the rivers and livestock are frozen solid, your supply of beer is in the fire and once a week half the people count to ten whilst the others count to eleven to make sure they still have control over their extremities.

Outline of Trip

Four Australians and two Americans from Arizona were determined to scatter ourselves around Mongolia for four weeks to experience the culture and landscapes, but more importantly to track down a few birds, mammals and the more sedentary vegetation. If you thought all vegetation was sedentary, think again, often it passed us at high speed, sometimes in the company of tents and their contents. Read on.

We wanted to find some of the birds and mammals for which this part of the world is noted – cranes, waterfowl, wolves, gazelles, ibex, jerboas and all those little furry things

that Richard Gere made famous. Having said that we didn't go to any specific places to seek out any particular bird or mammal. We took our chances wherever we went. So when you look at the lists at the end of this report you may see some gaps that might have easily been filled by going to a known site to see one thing or another.

We engaged the services of Selena Travel, the Ulaanbataar-based ground agent, to organize all our arrangements in Mongolia. They sourced a driver and guide and suggested an itinerary for us that would take in the range of wildlife habitats the country had to offer. Selena were very helpful over a period of six months of planning and gave us information to the best of their abilities. The tourist season in Mongolia is short and permanent guides / drivers are rare – what to do with them during winter? – so don't expect a driver with a name tag and a silly uniform or a guide that smiles all the time and keeps trying to interfere with your youngest daughter.

Our guide, Lkhagvasuren is a biologist from the National University. He is an expert on small mammals who loves his critters in quite a different way to Mr Gere. Like many scientists he displayed a remarkable lack of excitement in the field. He came complete with 20 live mammal traps, so he was an instant success with those of us that take an interest in small furry things....

Our driver for the first few days, Doina, was charming but looked like a very good reason for the building of the Great Wall. If Chinggis had an army of Doinas, they would have reached Vienna, Lisbon, the Canary Islands, Greenland and the American Indians would have been unknown to the modern world. Thinking about it, Australia might not have had so much rock art as well.

Driver #2, Bhartra, was a miracle of patience, good cheer without the need for alcohol, and a deft hand at chasing tents through the desert. His vehicle, a Russian UAZ 4WD (or "Gull"), was an uncomfortable beast that would routinely die in interesting locations. Bhartra was never concerned too much, he just got about fixing the problems with a minimum of fuss and as far as we ever knew, with no swearing!

Our expectations for the trip were generally not exceeded, although those of us from Australia were happy with the experience. What follows are some general observations, a diary, and a bird and mammal list. Mongolia is a good place to see some rare or unusual animals but you have to work at it. Don't believe everything you may have read or heard about the "respect for nature" ethic of the locals.

(Dave and I spent six days in Beijing on the way - my diary reflects this)

Sites visited:

Below is our itinerary. It was changed quite a bit from what was originally agreed with Selena because the original itinerary was almost impossible to achieve. One "driving day" ended up taking 16 hours (not including meal, fuel or minor rest stops) spread over

two and a half days. Most of our planned “stop and explore” days just didn’t happen. This was disappointing as we spent almost every day on the road from about eight in the morning until about four or so in the afternoon. Some days were much longer. Apparently this is what most tourists in Mongolia experience (or expect to experience?), but it is a bit frustrating when you want to explore the country’s natural history and not each others kneecaps.

I have kept the flavour of the wording of the itinerary as close as possible to the original. My words are in italics.

Part 1. Ulaanbaatar and Eastern Mongolia. Mountain and hills

Day 1. Arrival in Ulaanbaatar. City tour including Natural History Museum. Stay at Kuhkree ger camp on Bogd Uul.

Day 2-4 Drive out of the town for 2 hours to Gun Galuut Nature Reserve. Enjoy the wilderness.
Ger camp overnight

Day 2-4. Free days at the Nature Reserve. Bird Watching, hiking, wild mountain sheep and other wild mammals viewing. Ger Camp overnights

Day 5. In the evening drive back to Ulaanbaatar. Hotel overnight.

Part 2. Southern Mongolia. Plain steppes, desert and sand

Day 6. Drive to the south to the Gobi steppes. Enjoy the nature beauty and wilderness.
Ger camp overnight at Rashaant camp.

Day 7. Drive to Bayanzag-the Flaming Cliffs in the arid Gobi Desert. Tent

Day 8. Explore around for dinosaur fossils and hiking in Saxaul Forests. Drive to Yoliin Am-Vulture's Gorge at the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park. *Ger camp outside the park.*

Day 9. At Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park. *Ger camp in sight of the park if you have a good telescope.*

Day 10. Drive to Khongor Sand dunes, the largest sand dunes in Mongolia which extends 200 km long and 20 km in width and upto 200 m high. Enjoy the views of gazelle herds along the way, *Return to Bayanzag – tent.*

Day 11. Look for lake that disappeared some years back. *Camp in beautiful mountains north of Bayanzag. Chase tent.*

Day 12. Drive to Ongi Monastery Ruins by the River Ongi-the only river in the Gobi Steppes.

Enjoy the wilderness. Ger Camp

Part 3. Central Mongolia. Woody mountains and rivers

Day 13. *Drive to a nature reserve at the end of the earth. Marvel at the temperature extremes in summer. Get violently ill eating the lamb.*

Day 14. Drive to the Orkhon Waterfalls, a very beautiful site in the Central Mongolia. Hiking around.

Day 15. Drive to Taikhar Stone, an interesting granite rock at the River Tamir via Kharakhorum-the ancient capital of Mongolia to visit Erdene Zuu, the first Buddhist center in Mongolia.

Lunch at a ger camp nearby. Drive to Taikhar Stone. Ger Camp

Day 16. Drive to Khorgo-Terkh National Park. Climbing up the volcanic mount Khorgo. Tenting at the lake Terkh.

Day 17. *Drive part way toward Lake Khovsgul. Tent at fabulous site alongside forests and creek*

Part 4. Northern Mongolia. High mountain, forest, rivers and wetland

Day 18. *Drive to Moron. Marvel at certain things. Tent.*

Day 19. Get at the Lake Khuvsgul -the dark pearl of Asia in the Khuvsgul National Park. Transfer to a ger camp.

Enjoy the beauty of the nature. Ger camp

Day 20. At the lake *in the rain*. Optional horse riding, hiking and visit to Tsaatan or the

Reindeer People-a small clan of Mongolia. *Start leaving Khovsgul on account of the roads.* Tent

Day 21 *Drive to Selenge River.* Tent

Day 22. Drive to Uran Togoo-an interesting volcanic mount. Enjoy the wilderness. Tent *north of here.*

Day 23. Drive to Khustai National Park, where the Takhi-the only specie of wild horse existing graze. *Stay at Moilt camp "cabins"*

Day 24-26. Free days at the National Park. Bird watching, hiking and relaxing. Day 24 at Moilt camp, days 25 and 26 in ger camp.

Day 27. After breakfast drive to Ulaanbaatar. Shopping, sightseeing, in the evening enjoy the performance of

Mongolia's best folklore ensemble. Hotel

Day 28. Departure

Some observations

Mongolian People

Never stand still in a crowded place unless you have full body armour. Even the grannies will push you over. Come to think of it, it is the grannies that are more likely to do so. It seems the Mongolians learnt something from Chinggis about asserting dominion over the next guy's personal space, if not his or her whole country.

Actually the Mongolians are probably the most caring people on earth. They have to be. They are fairly evenly, if thinly, scattered about their remarkable country but they all seem to know where everything should be. So when strangers turn up, even if not remotely near one of their gers, expect a horse. Now I never knew exactly what was said between the locals and our driver or guide, but I expect the exchange probably went like this –

“Do your tourists want to buy, rent, eat or shoot my horses, cows, goats, sheep or marmots?”

“Nah, something about looking at wildlife and drinking alcohol?”

“What about gerbils (wink wink), we’ve got lots around the ger?”

“Only if its one they haven’t seen”

“Pity, car going okay?”

“Yeah, horse?”

“It’s okay, smoke?”

“Sure”

There is a very strong “help your neighbour” ethic in Mongolia. Whenever a car flashes its lights at an oncoming vehicle it is compulsory to stop and ask what’s happening and lend a hand if at all possible. This kind of spontaneous assistance is a distant memory where I come from. And there is all the time in the world to do it. At one point in the middle of the Gobi Desert a motorcyclist flagged us down and asked for some fuel. Fair enough, we gave a litre or so. Not that it would have helped all that much, the motorcycle was lacking a front wheel! He had a dog for company. That was his third problem.

We found people in the remotest places in the pokiest corners of the Gobi, and elsewhere, hospitable to the point of embarrassment and charming in their own way if you didn’t get in the way (see above). Somewhat surprisingly given the poxy climate, many of the women are very beautiful and not just in the exotic way an Eskimo or a fur seal could be said to be beautiful, but in the big league of beautiful. I can’t remember what the men looked like except that Chinggis isn’t dead.

I don’t expect much ever gets stolen from tourists in rural Mongolia (except by other tourists) so the country is a very safe one in which to travel. Except I wouldn’t trust some of the genetic throwbacks in UB, especially in market areas.

Accommodation

We stayed in gers, a hotel in UB, and in tents either supplied by Selena Travel or bought with us. The gers are great. It is a wonder they haven't become popular outside Mongolia. They have comfortable beds, can be well ventilated by rolling up the sides a little if it is hot, and five minutes later when it is freezing you can quickly turn the bloody things into an oven by lighting a very small fire in the fireplace. Three bits of quality cowshit can be used to heat the ger for about a month. Just that you can't cool the thing down afterwards. The ger camp staff, if they can be located, are friendly and obliging.

Our tents were fine except when you tried to use them in an upright position. See "Weather".

When in UB we stayed in the Anujin Hotel (3 star I think), which was great. It had all the things you might expect plus the most incredible showers in the world. The only problem was in understanding all their functions so that you didn't get scalded or frozen mid-shower. There is probably a TAFE course you can do but we didn't have the time.

The range of toilets covered the full spectrum. If you are considering taking small children to some of the "long drop" sites, you might wish to take a length of rope and lash some of their body parts to the door just to be on the safe side. Some of the floor architects have overestimated how far apart feet need to be placed so one could easily plummet through the hole with hilarious results.

Roads / transport

Before I left Australia I bought a map of Mongolia. Why it showed a road network on the map and not just a line that shows you where Russia and China are and blobs where the airports were I will never know. Clearly the authors of this so-called map had never been anywhere near the place. A random collection of scribbles drawn by a chimpanzee on LSD would have been just as accurate. The fact that it shows main highways that are sealed is commendable except for two small points:

1. they are not sealed, and
2. they are nowhere near where the map shows them to be.

Our driver used five methods of navigation:

1. two completely different maps,
2. a compass,
3. repeatedly asking directions (there are no signs),
4. guesswork, and
5. accepting that any goat track we were on probably led to somewhere.

When the dirt track gets a few holes in it, you start a new one next to it. When it gets a bit used, you start another, ad infinitum. It is not unusual to find up to twenty roughly parallel roads all leading in the same direction. They merge and diverge with monotonous

regularity. Passing another vehicle can be the high point of the driver's day – there are so many options for how this might be achieved. Plus there is a law in Mongolia that says that you must overtake any vehicle in sight in the most expeditious manner – hang on to your seat.

Since arriving home I have been driving very slowly, not because I am a timid driver, but I keep expecting the kind of bone jarring surprises that are randomly spaced throughout the Mongolian road “network”. These include bridges with broken backs, very big holes and the occasional farm animal with a lower than average IQ. Yes, it is a country with no fences and it lacks a few other things besides. What is really funny is the occasional kilometer marker post about half a kilometer perpendicular to the part of the countryside that is currently being used as a road.

The most common vehicle is the Russian-built UAZ or “Gull” 4WD just like ours. Other big 4WDs are popular. Everything else is confined to the larger towns or is broken on the side of the “road”.

Weather

We arrived in mid-summer. This coincides with the period when Mongolia gets most of its rain, but that isn't very much. So when we went to the Gobi Desert it rained every day but one. It generally doesn't rain continuously but often enough to keep you looking over your shoulder. It can be quite hot one minute and then a northerly wind change can send the temperature plummeting in a fashion I have never experienced. Bring all your clothes.

If you want to experience every kind of weather there is, all in the one day, and you don't want to travel to Melbourne, then Mongolia could be for you.

Travel tip – don't even think of going here in winter. The average temperature is –30 Celsius in the warmer parts.

Insects

We were prepared to get eaten by mosquitoes. It didn't happen but I am told that it can, especially if you travel to far eastern parts. This was the first trip I have ever undertaken when I didn't get bitten by a tick so that has to count for something. There is the odd fly but nothing to stress about. There was the odd plague of Pallas's sandgrouse but these apparently don't bite and there is some doubt over whether they are insects. Sure, there are grasshoppers, and I don't trust them when they appear in biblical numbers but they seemed to spend most of their time eating each other rather than worry about us.

The only thing that had us a little confused was the mites. These were the size of cocker spaniels and seemed to spend most of their waking hours trying to hitch a ride in your

tent or sleeping bag. I don't know what they eat and although it could have been me - I did lose some weight, I didn't feel anything.

Food

I was told that UB had half a freezer full of food. For everyone. In the country. This was not the case. In fact the capital has some of the best restaurants I've been to recently if the restaurant selection chosen by our ground agent is any guide. Just sit down and wait for your Korean, Mexican, or Mongolian food and lots of it.

In the countryside we ate at the gers, food very good mostly, or, at tent camps, cooked by our guide and driver (with a little assistance sometimes), which was mostly good after we established a few rules of hygiene. This came about after the "Great Dead Sheep Incident". This is where we were foolish enough to listen to my advice about the cooking of poorly prepared dead sheep. Needless to say we ate no more sheep, dead or otherwise, at least not bought at local markets anyway. Be warned that if you go to Mongolia, understand that the locals have more different things living in their digestive systems than you will see living in their national parks. Be careful.

Beer

Beer comes in three forms, warm, mildly cool (marketed as cold) and cold. Only the first two are found in Mongolia. Happily the local brews are quite drinkable. Chinggis (you guessed it) is very drinkable and can occasionally be found on tap, whilst Cass and Hite (both Korean) are cheap, ubiquitous and tasty. Tiger beer from Singapore is freely available and reasonably good, and Heineken can be found at the ger camps but it is hardly worth the premium prices charged.

Mongolians make some interesting beverages aside from beer but when we learned how much it makes them sick, we passed. We figured that if our driver didn't stop to buy the stuff it was very dangerous indeed.

Wildlife (see full list in table at end of report)

Birds

Everyone I had talked to, and everything I had read prepared me for the fact that there are not a huge number of different birds in Mongolia. Further, many are passage migrants and we were not going to be around for the migrations. There is said to be a bit of quality about the birds that are seeable, whatever that means. Together we would have seen over 200 birds. My list was 184. I could have seen that many in the local national park at home

if I had spent a month there, but would I have seen Siberian crane, white-naped crane and demoiselle crane on the first day in the field?

I think that if we had spent less time driving around up north and a little more time in parts of the Gobi or further east of UB we would have seen more birds but having said that we did spend a lot of time searching for mammals. It must also be said of course, that we did not use a professional bird guide. In any country there are always lots of birds laughing at you from the roadsides because you don't know precisely where to stop.

The best places we found for birds on our itinerary were:

- The lakes at Gun Galuut (in fact any lake was good leading to my colleagues to conclude that I had an unusual obsession with them, culminating in the search for a mirage at one point).
- The Gobi Desert especially Yolyn Am Gorge
- Any vegetation along large rivers, even the Tuul at UB, and
- Forests that are not exclusively larch.

Larch forests probably have lots of birds in them – I'll never know. We found that the edges of these forests could be good but deep within was very quiet and those birds found here tended to be in the tops of the trees and lacked diversity. Naturally there would be some fat chook things about if you spent the time searching.

All said, Mongolia is a place to go birding when you have been to a number of really good birding countries, or if you have a fascination with waterfowl. It is possible to see tens of thousands of waterfowl on a single patch of water – no exaggeration here.

Mammals

We identified 35 different mammals. If not for Lkhagvasuren's live mammal traps we would have seen far fewer. I was very happy with the mammals we saw. This country has an amazing mammal list. Sure it has its fair share of small furies that all look the same, but it also has some of the all-time greats in terms of large scary things like wolves and bears, lots of bovids, lots of cats, and lots of mustelids.

The highlights were wolves, Mongolian gazelles, Persian gazelle (or black-tailed gazelle), Siberian ibex, hangay argali, Przewalski's horse and red deer. Amongst the smaller critters on offer were corsac fox, Mongolian marmot, Mongolian five-toed jerboa, two different hedgehogs, some cute hamsters and the ubiquitous susliks or ground squirrels.

Of cats and mustelids there were few. We probably spotlighted a Pallas's cat at Gun Galuut but we'll never know for sure. The same can be said for Gobi cat at Bayanzag but it ran away as well. Of mustelids there were surprisingly none. Methinks that the locals have done a number on them. See below "National parks and other protected areas".

Some of the problems we had with seeing more mammals included:

- Exhaustion from traveling all day,
- Unkind weather for spotlighting,
- Very late sunsets,
- Freezing temperatures that precluded trapping without the likelihood of killing whatever was silly enough to walk into them, and
- The locals had gotten to the mammals first.

Reptiles

For a country that is so cold in the winter we spotted quite a few reptiles, including several snakes and some really neat agamids and skinks. Most of these were in the Gobi but some were in rocky mountains. Regrettably I forgot to write down their names from our guide's book! In any event I doubt any serious reptile-head will be going to Mongolia.

Selena travel

We booked with Selena Travel back in January this year. They were selected on the basis of the itinerary and price offered us and not on the basis of being recommended by anyone I knew. I had sent identical questions to about ten agencies found on the internet. I had some reservations using Selena as they offer hunting trips for large mammals. Then I discovered so do most of the others – they probably all do in fact.

Selena offered us a 15% discount if we booked early so that's what we did. This may not be the bargain that it seems because I am fairly confident we didn't get the best maintained vehicle at their disposal but certainly two very good drivers and the guide that we wanted. The price offered us was very good for the tour we booked on at around \$55US per day per person all inclusive.

Zola is the manager of Selena and she is very skilled in English, very obliging, and recently graduated in tourism management (or something). She can answer any questions you might have very quickly and professionally. If you are considering a trip to Mongolia I can recommend Selena. However, you should nail down the actual vehicle to be used, whether all the seats face forward, and check the itinerary for travel time. Don't rely on maps for this – they are useless. It seems that tour operators in Mongolia think that everyone wants to see the country from a vehicle because that's what all the operators we ran into have you do. Some Europeans think this is great, apparently, because they marvel at the wide open space.

Zola's email address is: sales@selenatravel.com

National parks and other protected areas

There aren't any.

A few years ago some numbskull suggested the whole country should be declared a World Biosphere Reserve. Clearly this boofhead had looked on a map and seen all these national parks etc and figured that if there were hardly any people then the wildlife and ecosystems must be in good shape. I thought the same thing. Whoever it was had obviously never been there. Now I'm not saying that after one month and having been to a selection of sites I'm an instant expert but consider these immutable facts:

- The government allows anyone to hunt anything not listed as endangered (CITES I) anywhere – including national parks – for a fee. I reckon you could shoot the rest for a larger fee but I don't know this.
- The government allows Mongolian gazelles to be hunted for a short season each year – the Chinese prefer to use machine guns for this – what joy to be a gazelle. No wonder they run so fast.
- The government exports very large numbers of raptors to the Middle East every year (mostly saker falcons).
- The locals kill anything they like anywhere they like to do it – we saw cooked marmots for sale within national parks. In Hustai NP one of the park rangers kills and eats the things, presumably caught within the park. Eating marmots appears to be some sort of national obsession.
- All national parks we saw were full of domestic animals and their herders.
- Gift shops in UB offer all sorts of dead animal parts including whole wolf skins and all types of trophy heads.
- The method for trapping wolves for research within Hustai NP is to lay baited steel jaw traps. I need not go on about the likely results except to say that these traps have killed at least one lynx, many raptors and lots of badgers in the last year.

Now, some might say that I am being a little harsh here – Mongolia is a poor country etc. So what, look what the Ugandan government has done? Try killing a flea in one of their national parks and see what happens. Mongolia will be lot poorer unless they get their act together. There is no difference between national parks and any other part of the country in terms of wildlife protection except that the parks charge a small entry fee. This was the most disappointing aspect of my trip. Does it show?

On the positive side, our travel agent, Selena, has started a project at Gun Galuut to protect 60 odd argali sheep. They are seeable. The other critters are along for the ride. Private conservation projects like this one have a far greater chance of success for wildlife, primarily because they are created for commercial gain. This generally means the profits are spread, albeit thinly, across the local community. Lets hope this spreads to other areas. The Mongolian Government is apparently useless in terms of environmental commitment.

Diary

Saturday 10th July

A mother-of-all-stuffups starts our day. Apparently the ever so organized Air China (not to confused with China Air) has cancelled our tickets. We arrive at the airport and find that being first in the check-in queue has its advantages, like this one – we get to fly in the very full plane by being “forced on”. I hadn’t previously been entertained by this bit of airline speak but at least our waiting time was reduced by trying to ring our agent in Sydney, Melbourne or wherever or by trying to find anyone at this very large airport who would admit any connection with the very absent Air China staff. Travel tip: avoid Air China if at all possible.

The flight is full of Chinese. Funny that. Everything written down anywhere in the plane is also Chinese, but the movies are in English – only problem is that they are all about five years old and the tapes are so badly damaged that you wish there were screaming children in the plane as a distraction.

All the people on the plane are very well behaved. Hmm. After five hours I politely asked if we might have a nice beer to drink, fearing the response. Nobody else was drinking anything at all. To my inestimable relief some beer arrived. And some more after that. What is going on here?

Great to know that there are still things to learn about flying. We transitted through some very large place starting with the letter “G”. We were all herded off and made to pass through immigration and customs and then chanelled by all sorts of people that had fancy clothes and fixed smiles to a so called transfer lounge. At the entrance to a spotless toilet we were greeted by an official whose sole purpose in life is to smile at foreigners and say “hullo” and “goodbye” as you enter and leave the said facility. There was a queue of such people talking turns. Yep, welcome to a very different place indeed.

Our plane refused to leave for Beijing on account of a very large amount of the World’s fresh water that had taken an interest in traveling there at the same time as us. The airport at Beijing was currently entertaining all of it. Around midnight we approached the city in a sort of spiral that sees the plane, a 777-200, fly about 100km from the airport for quite some time. The nose-cam on the plane as we landed gave us great views of what we thought might have been our last moments on earth.

We met our hosts Clio, a great young lady and the manager of travel@tour-beijing.com and Annie, our guide, and speed off into the night in our Mao Citizen (my name for our Chinese car) to the Harmony Hotel. The hotel is very good and we both die.

Sunday 11th July

After our generous buffet breakfast we started our all expenses paid six day tour of Beijing and surrounds. First stop was the Temple of Heaven. In the rain. It is possibly a very nice place but the weather kind of stuffed it. Lunch was breathtaking. This was at a restaurant at one side of Tiananmen Square. So many staff and so much food. We were to learn that all meals in the next six days would be like this.

The Forbidden City, even in the rain, is breathtaking. The scale, quality of architecture, presentation, preservation and history as presented by our guide and interpretation on the ground makes your head spin. It is one of those places that should be visited twice – the first time to inspire awe and the second time to actually learn something. I cannot speak highly enough of the way the Chinese have preserved and presented their cultural heritage.

For a change of pace we were taken to a facility where we were entertained by a Chinese tea ceremony. I thought this trivial and rather quaint at the time, but I am currently the proud owner of a Chinese tea set and tea courtesy of the Beijing Airport duty free shop. It is as yet unused.

Dave and I purchased beers from the shop across the road and drank it. Dinner was cancelled on account of lunch. We learned that nobody starves in China.

Monday 12th July

Every night our hotel room received attention from the outside world. Tapping on the door, phone calls and the like from kind folk wishing to offer us services of one kind or another. All we wanted to do was sleep. Trust me.

Our driver is Mr Lao, who looks like the sort of guy who can achieve things with a car that might get others imprisoned, or worse, picks us up with our new guide, Jerry. What happened to Annie is anyone's guess and polite or even direct enquiries of Clio elicit no intelligible response. Perhaps she has become a lower part of the food chain somewhere. Mr Lao and Jerry took us on the aptly named Badaling Freeway to the Badaling section of the Great Wall. Thereabouts the freeway ended.

I thought that the Great Wall would be the sort of place where you parked beside a dusty road and wandered through a village or two before stumbling onto, it must be said, a great big long wall. Nothing could be further from the truth. The buildings that service the car park were bigger than Australia's fourth largest city. The bits of Wall that tourists visit are largely of the rebuilt variety. Not surprising when you consider the numbers of tourists, mostly domestic, that climb it daily. Still, it is a must see and we did spot Pere David's laughingthrush, a few squirrels and the odd redstart. The funniest experience was the young Chinese women who wanted their pictures taken with the white man with the beard. Odd to be on the receiving end of "may I take your picture?"

Lunch was preceded by a visit to the cloisonné factory, interesting but not buying. We were to visit every kind of factory Beijing has on offer and there are a few common observations – every factory / shop is immaculately presented, interpreted very competently by an English-speaking guide, overstaffed and overpriced.

Our 29-course lunch was alright I suppose.

Off to the Ming Tombs, brilliant of course, but only a taste of what was to come. This was the Yonghe Lamasery, not on every tourist's itinerary but given the amount of days we had, it was on ours. Aside from the standard selection of brain-numbing temples, there was this big bit of wood that the Nepalese king had given these guys in 1748. This wooden Buddhist charm is 28 metres (not inches) high, coloured gold, looks like a Buddha and is carved from a SINGLE piece of sandalwood. Well f*ck me!! A number of things came to mind all at once. Firstly, how on earth did the Nepalese get this Guinness World Record toothpick here, given their national airline can't check your luggage from Kathmandu to Sydney, or anywhere else in any reliable fashion come to think of it? Boggles the mind. It is the most enduring image I have of Beijing.

This night saw the ceremonial opening of our first Jack.

We met Clio for a Peking duck dinner at a four star hotel. The 38-course dinner was reasonable and was followed by a show across the road where we were entertained by a troupe of young acrobats. This consisted of an hour during which some very young people did impossible things with their bodies, whilst smiling. I sat in pain most of the time. This made the phone call at the hotel offering a massage harder to ignore.

Tuesday 13th July

After marvelling at the queue to view Mao Tse Tung's body we toddled off to undertake the Hutong Village Tour. This is supposed to be the authentic old Peking residential area where the parked tourist buses represent about 40% of the total land area. That Chinese tourists undertake tours of their own residential areas is somewhat strange.

Indeed the rickshaws, the narrow streets, the birds in cages and the urban design laws do create an atmosphere of old Peking as near as I can tell. We dined at a local family's home in a small garden courtyard where they have done this sort of thing many times before. Never mind, with the food and the atmosphere it was just great! The visit to a local primary school (where boys outnumber girls) and the chance of dying in a rickshaw accident filled in the day nicely.

We learned about ghosts and the silly way they are prevented from entering homes, and feasted on all sorts of reasons why the number "9" is important. We discovered how you could tell the occupation of a home's inhabitants and what they had eaten for breakfast. Great.

It was after leaving the Hutong Village that I began to challenge the authorities. We chose to walk back to the hotel through Beihai Park, a large and beautiful park with a big lake in it. Don't drink the water. Here we found, surprisingly, temples, lots of them. After leaving the park I tried to cross a line painted on the footpath that defined a triangle of pavement of about three square metres. This site must have been where Chairman Mao had his first crap or something because a uniformed man in a booth darted out and redirected me. He did not seem happy that I had managed to intrude so far – about 9 centimetres.

9 centimetres was further than I managed to get when I tried to walk around a taped barrier at the big important government building opposite Tiananmen Square, where a different man in a different uniform physically gave me some advice. I really must be more careful. Anyway we spotted the Burmese president as a consequence thus getting my first, but not last, president tick for the trip (the other being the Mongolian president in UB).

It is a curious fact that in Beijing all manner of people approach you for all manner of reasons, chief among them, to practice their English. In the next few weeks or so when the Chinese are in charge of the world, I hope they remember our kindness.

One thing to note - you feel very very safe in Beijing.

Wednesday 14th July

Our new guide has the shortest name in the whole world – Li Yi. She is not a morning person but brightened as the day progressed. First stop today is the Summer Palace. Yeah, awesome. Large crowds of Chinese and owls. Yes, gobsmacked we were, we actually saw some wildlife here. First an Oriental scops owl and then a parliament of brown hawk owls.

After our 73-course lunch it was the cultured pearl factory tour. This was followed by the silk factory tour and I kid you not, the lecture by the doctor at the hospital on Chinese medicine tour. We passed on the sincere invitation for a free physical – more than a smidgeon of eastern propaganda on this one. How did I end up at a hospital in China – I'm not even sick.....?

The day concluded with our complimentary imperial cuisine dinner. This dinner was given us by the tour company on account of my suggesting an improvement to their website – I thought they should spell their email address correctly. The 99-course dinner was embarrassing. We had our own room in a 4-diamond restaurant in the middle of Beihai Park, where we retraced our walk from yesterday by car – the only car in the place. We asked Li to join us. There was never the slightest chance we could have eaten all the food if we had sat there for a week.

Thursday 15th July

Song Shan Nature Reserve was on the menu today. This forested reserve is about 100km from Beijing. Being forest, nobody in town has ever heard of it, but off we went and eventually arrived mid-morning. The walk up along a creek was enchanting for a number of reasons. We did see a few birds, very few. There were a number of old Chinamen gathering herbs. Interpretation of the vegetation was terrific (in English), and the forest was populated by many edible fruits and nuts. Here were wild peaches, pears, mulberries, walnuts, various berries and lots of edible fungi. No wonder the Chinese can feed their population.

The down side was lots of rubbish, very noisy Chinese, and horrid air pollution from town.

Ended the day by having 9 drinks.

If ever you get a chance to stop in Beijing for a few days you will not regret it. Contact Clio.

Friday 16th July

We checked out of our hotel and Mr Lao and Li took us to the airport. Mr Lao, who has the same rabid and aggressive driving style of every other driver here managed to get us within 50 feet of the passenger drop off area before he had a car plough into his. Close.

Now the Chinese airport torture. Here we learned that you can't take alcohol into the terminal as hand carry. So we lost half a bottle of Jack. Oddly, you can buy as much as want at the duty free shops soon as you clear customs. This is called a rort.

We caught up with Barry-Sean and Sue, his partner, in one of the airport queues. Eventually we boarded our 737-300 for Ulaanbataar. It sat at the airport for an hour or so whilst the mixture of fog and chemicals in the air cleared a little.

It was very hot when we arrived in Mongolia. We were met by our guide and driver and rushed off to a restaurant for lunch. Here we caught up with Larry and Nancy, our fellow travellers from Arizona. Then the bank to change money, pay the smiling Zola, the tour of the natural history museum and off to the Kuhkree ger camp across the river. Why we were at a ger camp across the river is a mystery. It was not on our program when we left home. A walk in the larch forest produced a few woodpeckers, lots of beautiful flowers and our first mammals – marmots.

Saturday 17th July

For mine, one of the great things about going to a different country is getting up early and going for a pre-breakfast walk in vegetation that is all unfamiliar. Or is it. On the hillsides there are all these familiar garden plants from home, even rhubarb, parsley and strawberries – all where they should be.

We left for Gun Galuut Nature Reserve after breakfast. We were spoilt as we travelled on the best road in the whole country – it goes to the biggest coal mine near UB. The ger camp at GG is sited in the middle of nowhere, although in retrospect it is at one of the better sites. It is curious that Mongolians site the tourist ger camps at the most featureless barren flat and boring sites they can find. And in a landscape that often has all these qualities and more, this is quite a feat.

We backtracked to a lake we spied on the way in and to our excitement there were four Siberian cranes, an endangered bird that lives in some of the worst countries in terms of wildlife protection. Larry was so excited. Also present were large numbers of breeding spotted redshanks, a pair of whooper swans, hosts of other waders in full breeding plumage, some of the more common ducks and terns, a hundred or so demoiselle cranes, and northern lapwings.

After a delicious lunch we wandered to some distant small lakes to spy a pair of white-naped cranes with two chicks – so a three crane day! Icing on the cake was provided by a family of active corsac foxes running across the open grass. Very attractive animals.

We enjoyed a few Chinggis beers before dinner and a Jack on the riverbank as the horses came to drink and the sun set on a splendid day.

Sunday 18th July

Today is argali sheep day. These woolly monsters are one of the reasons I thought to go to these parts. Along the way we picked up a “ranger”, a remarkable word that can describe anyone from a collector of entry fees to someone who shoots wild animals for food. This guy (impossible to make sense out of people’s names in this country) fell somewhere in between. We were deposited at the top of some formidable looking mountains whereupon the vehicle disappeared. The local guide waved vaguely into the distance at a point about three time zones away and said the vehicle would pick us up there. Larry and Nancy bailed immediately and I wondered to what we had subscribed. I sent the local ranger off with the age-challenged Americans while the rest of us went searching for sheeps.

The car park theory held, again. Us mountaineers were stumbling along a ridge when we spotted through binoculars the valley people waving frantically. Naturally those least interested or least likely to see the argali had spotted a couple of rams on a ridge, affording the rest of us with decent views. We were later to see 12 more. There are about 60 in this pocket of rocky hills. They are kept company by at least one wolf flushed by Dave which quickly disappeared. A sensible wolf if the gift shops in UB are any guide.

It was a glorious walk through unpopulated hills dotted with flowers and the odd bird and reptile. The best of them was an imperial eagle. Also seen were daurian suslik (reasonably common here) and lots of Mongolian marmots.

In the afternoon we had no vehicle. This decision by our agent confused me but apparently they thought that we would just love to ride horses or rest for a day or so. Horses? Rest? This is a bloody holiday, not a health camp! The only thing requiring rest is my stomach, which is most unhappy with some of the local comestibles.

So Jack, riverbank and the glow that follows an exciting walk.

Monday 19th July

We visited a local lake of the waterfowl covered variety that kept most of us entertained for hours. Pretty much all the lakes in Mongolia have no vegetation whatsoever around the edges so they can be approached easily. Unfortunately this means anything living on them can see you coming. Duck hunting seems relatively unpopular so the lakes are VERY well stocked. On this lake there were ten different ducks, none of which were rare, and lots of terns, gulls, grebes, swans and waders. We stopped counting demoiselle cranes but viewed numbers well into the hundreds for the morning. We trapped Mongolian pika and daurian suslik near the ger camp and released them after taking a few pickies.

The evening saw Dave, Lkhagvasuren, Doina and I spotlighting from the vehicle for an hour or so. Aside from a number of corsac foxes we failed to positively identify anything from the myriad creatures we scared the crap out of as we chased them across the grasslands and up into the hills. Much of this was achieved from a vehicle travelling at lunatic speeds, with Doina, our driver, as excited as we were for entirely different reasons I am sure. We almost certainly had a Pallas's cat but the rest are still a mystery.

Tuesday 20th July

Our trapping is improving with Brandt's vole, house mouse and the absolutely stunning Campbell's hamster around the camp.

We left Gun Galuut for UB via lunch on Bogd Uul, the sacred mountain opposite the capital. We went shopping for food and essentials (read alcohol) – there are quite a few good shops contrary to what we were told to expect. I escorted Dave to a few local bars where we watched the locals go about their day. It is a credit to Mongolians that they have a real cultural identity when surrounded by the giants of Russia and China. Russia has had more influence in terms of language and urban architecture, the latter regrettably so.

Dinner was in a great Indian / Mexican restaurant as you would expect.

Wednesday 21st July

Today we change drivers and vehicles as we head toward the Gobi Desert. Our vehicle is a Russian UAZ or "Gull" 4WD van that spends the rest of the year as a public transport vehicle near the Siberian border. It is not new. After repeated enquiries of our guide over

a period of weeks we failed to establish whether it was the first of its kind. At least we think the driver's name can be roughly translated as Bhartra although we were far from certain. The only thing that we were sure of was that he seemed happy. This is always good.

Our first breakdown occurred soon after we left the bitumen, which was soon after we left town. Basically it happened half way up our first hill. While Bhartra drank some bad petrol we amused ourselves at an ovoo. Ovoo's are at the top of passes and consist mostly of rocks. They are festooned with all manner of stuff put there by the locals who have some utterly unsound reason for doing so. I think it's because all the good religions were already taken or some such thing. This one was covered with paper money, much of which was still where it had originally been placed, but mostly it was strewn about the countryside by the wind. Odd. Very odd. From here we were introduced to the most featureless landscape I have ever seen.

The lunch stop was rather nice. Out of the steppe rose a few rocky hills sufficient to support lammergeiers and all manner of other raptors. It would have been a great spot to camp but no, the Rashaant Tourist Ger Camp beckoned.

This place is comical. It is at the junction of three or four featureless areas. The most interesting thing for miles around are the power lines, such as they are, that terminate here. The only thing that might have inspired the original inhabitants of the place is the wind. It should have inspired them to go elsewhere. Never mind, they did have beer at a decent room temperature (I didn't say that the power lines carried any power), it was cheap, and we could time the rate at which the empty cans raced across the desert (we retrieved them).

22nd July 2004

The rain and 45 knots of wind ensured that I slept well. Today has all the hallmarks of being a disaster of an order that would have made Chinggis very proud. The featureless flat landscape became more featureless and flatter. It was so utterly without features that it was impossible to tell how fast the vehicle was moving as there was no frame of reference.

The rain cleared by mid-afternoon as we arrived at the saxaul forests near the "flaming cliffs" of Bayanzag. Much is written of these queer forests and how they are shrinking. No mystery here – goats and camels and collection for firewood do that to a forest.

The campsite selection sub-committee made its decision and finally we could roam about a bit. Now here's a funny thing – there is hardly any other vegetation other the saxaul "tree" and yet there are so many small mammals, almost all of which are rodents, in both diversity and biomass that it boggles the mind. The great gerbils were certainly not the kind that Richard Gere had an alleged fondness for – they are nearly a foot long and they were literally under every bush. Other diurnal curiosities included saxaul sparrows,

nesting grey shrikes, desert warblers (worth traveling about five metres to see) and the occasional Pallas's sandgrouse or five thousand.

The evening was mild and quite still. The spotlighting was nothing short of spectacular. Lkhagvasuren had his landing net and Dave and I had torches. There were small mammals going in all directions. The delightful desert hamster (two inches of terror!) was able to be caught by hand, we ran down long-eared hedgehogs, mid-day gerbils whose watches had stopped, and saw what may have been a Gobi cat but we will never know for certain. The Mongolian five-toed jerboas were less interested in being near us and a range of other critters went the same way.

23rd July 2004

Up early to check our traps. Lots of mid-day gerbils and desert hamsters. We packed our gear and went looking for the mythical drinking place of the sandgrouse. The hunt ended with a withering stare from a local on his horse (what else?) who clearly thought we were deranged to suggest such a thing in the first place. Whatever other qualities sandgrouse might have, one thing is certain, the locals don't know how to cook them in these parts because there are more sandgrouse than sand.

On to the flaming cliffs. These red-earthed walls are impressive, red and earthy. They contain dinosaur fossils or so they say. All we saw was impressions of dinosaur fossils and some great desert scenery.

We changed the schedule and left for the Great Gobi NP or whatever they call it, a day early. We passed a great herd of one and half Mongolian gazelles along the way. They weren't hanging around to have their pictures taken so we pushed south to Yolyn Am Gorge. A morose ranger gave us all the news that mattered – we weren't allowed to camp in the park. Might disturb the hunters I guess. We had just entered when Dave spotted our first Siberian ibex, for me the mammal of the trip. Four large males with magnificent horns and quirky beards. Later we spied a few more so they must be in good shape here.

Lunch was followed by picking carefully through a sea of daurian pikas (these guys are here in numbers that cannot be exaggerated) and the occasional red-cheeked suslik, to see if could walk far enough from the van so that if a really big thunderstorm came over we could all get drowned and catch colds. Not there was much chance of this happening in the Gobi Desert. When we returned to the van there were five people lying on the ground underneath it out of the rain. It was then quite cold, so we were cold and wet.

The search for a ger camp was on in earnest. The prospect of hot showers had most of us salivating. The camp we selected was fine except for one slight problem – the price, as interpreted, kept changing. We never discovered who should have been shot but it made for some interesting dummy spitting the next day. In the meantime Dave and I had christened the day as the "Day of the Ibex" and decided to do some serious hill sitting and beer drinking. We achieved both without serious injury.

An evening of spotlighting inside the park and on the way back to the ger camp set a record of sorts. Not one live thing except each other. Careful.

24th July 2004

An inspirational day clambering about the mountains in the NP. Saw some good birds that included Pere David's and white-winged snowfinches, various rosefinches, accentors, pipits (yuck), chukars with their chicks and lots of raptors. Ibex were common and the seething masses of pikas and their kin continued to have us shaking our heads. This place must have the fattest raptor chicks in the world.

Our ger camp was sensibly located as far as possible from anything the least bit interesting. It did have cold beer however. Certainly there was nothing else to distract us.

25th July 2004

It surprises me that when you have formed an image of a place you have never been, it sits there despite lots of new information that suggests that the image is worthless. I had imagined that the "Singing Sands" of Kongoryn Els, the tallest dunes in the desert with a river running in between, would be an idyllic place where herds of wild beasts would come to drink or make beastly love in the late afternoon. As the river here empties into a lake, all sorts of images form, of rare waterfowl or the drinking place of the sandgrouse.

This is what we found at the tourist camp ground at the Singing Sands, part of a national park – a small pile of mud on which a world class selection of domestic camels, goats and sheep were holed up and not inclined to want to move. Two nights here? We thought not. My ever so polite enquiry of our party to go away seemed unanimous for once. So back we toddled to Bayanzag; this meant a 12 hour day in the Gull.

The road between the now long forgotten areas of singing to the more familiar flaming was not without its merits. Small herds of Mongolian gazelle were seen as they fled smartly and the small rocky hills we crossed near the sands housed numerous ibex, an animal that doesn't easily get boring.

The late afternoon gale made spotlighting rather subdued and camping became an extreme sport.

26th July 2004

An Armenian hamster was silly or hungry enough to enter a trap that had not filled up with sand. We proved that a hedgehog could also fit into a trap although it couldn't turn around. The staples were mid-day gerbils and desert hamsters. If you ever hear that mid-day gerbils are on the endangered list, worry, you're next.

The mythical lake shown large and proud on my map and just as large but not so colourful on Bhartra's was the main course for today. Pity it had disappeared five years

ago and nobody had seen where it went. Never mind, we had a little time to explore, and along the way saw Arabian sand gazelles, McQueens bustard, a very obliging Mongolian five-toed jerboa and Mongolian ground-jays. It seems that this part of the desert has no water so there are no domestic animals, ergo....

Lunch was enjoyed at a local ger at a ghost town that the Ruskies had built. The Russians have a talent for building something that after twenty years looks like it predates the pyramids. In any event, our little lunch stop showed us what really large flocks of sandgrouse look like.

Entertaining and educational as changing the water pump on the Gull on a clay pan in the desert might be, it provided yet another reason why I didn't get an afternoon snooze. It had an effect in Bhartra insofar as he struggled to want to drive on the "roads". So when we pointed to some distant hills as a potential campsite, he drove straight at them at fair speed sans road. We were so thrilled that we might perish in the desert in a spectacular single vehicle accident that would not be discovered for a thousand years or so.

The hills provided fascinating territory for walking and discovery. We found an old Mongol fort or lookout post (I think) and some long abandoned ovoos and other structures that gave no clue to their function.

The gale was getting stronger, our warm beer was becoming mostly sand and Larry and Nancy's tent disappeared. The tent had a number of personal effects included, like air mattresses, sleeping bags and the like. Bhartra was the first to spot the empty ground where the tent was previously been. Those not involved in the hunt quickly cleared the van as it went roughly in the direction of the wind towards China. The tent could only be seen though binoculars as it rolled away at good speed, for a tent, randomly spewing its contents through the desert. It was recovered after the van intercepted it. Oddly it was not too badly beaten up after its little holiday. We needed a good laugh.

27th July 2004

Featureless desert was the main feature en-route to the ruins of the circa 1670 Ongi Monastery, our ger camp for tonight. The monastery would have been amazing if the rascally Ruskies had not found it and fiddled with its architecture and the inhabitants. A small functioning monastery has been built on the site but looks rather out of scale with the original.

A small river runs through here. A few trees are dotted along its banks. Lots of birds, but very little variety – a common theme throughout.

The afternoon was largely taken up with drinking beer and wondering what would happen when the big bank of clouds up north came to town. Another night that would have been interesting had we been camping. The temperature fell twenty degrees in about twenty minutes.

28th July 2004

A day best forgotten.

We made a large town where we were tempted by a big building that suggested we might send an email or make a phone call, yeah, right. Lkhagvasuren helpfully suggested we seek out the lakes at a nearby nature reserve because the Orkhon Waterfall, our campsite for the next two nights, was not all that far away. Huh. One of the problems with travelling with a guide and driver who have never been where you are going before, is that you have as much chance of predicting the future as they have.

The lakes were at the end of a tortuous road and at the bottom of a near vertical mountain accessed by a twisting road that none of us wanted any part of. We decided to camp in a peaceful grassy valley, just us, a poisoned sheep (more on that tomorrow), a howling wind and a pleasant hailstorm.

29th July 2004 The day of the reformation.

I have just read a book written by Stephen Fry, the English comedian. He describes how sick he was in Peru. Compared to the remains of my digestive system, his would have looked like a shop bought one. I was not alone. Of five that had eaten the poisoned sheep, four were very ill. The only one of us that didn't eat it was ill anyway. So this was the day when we introduced a few rules regarding camp hygiene, more for the benefit of our staff than ourselves, so that we might survive to tell the story.

I lost interest in the 90km short drive to the waterfall that took six hours. With the sluices opened at both ends I would happily have beamed myself home and stayed there. I resorted to counter-poison pills, even Russian examples that Bhartra kindly gave me.

The Orkhon Waterfall is nothing much but the forest around it is alive with birds and small mammals, including Eurasian eagle owl, various thrush, rosefinches, tits, redstarts, wagtails and woodpeckers. The mammals seen were Eurasian red squirrel, Siberian pika, mountain vole and northern red-backed vole.

Needless to say this was the trip-alcohol-free-day. Dinner was poorly attended and tomorrow's breakfast was called off altogether.

30th July 2004

All sick.

Larry and Nancy announce that they are going home from the next big town, Karakoram, the old Mongol capital. Larry tells us that he has been sick almost every day since he arrived in the country. Didn't seem to affect the volume of alcohol he consumed daily, but that's another story.

With attractive scenery along the way, we arrived at the 1586AD Erdene Zu Monastery in Karakoram. It was not destroyed by the Soviets. It would have been really exciting as a monastery had I never seen one, but I was pretty much bored with them by this time.

Then all sorts of things were happening at once. We couldn't find the ger camp where we were to have lunch (if we had looked from anywhere interesting into the middle of nowhere we would have found it instantly), Dave wanted to ring / text his beloved, Larry wanted out, preferably in a taxi, and the rest of us were very suspicious of anything that looked like food.

This is what happened after we found the camp in the middle of nowhere. Dave continued with his telecom problems, Larry did a little dummy spit when the taxi wasn't dancing to his tune and returned with the long-suffering Nancy to find Barry-Sean, Sue and I playing with our food. Another perfectly good day wasted.

We arrived at the ger camp adjacent to the Taikhar Stone. Uniquely the camp was near something of five minute's interest. Almost as interesting as the camp amenities commandant. This lady, a cold war relic, made an inspection after every visit from anybody to her area of professional interest – toilets and showers. That I am writing this, is testimony to my understanding of Mongolian toilet function and etiquette.

This place, although a wildlife desert, saw the return of the stomach, so the day was not wasted after all.

31st July 2004

A much anticipated day, where we went on what we were advised was a “short drive” to the Khorgo-Terkh NP.

After lunch at an extinct volcanic cone we camped at the edge of a large lake in perfect time to watch it rain for the rest of the day. The only distraction, aside from our well-stocked bar, was watching Bhartra try to jury-rig the front offside wheel assembly so that it didn't part company with the rest of the vehicle. Most of the bolts that used to hold these rather important parts together were snapped. The solution was severe – take the thing to “town” and weld it all together. That fixes that problem rather permanently, but fixes it nevertheless.

There is nothing that distinguishes this NP from the rest of the country except the modest entry fee. There are just as many domestic stock, domestic stockpersons, marmots to hunt and sell along the roadsides, and remnant forests to cut down.

1st August 2004

Cloud-spotters heaven. The day started with every type of threatening-looking cloud on record moving in at least three different directions, so I did the only thing sensible in the circumstances – went for a long walk into the mountains. These mountains had patches of

larch forest but few mammals and all of them small. Siberian chipmunks were common and there were lots of birds but nothing special. A northern goshawk took out a long-tailed suslik for dinner.

The most exciting thing to happen was the return of the now repaired van from the “mechanics”.

We started north to steal some distance from tomorrow which would otherwise be a long day driving. After we re-attached the spare wheel that had fallen off after hitting a speed hump, we found an area that is not being grazed. Who knows, it may be in the NP. We were prepared to go on but we have been trapped before, where “going on” means emerging from an area of good habitat into the man-made wilderness that occupies much of the country. So we camped beside a great little creek with *almost* primary larch and pine forest on three sides, and enough time left in the day to explore a little. Saw a few new birds, Pallas’s bunting, yellowhammer and Siberian stonechat. There are many woodpeckers because, sadly, there is an insect that is killing whole swathes of larch.

We decided on having a fire in the evening that Bhartra enthusiastically but unnecessarily lit with some petrol, almost becoming a statistic in doing so. Larry is babbling like an idiot because his other passion, birds, had satisfied him. Dave and I went for a spotlight but at this latitude it refused to get dark, even at 11pm, so we gave up and went to bed.

2nd August 2004

A long day spent driving north toward Lake Khovsgul. Larry’s sarcasm has returned as the birds dried up. We ended up camping on the edge of a river in sight of the town of Moron. I kid you not. Not very inspiring but at least I don’t have to write very much which is good given my typing skills, or lack thereof.

3rd August 2004

The Morons provided us with a selection of car parts, including a new starter motor – Bhartra has been hand cranking the van for weeks. We grabbed some food and other essentials, and once more steered in the direction of Khovsgul, which has taken on great significance in terms of our expectations for seeing wildlife (oh, no).

We stopped at a series of smallish lakes. One had maybe 10,000 birds on it, mainly ruddy shelducks, common goldeneye, whooper swans and herring gulls. Also present – brown-headed and mew gulls, common tern and white-winged terns, avocets, demoiselle cranes, bar-headed geese, a variety of waders and who knows what else. Would have loved to have my kayak. Really spectacular.

The rest of the journey was pure torture as we didn’t seem to get any closer to our camp. Getting to the lake was one thing, finding our way along its shores was another matter. Even Dave was starting to get the shits.

Camp Toilogt was situated on the edge of the lake and very pretty. A small lake resting to one side was home to breeding horned grebes, white-winged scoters and a variety of the more common ducks. It is surrounded by larch forest that gave up a few birds – red crossbill and black grouse among them, but failed to see a black woodpecker.

Larry was entertaining as he “psst psst psst”ed the ger shower attendant to point out the shower plumbing problems that the same attendant had just finished warning him about. Pay attention Larry. Enough to drive a man to drink.....

All the gers have a fixed menu dinner and tonight’s was delicious. Pity I can’t remember what it was.

4th August 2004

Today is supposed to be a free day spotting animals but it is raining. Dave, Lkhag and I went anyway with a predictable result – no wildlife and wet us. Heard a black woodpecker but failed to see it and that was the most exciting thing that happened in three hours. Visited some so-called reindeer people and their reindeer. All very interesting, bought a hat and took a few pictures. That took ten minutes.

After lunch we packed and moved an hour or so back down the road. A great campsite but the rain never really went away. Lit a fire and had a few drinks. So much for Lake Khovsgul NP. Bit of a waste of time really.

5th August 2004

The day dawned bright and off we went in the van. This is because we don’t trust the itinerary anymore. We are meant to go to Uran Togoo today to camp. It ended up being 16 hours drive away but we were not to discover this until the end of tomorrow!! Sue spotted a red deer on the way at so all is not lost. Otherwise a totally boring day culminating in a 4:30 finish on the banks of the Selenge River. It was a great campsite plus a few new birds including azure tits. The day is quite warm so put some animal traps out before going to bed.

6th August 2004

We trapped some Chinese hamsters but naught else. We were told to expect a two to three hour drive to our next site. We got there at 6:30pm. We did stop for a short walk along the way seeing black and hazel grouse in good numbers.

I waved the white flag in the afternoon, I have had enough driving to last through three or four holidays. Started drinking beer in the van. Larry didn’t improve the situation, with his untimely and unhelpful comments along the way.

Lkhag and Bhartra explained to me during evening drinkies that most travel companies drive till 7 or 8 at night – we were soft! Stuff that, we want to see wildlife, not grass speeding by Russian 4WDs.

7th August 2004

I went for a short walk after breakfast. My bare feet were frozen because I didn't want to soak my shoes on the wet grass. At 0930 we left for Hustai NP. We may have been persuaded to stop along the way somewhere but the landscape was utterly stark. We were supposed to go to a monastery further to the north but there was spirited and unanimous agreement to shorten our driving time no matter what delights we may have missed.

Hustai NP does not allow camping so we drove to Moilt Camp. Great location, pity about the management. The resident ranger, who has a flock of sheep, goats, horses and who knows what else, gets involved in a little live animal trapping of his own, or at least that's the idea. He puts out baited steel jaw traps to catch wolves, which allegedly are then fitted with radio tracking collars. Odd the way they do things here. Anyway these traps are more likely to break legs than restrain animals. We were happily told about the lynx and the badgers that had expired as a result of this trapping method. Depressing. Drank beer and went to bed.

8th August 2004

This was the first day since leaving Sydney that I did not get into a vehicle – a full day in the field. The forest here is birch with a few (very few) other trees and shrubs thrown in on creek lines and ridge tops. We scattered in all directions. I walked for five hours non-stop through good forest and along ridge tops thinking that there would have been deer or Przewalski's horses or whatever. Plenty of spoor but no cigar. Dave, Barry-Sean and Sue were more successful, having scattered some horsies.

So after lunch, back up the hill. A few male black grouse – they are common here – and one red deer and one horse in company. Excellent! The day then abruptly ended. A comfortably warm day turned into an ice box. The storm front was attractive, it rained for a bit, then the famed north wind clocked on and just increased in velocity as the day gave up and died. 28 degrees turned into about five degrees in an hour or so.

9th August 2004

Very cold. After brekkie went for a wander into the next valley but the prospect of freezing to death made me wander back again. Visited the ranger's ger and donate the last of my stuffed toys to a pleasant little girl. The ranger then sequestered our van to put his precious murdering traps out. He declined to let me join him.

We moved to our last ger camp – the Hustai *Resort*, can you believe it? Too cold to do anything. Drank beer and talked with tourists.

10th August 2004

Our last day in the field so we get an early start. Up at 0515 and in the company of the park's biologist, a friend of Lkhvag, we set forth to see all there is to see. After seeing a lone Mongolian gazelle, a Eurasian hare and a small herd of takhi (the horse) from the van we stopped in a small but fascinating gully where we thought the biologist had a stakeout for something. Not true. We climbed higher and higher and went further and further into the hills, losing customers along the way. The sun came up on a magical day – the sighting of a lone wolf trotting off – with colourful cliffs and rock piles, but the main menu, red deer, had decamped. Not so a large covey of daurian partridge.

I laughed when Sue of the “can't we sleep in and have a later breakfast” variety, expressed such enthusiasm about the beautiful sunrise. It happens every day.

After breakfast, Barry-Sean, Sue and I went to a black woodpecker stakeout in an unlikely small patch of forest but there it was, a splendid and obliging large black bird, pecking. Bhartra meanwhile was staring at 23 red deer but his windmill impression and screaming from a hilltop went unnoticed. Many more takhi seen

After lunch walked around the bald ridges near the resort, which, like so many others, is sited at the only place in the park that isn't the slightest bit interesting. Dave is suddenly consumed by the need to spend most of the day writing his diary. The afternoon saw us spend a little of our time seeing how many grasshoppers a large flightless cricket could eat.

Our last hurrah for spotlighting went as planned after dinner. If there are 160 wild horses in this park we must have seen more than half of them. There is a real possibility that someone here can't count. Of 80 red deer said to be here we saw a herd of 62 minimum and that doesn't include the 23 seen earlier. A wolf howled a couple of times in the distant hills. This is more like it! The spotlighting was a tad disappointing with me on the roof of the van with lovely vision in all directions. The only critter seen was a daurian hedgehog, which suffered the Mongolian water torture to get it unravelled. This is a big hedgehog, about one kilo in weight. One of the best days of the holiday.

You have to believe me here. We just made camp before the latest northerly gale hit. It blew the toilet door off its hinges taking the door jamb with it, and all the plastic furniture around the camp was heading for its place of manufacture – China.

11th August 2004

Our friendly gale ensured we didn't stop on our way back to UB.

Lunch was at a Korean restaurant where the amount of food was extra-ordinary. Then off to the markets to do some shopping. Bought a few old trinkets to add some spice to the customs people's lives but there is a distinct lack of things to buy that are reasonably

priced or interesting. I passed at the opportunity to buy full wolf skins or other rare animal bits.

We attended a Mongolian folkloric concert that was tremendous. Throat singing, music, dance and a youngish lady of moderate build who could, inter alia, put her head up her bum. The mind struggled to come to terms with the arrangement of her body parts. How do they do this?

Last but not least – the Mongolian barbecue restaurant. Our stunning waitress and the equally delicious food rounded the day off very nicely.

We said goodbye to Larry and Nancy who have an early flight tomorrow as Dave and I went to bar for our last Cass beer and a post-mortem. We attracted the attention of the serving wenches, as we tend to do, before being handed some free packets of condoms and tissues. Why?

12th August 2004

Went home, or at least tried to go home, but good ol' Air China had other ideas that saw us eventually leave with a very good working knowledge of Beijing Airport.

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1st September 2004
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Below are mammal and bird lists. They are not terribly useful for trip planning because I didn't spend too much time keeping records. Sorry.

Mammal	Latin name	First seen
Long-eared Hedgehog	<i>Hemiechinus auritus</i>	Bayanzag
Daurian Hedgehog	<i>Mesechinus dauuricus</i>	Hustai NP
Daurian Pika	<i>Ochotona dauurica</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Northern or Siberian Pika	<i>Ochotona hyperborean</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Pallas', or Mongolian Pika	<i>Ochotona pallasi</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Siberian Chipmunk	<i>Tamias sibiricus</i>	Khorgo- Terkh NP
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
"Grey squirrel" in Beijing		Great Wall
Daurian Suslik	<i>Spermophilus dauricus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Red-cheeked Suslik	<i>Sperm. erythrogegens</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Long-tailed Suslik	<i>Spermophilus undulatus</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Mongolian Marmot	<i>Marmota siberica</i>	Bogd Uul
Striped or Chinese H'ster	<i>Cricetulus barabensis</i>	Selenge River
	<i>Cricetulus pseudogriseus</i>	Selenge River
Armenian or Grey H'ster	<i>Cricetulus migratorius</i>	Bayanzag
Desert Hamster	<i>Phodopus roborovskii</i>	Bayanzag
Northern Red-backed Vole	<i>Oethrionomys rutilus</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Brandt's Vole	<i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Mid-day Gerbil	<i>Meriones meridianus</i>	Bayanzag
Great Gerbil	<i>Rhombomys opimus</i>	Bayanzag
House Mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Mong' Five-toed Jerboa	<i>Allactaga sibirica</i>	Bayanlag
Gobi Cat <i>possibly</i>	<i>Felis bieti chutuchta</i>	Bayanzag
Pallas' Cat <i>probably</i>	<i>Otocolobus manul</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>	Gun Galuut & Hustai NP
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Gobi Desert
Corsac Fox, Steppe Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Przewalski's Horse	<i>Equus ferus przewalskii</i>	Hustai NP
Siberian Ibex	<i>Capra siberica</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Persian Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa</i>	Gobi Desert
Hangay Argali	<i>Ovis ammon hangaii</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Mongolian Gazelle	<i>Procapra gutturosa</i>	Gobi Desert
Red Deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Lake Khovsgul & Hustai

Mongolian/ Beijing birds		First seen
Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Daurian Partridge	<i>Perdix dauurica</i>	Hustai NP
Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>	Khovsgul NP
Hazel Grouse	<i>Bonasa bonasia</i>	s of Khovsgul NP
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Swan Goose	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>	s of Khovsgul NP
Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>	Moron
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Ferruginous Pochard	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Gun Galuut NR
White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta fusca</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	n of Khorgo-Terkh NP
Eur 3-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picooides tridactylus</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Bogd Uul
White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Beijing
Black Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Hustai NP
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Bogd Uul
Oriental Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus saturatus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Bogd Uul
Fork-tailed Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>	Bogd Uul
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Gobi steppe
Oriental Scops-Owl	<i>Otus sunia</i>	Beijing
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Brown Hawk Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>	Beijing
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	Beijing
Hill Pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>	Gobi steppe
Spotted Dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Beijing
Oriental Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	Beijing

Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Gobi steppe
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Siberian Crane	<i>Grus leucogeranus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
White-naped Crane	<i>Grus vipio</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Macqueen's Bustard	<i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>	Gobi desert
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	?
Pied Avocet	<i>Whatever it is i forgot</i>	N of Ongi ruins
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>	Gobi steppe
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Pintail Snipe	<i>Gallinago stenura</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	s of Khovsgul NP
Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Great Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	Gobi steppe
Brown-headed Gull	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>	Gobi steppe
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	Bogd Uul
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>	Bogd Uul
Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Gobi steppe
Himalayan Griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Bogd Uul
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Northern Goshawk	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Gun Galuut NR

Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Bogd Uul
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Beijing
Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>	Beijing
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	Bogd Uul
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Gobi steppe
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Beijing
Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Chinese Pond-Heron	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>	Beijing
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Bull-headed Shrike	<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>	Beijing
Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Gobi steppe
Northern Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>	Bayanzag
Red-billed Blue-Magpie	<i>Urocissa erythrorhyncha</i>	Beijing
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyana</i>	Beijing
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Beijing
Mongolian Ground-Jay	<i>Podoces hendersoni</i>	Gobi Desert
Eurasian Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	Beijing
Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>	n of Orkhon Waterfall
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Beijing
Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Beijing
Hair-crested Drongo	<i>Dicrurus hottentottus</i>	Beijing
Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	Gobi steppe
Scaly Thrush	<i>Zoothera dauma</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Eyebrowed Thrush	<i>Turdus obscurus</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Dark-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Dusky Thrush	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	Beijing
Plumbeous Redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Orkhon Waterfall

White-throated Bushchat	<i>Saxicola insignis</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Bogd Uul
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maura</i>	n of Khorgo-Terkh NP
White-cheeked Starling	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>	Gun Galuut NR
European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Beijing
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Bogd Uul
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Yellow-bellied Tit	<i>Parus venustulus</i>	Beijing
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	n of Hustai NP
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>	Beijing
Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus</i>	Selenge River
Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Common House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Selenge River
Dusky Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Chinese Bush-Warbler	<i>Bradypterus tacsanowskii</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Thick-billed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus aedon</i>	Ongi ruins
Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	Beijing
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	Bogd Uul
Greater Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	Hustai NP
Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Sylvia nana</i>	Bayanzag
Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	Gobi Desert
Pere David's Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax davidi</i>	Beijing
Mongolian Lark	<i>Melanocorypha mongolica</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	Gobi Desert
Asian Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>	Gobi Desert
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Saxaul Sparrow	<i>Passer ammodendri</i>	Bayanzag
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Beijing
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Beijing
White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Pere David's Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla davidiana</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Gun Galuut NR
Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Beijing
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	Bogd Uul

Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Blyth's Pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Bogd Uul
Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Mongolian Finch	<i>Rhodopechys mongolica</i>	Ongi ruins
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Beautiful Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus pulcherrimus</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Long-tailed Rosefinch	<i>Uragus sibiricus</i>	Orkhon Waterfall
Pallas's Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus roseus</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>	Yolyn Am Gorge
Yellow-billed Grosbeak	<i>Eophona migratoria</i>	Beijing
Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Godlewski's Bunting	<i>Emberiza godlewskii</i>	Beijing
Gray-hooded Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP
Chestnut-eared Bunting	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>	Lake Khovsgul NP
Pallas's Bunting	<i>Emberiza pallasii</i>	n of Khorgo-Terkh NP
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	n of Khorgo-Terkh NP
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	Khorgo-Terkh NP