

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO MONGOLIA
Eastern Steppe & Gobi Desert

10 – 25 June 2014



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A Personal Diary

Ornitholidays' first foray into Mongolia is an exciting experience for all of us – the overwhelming impression being of open space, abundant wildlife and the scent of *Artemisia* when we walk in the steppe. Staying in ger (yurt) camps is a different experience from hotel rooms with private facilities, but it's mostly a positive one! All the Mongolians we meet are extremely friendly and many have good English; and the food surpasses our expectations. Among the top wildlife experiences are the Saker and Amur Falcons, Steppe Eagle, Azure Tit, Demoiselle and White-naped Cranes, Oriental Plover, Altai Snowcock, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Mongolian Lark, Saxaul Sparrow and (perhaps best of all) the Henderson's Ground Jays running across the steppe-desert and burying almonds. Mammals include a number of fascinating rodents that keep the raptor population healthy, Argali Sheep and Przewalski's Horse (in both cases the ancestral stock of our domestic animals), Corsac Fox, Tolai Hare and Goitered Gazelle. We are relieved to miss the intense summer heat of the Gobi Desert, but are surprised by the (unseasonal) chilling Siberian winds and rain we experience! The forests of Terelj are also an extremely beautiful environment, totally different from our other centres. Next time we plan to return in mid-May to catch the northbound migration of thrushes and warblers to add to the resident specialities.

Tuesday 10 June

We gather in Heathrow's Terminal 3 for the start of the Mongolian adventure. At the Air China check-in desk, we are given boarding passes for Beijing and the onward flight to Ulaanbaatar. The 777 leaves an hour late as the incoming plane was delayed by a storm in Beijing.

Wednesday, 11 June

...is a shortened day since Beijing is seven hours ahead of BST. Breakfast is served as we fly over the wilderness of the Gobi Desert. We make up some of the delay, and after just over nine hours in the air, land at 1400 local time. We don't need Chinese visas as we are staying less than 24 hours. Air China has booked us into a nearby hotel which we reach in their courtesy coach. After we have rested a while and let the summer heat subside, a short walk reveals a male Chinese Grosbeak, a Eurasian Hoopoe and a few Azure-winged Magpies. Keith has a brief view of an Indian Cuckoo that repeats its four-note song. After an enjoyable Chinese meal and bottles of Beijing beer, we head for an early bed.

Thursday, 12 June

Azure-winged Magpies are visible from the shuttle bus to the airport. Around the huge terminal building, a few Pacific Swifts appear among the more abundant Common Swifts. We soon leave China and board the Air China 737, which takes two hours to reach Ulaanbaatar. On the left, the Great Wall of China can be seen, marching over the hilltops. Mongolia is also seven hours ahead of BST.

Except for two missing bags, all goes well at Ulaanbaatar Airport. We meet Mitko, our birding guide, and Bogo, a local guide. Our drivers (of two Mitsubishi 4WD minibuses) are Nagi and Taiwan. We have to cross the bustling city, and enjoy a superb lunch at an Indian restaurant on the outskirts. Heading east across the steppe, green after the spring rains, we soon find Red-billed Choughs, Daurian Jackdaws, Isabelline Wheatears and Demoiselle Cranes feeding in pairs. Dark jackdaws feeding with Daurian are not our familiar Western species, but the young of the pied Daurians: they have dark eyes. Patches of blue iris appear along the way. At the first Siberian larches on the hillsides, a Black Woodpecker clings to a telegraph pole. This is the southernmost point of the great Siberian taiga, the conifer and birch forest that stretches north for thousands of miles until it reaches tundra.

We turn off to visit the Gun Galuut lakes: immediately Horned, Mongolian and Asiatic Short-toed Larks turn up. The Mongolian, one of the largest of the world's larks, is a distinctive bird with white secondaries, rufous crown and black bib. The first lake has many duck species we know well from home, but White-winged Scoter (a recent split from Velvet) and Swan Goose are new for most of us. The second lake has many Pied Avocets and Black-winged Stilts, plus a pair of Whooper Swans nesting - so far south, at 48°N! Many White-winged

Terns in brilliant pied plumage dip over the surface, with Common Terns of the dark-billed eastern subspecies *longipennis*. Six Demoiselle Cranes pose by the shore. Waders include Eastern Black-tailed Godwits and a Pacific Golden Plover. On the way back to our camp, Upland Buzzard and Eurasian Black Vulture (now called Monk Vulture in the Mark Brazil book) fly past.

Our gers are in a magnificent setting at the base of huge crags, like a scene from the Rocky Mountains, with patches of woodland at the base. The gers themselves are large and comfortable, with a low doorway like a hobbit house. Each one is 5m (15 ft) across and 2.5 m (8 ft) high, with electric light and a power socket. They have two proper beds, table and stools, rugs on the floor, intricately painted woodwork, hooks, and in some cases a mirror! The shower and toilet block is nearby. At dusk, Red-billed Choughs and Common Cuckoos call around camp. Dinner is delicious, and followed by a good checklist. A full moon lights our way to bed.

Friday, 13 June

Dawn is cold but we are soon warmed by the rising sun. A Brown Accentor sings behind camp on the outcrops. Red-billed Choughs feed their young on the restaurant roof. This place is a wheatear city: an Isabelline Wheatear feeds four recently fledged chicks; while Northern Wheatears feed young in a dry drainage pipe in the restaurant building. A Pied Wheatear flies to the rocky outcrops where it too is surely nesting. Luckily wheatear-bix is not on the breakfast menu: instead a fine buffet. We welcome Puji, who arrives to guide us after a family bereavement. He replaces Bogo.

We explore the local area of the Terelj National Park during the day. The short journey there produces a Grey-headed Woodpecker feeding on roadside ants, and a Steppe Eagle perched by the road. Much of the time we walk in beautiful, mature forests of Siberian larch and Siberian birch, 10-15 m high. We have repeated views of Pine Bunting, Daurian Redstart, Yellow-browed Warbler, Taiga Flycatcher, Willow Tit and Olive-backed Pipit. The pipits, which sing mostly from a treetop unlike our display-fighting Tree Pipit, are likely to be a favourite victim of the Eurasian Cuckoos which we hear all day. An Oriental Cuckoo also calls its deeper, hoopoe-like double note, but never comes into view. A Booted Eagle of the pale morph soars over twice during the morning. Common Rosefinches show well, and can often be heard singing their cheery *pleased to see you*. Eurasian Nuthatches are pure white below here, a different subspecies which some scientists have suggested splitting as Siberian Nuthatch, *Sitta arctica*. Lunch is a tasty picnic enjoyed on the banks of the Terelj River, which will eventually join other rivers and flow north into Lake Baikal. Today's mammals include Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, Daurian Pika, and a confiding Siberian Chipmunk. Among the herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats are many shaggy yaks, and a few yak-cow hybrids. The flora is colourful too, and includes mauve pasque flowers, white meadow rue, orange globeflowers (*Trollius orientalis*) and purple *Aquilegia*.

Sunburnt, we return to camp with its noisy cuckoo still echoing round the valley. Dinner is another fine meal, exceeding expectations, with salad, green vegetables, and fruit salad. Puji answers our questions about the country: democracy was introduced in 1990 after years of Russian communist rule. Now almost all of Mongolia's trade is with China.

Saturday, 14 June

Keith is up early enough for both a hot shower and a Wryneck on a dead larch below camp. After a substantial breakfast we pack up and leave Terelj. Driving into Ulaanbaatar, we watch the train from Beijing with 27 carriages, approaching the station. In the other direction the line continues to Moscow - a five day journey. After stops to pick up the missing luggage and to buy more water (provided by our agents), next stop is the Ulaanbaatar sewage ponds: what bird-tour is complete without one? Here we have a three hour walk, much of it along a disused railway line. Many highlights include two families of Swan Geese with five goslings each, and several Long-tailed Rosefinches feeding on the ground or perching in small willows. White-crowned Penduline Tits look and sound similar to their European cousins, and an Oriental Reed Warbler finally gives up skulking and perches on a reed-top. There is a Richard's Pipit and a pair of White-cheeked Starlings. At our furthest point is a fine male Yellow-breasted Bunting singing, and a Eurasian Hobby chasing dragonflies. Demoiselle Cranes call evocatively as they fly across the marshes.

On the way to the picnic place, a Black Stork feeds in a polluted stream. By the Tuul River we eat a very acceptable picnic lunch under willows and poplars. Puji has chosen the exact spot brilliantly as it has an Azure Tit exploring the trunk and branches of a poplar, and a noisy group of Amur Falcons using an old crow's nest. We see one fine slaty male and two or perhaps three females. These lovely falcons have a huge migration to

southern Africa. Across the river a group of Azure-winged Magpies feed in the willows and on the ground. We are intrigued watching a shaman in consultation with a woman, presumably about a departed relative. His head is totally covered in a mask of Black Vulture feathers, as he beats a drum and communicates with the spirit world. Such occultism is an important part of Mongolian society.

A two hour drive brings us to Hustai National Park, mostly along the main road. (Mongolian maps spell it Khulstayn). For the last ten kilometres, we take a lark-rich sandy track. Mongolian, Shore and Asian Short-toed are all in evidence. We arrive at 1700, with plenty of time to rest before dinner. Sue, Keith, Mitko and I decide on a short walk in the rolling steppe, where a pair of Père David's Snowfinches are a pleasant surprise, along with a Siberian Marmot. There is a small flock of Rock Sparrows too. We are disappointed to see large herds and flocks being grazed (theoretically illegally) within the national park.

After dinner we call the list in the conference hall, and watch a short film about the national park and the re-introduction of the Przewalski's Horse, ancestor of the modern breeds.

Sunday, 15 June

A cold, wet front from Siberia brings us a damp morning with a chilling north wind. During gaps in the drizzle we enjoy a Saker Falcon, perched on a pole, an immature Golden Eagle mobbed by magpies, and a single Amur Falcon. Blyth's and Tawny Pipits, Meadow Bunting and Lesser Whitethroat appear too. The bunting gives great views as it sings, defying the elements. Daurian Partridges appear right by the track: here comparatively ungrazed, undulating steppe is their preferred habitat. Colourful flora include pink and white *Stellera*, a yellow snapdragon called *Cymbaria*, and a yellow legume called false lupin. The re-introduced Przewalski's Horses are a feature of this national park. We see one herd disappearing over the ridge, and wonder how they preserve their genetic purity when we see domestic horses grazing nearby. Each footstep we take on the steppe releases a pleasant aromatic scent of wormwood (*Artemisia*).

We head back for an early lunch to dry off and warm up in the heated restaurant.

The afternoon safari is in dry, brighter conditions but still with a cold wind. Siberian Marmots are everywhere, some disappearing down burrows, others happy to watch us pass. There are groups of two or three youngsters at some burrows. This morning we saw none – marmots like keeping dry. Raptors too are far more on show, with several Steppe Eagles, many Lesser Kestrels and Amur Falcons catching insects from the ground and eating them in flight. A lone Argali Ram, with huge curly horns, wanders across the steppe. By the Tuul River we find Azure Tit, before returning to the Meadow Bunting spot. Across the track is a wood of Siberian birch where a Saker Falcon has a nest. When a Golden Eagle flies past, it is dive-bombed mercilessly by the screaming falcon. Higher up the hill, a Eurasian Hobby is on territory too, mobbing passing crows. Overhead fly squadrons of Eurasian Griffon and Black Vultures, with one immature Himalayan Griffon. Mitko flushes a Daurian Partridge; and a herd of Red Deer stags, all with magnificent antlers, crosses the valley. For some of the group, the highlight is sitting in the sun looking down upon a totally relaxed herd of 12 Przewalski's Horses, including two foals. There's plenty of action with one frisky stallion among them.

The hot showers here are much appreciated; and there's the added optional luxury of having the dung-burning stove lit inside each ger.

Monday, 16 June

The male Père David's Snowfinch is on show before breakfast, display-fighting and showing off white wing-bars. A skein of 12 Swan Geese fly south. Thankfully the sun has resumed its normal service after having taken yesterday off: on Sunday of all days!

We leave Hustai, passing many Mongolian and Asian Short-toed Larks on the way out. Upland Buzzards, usually with almost white heads, become a regular sight as we drive west. First stop is at Lun marshes, where the drivers leave us to get a punctured tyre fixed. We spend the time watching a distant family of White-naped Cranes with two half-grown chicks. There are also White-winged Terns, and many Barn Swallows of the eastern subspecies *tytleri*, with rufous breasts. Above us is a chorus of Skylarks.

A large flock of wild Argali sheep, with lambs, is our next point of interest. There are 70 or so, running along a hillside. Bayan Lake occupies the middle of our day, with various stops and a picnic lunch. Highlights here

include Red-crested Pochard, Citrine and Yellow Wagtails, Bearded Tit, Oriental Reed Warbler, and Eastern Marsh Harrier. A White-tailed Eagle lumbers overhead, mobbed by a harrier. A single Hen Harrier is here too. Further round the lake we find a pair of much closer White-naped Cranes, with several smaller Demoiselle Cranes. A large flock of Eurasian Spoonbills feed and rest on the far shore. A lone Pallas's Gull - a black-hooded breeding adult - swims in the lake with a few Mongolian Gulls. Bar-headed and Greylag Geese both have half-grown goslings here. A male Northern Pintail is new for us, among a large flock of Common and Ruddy Shelduck.

We continue our westward journey, across lark-filled steppe. Nomadic herders dot the landscape with white gers and their flocks and herds. Suddenly we leave the good tarmac road and head out along a sandy track with no signposts. Nagi, our lead driver, has a good memory. Now Steppe Eagles appear, with one Golden Eagle among them. There is abundant rodent prey, as we see Daurian Pikas and Brandt's Voles scurrying into burrows as we pass.

After half an hour Ogi Lake comes into view, and soon afterwards our third ger camp. As usual we receive a warm welcome and are soon out exploring. Père David's Snowfinches are everywhere! They nest in rodent burrows, and many have chicks on the point of fledging, waiting for food at the entrances. The compound also has nesting Tree and Rock Sparrows, Red-billed Choughs and Barn Swallows. An amble down to the lake reveals a flock of 70 drake Goldeneye, and an Upland Buzzard nest on a low crag, with two well-grown young.

After dinner and checklist, some investigate the temperature of the showers, and we enjoy the big skies typical of the Mongolian steppe.

Tuesday, 17 June

...starts off wet and cold, with the chilly Siberian wind returning. However by midday it is warm and sunny again. We explore the south side of Ogi Lake, where an impressive gaggle of Swan Geese - about 500 - are grazing the pasture. The lake is a Ramsar site, perhaps designated for this strong population of a rare and declining species. Many are shot and trapped in wintering grounds in China. Behind them run a pair of Corsac Foxes: small, sandy steppe foxes which surely have voles rather than geese on their menu. During the morning we also have Black-throated Diver, Bar-headed Geese, Demoiselle Cranes, Upland Buzzards and Pacific Swifts, among much else. Eagles are Golden, Steppe and one Great Spotted, but not the hoped-for Pallas's Fish Eagle, which have been recorded here in the past. The size of the sheep flocks and goat herds is enormous - it's amazing that lark eggs survive the trampling. Yet we see plenty of larks today.

Lunch is a four-course meal: both the minestrone and the breaded chicken main dish are excellent. Since it is sunny and the showers are solar-heated, we allow time to enjoy the hot water. The camp also has a ger museum, which is open for us to photograph. The furniture and decorations (somehow reminiscent of a gypsy caravan) are exquisite. One of the camp staff poses in the entrance in full traditional dress.

The afternoon trip is along the north side of the lake. At the end of a long spit rests a lone Dalmatian Pelican with several Mongolian Gulls, one Caspian Gull and two Slender-billed Gulls. Pelicans are a part of Mongolian culture as they are hunted for their bills, which are used to card the sweat off horses after a race. Puji explains this to us, before we make the grim discovery of a dead pelican (minus bill) on the beach. At the north-west corner of the lake a river flows in. Here there are many White-winged and Common Terns dipping for insects, flying endlessly back and forth. With them are one Little Gull and one Black Tern. Seven drake Falcated Duck are also here, in the shallows with Wigeon and Ruddy Shelduck. And so we return to camp after a relaxing day under the wide Mongolian skies.

Wednesday, 18 June

Rain falls during the night, and the camp staff come round the gers before breakfast lighting our stoves. After a cooked breakfast, we leave Ogi Lake and start back towards UB, the universal abbreviation of Ulaanbaatar. As drizzle persists, the cardboard boxes on the roof disintegrate, and our supplies of bottled water have to be stored loose inside. Steppe Eagles stay perched right by the road as we pass; there are also three Black Storks and two families of Demoiselle Cranes with young. Bayan Lake has most of the same species as on Monday, with the addition of Paddyfield Warbler and Pallas's Reed Bunting. The warblers have young, and the identification is clinched by Puji's photo. The reed bunting is a smart male, on territory among rushes above the reed zone. The density of wildfowl at the north end of the lake is amazing, with many duck species and

three species of crane on view - one visiting Common Crane is mercilessly mobbed by the nesting stilts and avocets. We search among the waders for Asian Dowitcher, but have to be content with 35 Eastern Black-tailed Godwits.

After a picnic as the clouds lift, we call in briefly at Lun Marshes. The White-naped Cranes with their two chicks are much closer than on Monday: we have seen eight of these rare cranes in all today. We skirt round the industrial zone of UB, and pass the airport. A little further on is our ger camp, very smart with traditionally stitched and decorated animal-skin gers. A hike up the hill behind camp reveals White-backed Woodpecker and Azure Tit in the birch woods. Like many of the woods we have seen, the lower trees are dead or dying, caused by a recent lowering of the water table. The meadow below the wood has six Siberian Marmots standing up like Meerkats, singing Richard's Pipits, and a colourful and scented flora.

The dining room is an enlarged ger, with a shocking array of Snow Leopard pelts decorating the walls. Dinner and hot showers round off the day.

Thursday, 19 June

The dawn chorus consists of two frenzied Common Cuckoos: it is amazing they keep up such intensity so late in the season.

We leave camp early and soon arrive at the airport, where we say farewell to Nagi and Taivan. The Hunnu Airlines Fokker (a 46-seater) takes 80 minutes to reach Dalanzadgad, known generally as Dee-zee. We drop five degrees of latitude, from 48°N to 43°N. Soon we are off in two Russian UAZ 4x4s driven by Bataa and Erdene. The design for these sturdy vehicles came from the military. First stop is at a supermarket where we quickly find tasty filled rolls and drinks for breakfast. Next we visit a pool that stores water from a stream. It has been dug to retain water for irrigating crops lower down. The town's name means '70 Springs,' after this pool area. Here are various birds of interest: Long-legged Buzzard, Isabelline Shrike, Crested Lark, and surprisingly a Chinese Pond Heron flying further from its breeding grounds - an overshooting migrant. A pair of Common Snipe is nesting in a fenced off enclosure with long grass, reeds and tamarisks.

Passing the airport again, we head west through the steppe-desert towards our first Gobi ger camp, near Yolin Am. Soon our first Pallas's Sandgrouse appear: 13 in all, in three or four groups. These especially beautiful sandgrouse feed close to the track and fly only a short distance before settling. Next come two plovers which migrate here to nest: Greater Sandplover and Oriental Plover. The former are a group of 15 or so, none in full breeding plumage; and the pair of Orientals are of similar size but have longer legs. The male is striking, with chestnut breast band and pure white head. This is a bird we all especially hoped to see. Larks in this habitat are a little different from the north: Shore is much more common, Asian Short-toed much less common; and the huge, distinctive Mongolian has now disappeared. A herd of (domesticated) Bactrian Camels rounds off the morning.

We check into the camp and enjoy a four-course lunch: salad, soup, spaghetti bolognese and a chocolate bar. There is time to rest (or wander taking photos) before we set out again. Behind camp is a small river valley with a trickling stream running through. Mongolian Finches come to drink regularly, while both Grey-necked and Godlewski's Buntings frequent the rocky sides of the valley. Hill Pigeons fly over, and Crag Martins patrol the valley for flying insects. Other birds here include White-winged Snowfinch, Pied Wheatear and Black Redstart of the eastern subspecies *rufiventris*. Back in the camp compound is a nesting Eurasian Hoopoe and a family of Isabelline Wheatears. Pallas's Pikas have burrows here too, and one pokes its nose into Sue's ger.

Puji has written a small book, illustrated largely with his photographs, on the birds of his local patch, not far from Dalanzadgad. He has kindly given a copy to each of us. It is published by the mining company for whom he usually works as environmental consultant. We call the log before dinner as we plan an early start in the morning....

Friday, 20 June

At 0500 we leave with a picnic breakfast for the nearby gorge Yolin Am, which means Valley of the Lammergeiers. The early start is in hopes of seeing Altai Snowcock, which call from the peaks in the early mornings. A Tolai Hare poses by the track. It's too cold to enjoy breakfast outside as the Siberian wind is still

blowing; so we eat in the warmth of the vehicles while three of us keep watch for snowcocks outside. We are wearing many layers, fleeces, windproof jacket, gloves and woolly hats, and still need the bus after a few minutes. White-winged Snowfinches wait for crumbs round our feet. Since all is quiet on the ridge, we begin walking down into the gorge, passing Twite, Mongolian Finch, Pied Wheatear, and enjoying the sight of three approachable male Chinese Beautiful Rosefinches. Koslov's Accentors, Mongolia's only endemic, are common. They nest inside the prostrate juniper bushes and resemble a longer-tailed Dunnock. Also keeping an eye on the accentors is a Common Cuckoo, since they are the host species here. Overhead are Himalayan Griffons and a magnificent pair of Bearded Vultures. An immature Golden Eagle flies over, mobbed by Common Kestrels which are nesting on the crags too. The ground is alive with pikas and gerbils, and at the turn-around point Sue and Ann find an Argali ram which is unwell.

At this point Erdene arrives on a scooter that he has borrowed. He tells us that Bataa has spotted five snowcock, visible from the car-park! Keith rides pillion, while the rest of us hot-foot back up. Amazingly all five are still in view, and remain so for over 30 minutes. They are silent: perhaps by now they have stopped proclaiming territory. The white belly, characteristic of this species, stands out well. Now Mitko and Puji return after a long climb (in a vain hope of closer snowcock views) but luckily the birds are still calmly feeding on a grassy slope just below the ridge. Only the arrival of a few Siberian Ibex moves them onto the crags. Delighted with our morning, we leave Yolín Am as rain begins to fall. The museum and shop at the gorge entrance is worth seeing, and occupies half-an-hour.

Back at camp, our ger stoves are lit and kept fed with wood and coal: not what we expected to need in the Gobi in summer! Lunch is another tasty meal with mushroom soup and Hawaiian chicken. Squally showers lengthen siesta and delay setting out again twice, but eventually we head out again for the small canyon behind camp. The wind drops and conditions for walking and birding improve no end. Scanning a crag suitable for Eagle Owl, we have good views of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Godlewski's Bunting, and there is a distant Little Owl; but no larger relative. A carcass we find on the path is that of a fox.

Before midnight and moon rise, the night sky is magnificent.

Saturday, 21 June

At last we have a perfect day: sun and breeze, with no chill. We leave the friendly and efficient camp staff after breakfast, and head west for the Gobi sand-dunes. It's 160 km in all, but we have the whole day. Chukar Partridge gets us off to a great start: a confiding pair by the vehicles close to camp. A Saker flies low in front of the second vehicle - a huge, fast falcon. The main morning stop is off to the left, where a thriving vegetable garden is surrounded by a shelter belt of elm (*Ulmus pumila*). Here we find Isabelline Shrike on territory, Eurasian Hoopoe, our first Eurasian Collared Doves, Tree Pipit, and most surprising of all - a Black-naped Oriole. It must be an overshooting migrant.

Near Tukum Lake is our first Desert Wheatear, on the roof of a ger used by local herders. The lake has no close access, but we can look across to Demoiselle Cranes and many Ruddy Shelduck. Soon afterwards we eat our picnic on a sward of green grass. Next stop is in stony steppe-desert with scattered almond bushes (*Amygdalus sp*) along dry watercourses. Here Mitko puts us onto a singing Asian Desert Warbler, a small, pale *Sylvia* seen well in the scope. Some of us are lucky enough to see a Henderson's Ground Jay, one of the Gobi specialities. It appears first in flight, showing off black and white in the wings. But on the ground it looks plain and sandy, and soon runs out of sight. We have other chances!

Another small oasis has a fenced but abandoned garden by a spring that produces a stream. Here breeding birds are Little Ringed Plover and Rock Sparrow. We hear a Radde's Warbler singing, but can't bring it into view. A female Common Rosefinch is also here - way out in the desert, miles from any other vegetation taller than a foot or two. We stop further on to admire a pair of fine Pallas's Sandgrouse by the track. (Peter Pallas, who lived from 1741 to 1811, was a German naturalist in the Russian service, who explored Siberia and wrote monographs on the wildlife of the Russian Arctic).

Now the 160-km long Gobi sand-dunes appear on our left; and we reach our new camp just before 1700. Here we have a pleasant surprise: in addition to the gers where we are booked in, they have self-contained chalets. The charge for the upgrade is modest and everyone leaps at the chance of facilities under the same roof! Dinner

is superb too, in a new Scandinavian-style log cabin restaurant. There are cold beers and even a South African *Shiraz*.

Sunday, 22 June

A pair of Desert Wheatears feed their fledged young in camp. The male takes time off to sing a Robin-like song from the top of a ger: perhaps there will be a second brood. These and Shore Larks are the only birds in camp at breakfast time.

It's not far to the edge of the great dunes. At the parking place, Saxaul Sparrows appear to order in the saxaul trees (*Haloxylon ammodendron*) before we step out of the vehicles. The male is especially smart with chestnut face pattern. Here also is Steppe Grey Shrike and a Black-faced Bunting. A Demoiselle Crane flies past - not so surprising as there is a stream and wetland between us and the great dunes. An Upland Buzzard flies past with a lizard dangling from its bill. Asian Desert Warbler is also here, repeating a cheerful song. Ten or more Lesser Kestrels hover above our heads and dive down for insects. Bridges take us across two streams - the second has several Ruddy Shelduck on the banks, which are colourful with purple iris. Further on the great dunes start: pure sand hundreds of feet high. We walk on the lower slopes and take plenty of photos. Surprisingly the mammals on the sand slopes are not Bactrian Camels but horses. We take our time absorbing this grand and unique scene, in perfect sunny and breezy conditions. On the walk back, we photograph the two common reptiles: the tiny Tuva Toad-headed Agama and the larger, spotted Gobi Race-runner.

Siesta follows another excellent four-course lunch. We set off for a dry riverbed nearby which is a known site for Henderson's Ground Jay. Often there is no track: our two trusty UAZes go quite happily across almost all the steppe, and both up and down amazingly steep slopes! The drivers and Mitko find a jay perched on top of an almond bush, but it quickly jumps off. On foot now, we relocate it further up the wadi. It frequently runs out of sight, but eventually gives scope views as it perches, curved bill open, on top of another small bush. It is a great runner, and wanders for a great distance up the bank and out of sight, before re-appearing on a further ridge. Puji finds its empty nest (a very small nest for a corvid) in the almond bush where we first saw it. Other birds of the area include more Lesser Kestrels, Desert Wheatears, and one Hill Pigeon. We finish a relaxing and successful day on top of a ridge overlooking our excellent camp. We look for Goitered (or Black-tailed) Gazelles which are occasionally seen but very shy; but without luck. All the same we enjoy the view of the dunes and the panoramas that stretch for miles in all directions.

We all enjoy our hot showers and a fine dinner - there is a chilled French *Sauvignon* on offer.

Monday 23, June

...is mostly a travel day as we head back east (230 km) from the Gobi Dunes to Dalanzadgad. The first part of the journey is through a mountain pass where we pass two Bearded Vulture territories. One perches close to the road, offering the photographers a great portrait, while at the second we have the pair flying together and one resting on a favourite ledge. Siberian Ibex also pose in silhouette on the ridge. We continue through the steppe-desert, passing our first Mongolian Larks since Ulaanbaatar, a lone Demoiselle Crane and an especially dark Upland Buzzard. A mid-morning stop produces a fine male Oriental Plover, two Pallas's Sandgrouse feeding, and a scattered herd of Goitered Gazelles.

In the middle of the day we enter the Gegeet Valley, a vertical gorge similar to Yolin Am. Here the most unexpected find is a Eurasian Woodcock, which we flush twice. This must be a lost non-breeder, (though they breed 600 km away in Terelj). Godlewski's Buntings and Pied Wheatears are everywhere, bathing in the stream that flows through the gorge. Chukar Partridge, Crag Martin and Beautiful Rosefinch are also at home here. A pair of Saker Falcons harry and mob the resident Bearded Vulture. It's a great spot for a picnic despite the gathering clouds.

During the afternoon we make steady progress in heavy rain. At five or six spots we have to ford flash floods of torrential rainwater that has fallen on the mountains around Yolin Am. It is up to the axles of the reliable UAZes, which bring us to our new camp in great style. Here it has not rained, and there is time before dinner for a walk along the side of a plantation where Isabelline Shrike and Asian Short-toed Larks are conspicuous. Our well-appointed gers are lined with yak-fur. Dinner is one of our best meals, and comes with glasses of complimentary Spanish wine.

Tuesday, 24 June

As we tuck into our cooked breakfast, an Isabelline Shrike perches outside the window. Desert Wheatear is in the car-park as we set off, and soon an Isabelline Wheatear appears, thus maintaining its every-day record on this trip (along with Raven and Tree Sparrow). We re-visit the pond in Dalanzadgad which we saw on Thursday. Everything seems to have young: Little Ringed Plover, Eurasian Hoopoe, Crested and Asian Short-toed Larks. One busy Eurasian Hoopoe parent has three fledged chicks to feed - their crests are fully formed, but their breasts are more grey than orange. Citrine Wagtail and Mongolian Finch are also here.

Next stop is a tree-nursery which is a hot-spot for migrants in May. Here at that time Naumann's, Dusky, Eyebrowed, Red-throated and White's Thrushes can all be found, along with Pallas's Leaf and Dusky Warblers, plus three *Accipiter* species: Eurasian and Japanese Sparrowhawks and Northern Goshawk. Now those migrants have headed north, but at least we find a Daurian Starling and a Common Cuckoo (still singing).

We head back to base for lunch. Our afternoon trip is delayed by a vicious storm which brings rain into all our ger doorways. As it clears we head for the slope of the mountains south of town. Here, a series of ridges and dips has a scattering of almond bushes. Straight away we find four Henderson's Ground Jays, and are able to watch them for half an hour, burying almonds, perching on bushes and flying here and there, displaying pied wings: a great climax to the tour. Also here are Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush and Common Cuckoo. Back at base, there is time for a hot shower, re-pack and a final dinner.

Bataa and Erdene have one last short journey with us - to the airport. It's a lovely sunny evening to wait outside for the airport staff to arrive. The Hunnu Fokker takes off as darkness falls, at 2130. This is much later than we would have chosen, but there are not many flights from Dee-zee! Our old friends Nagi and Taivan are at the airport to meet us and drive us to our city hotel, which we reach just before midnight.

Wednesday, 24 June

The Beijing flight - this time with Mongolian Airlines - is much earlier than we would have chosen! It takes off at 0615, and arrives soon after 0800. We have a few hours in transit, which we help to pass with a visit to Pizza Hut. The Air China flight takes nine and a half hours to Heathrow. We fly over Ulaanbaatar eight hours after we took off from there! It is a beautiful sunny evening in London, as we say our farewells in the newly re-opened Terminal 2.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Puji for being our Main Man in Mongolia. Puji took us to all the best birding sites, gave each of us a copy of his book, answered our questions and shared many great photos with us. Thanks also to Bogo for standing in on the first day. Many thanks also to Mitko for all his enthusiasm and determination to find as many Mongolian species as possible. In Nagi, Taivan, Bataa and 'Mad Mick' Erdene we had four excellent drivers: thanks guys! Thanks also to all those who gave us a great welcome at each ger camp we visited. Finally and most of all, many thanks to you all for participating in the tour with such enthusiasm and good humour at all times. You really were a pleasure to share these days with. I hope we may meet up on another Ornitholiday again soon. Thanks also to Rob Grimmond, Mitko Petrakiev, Kay Sayers and Puji Tsolomnjav for allowing me to use their photographs to illustrate this report.

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August 2014



Inside a ger



Ger camp near Ulaanbaatar

Itinerary and Weather

Wherever possible, **shade** temperatures at dawn and midday are given. We experienced weather much colder and wetter than is typical in Mongolia in an average June. Future visitors should beware the chill of a Siberian wind, even in summer!

- 11 June Arrive Beijing 1310. To local hotel. Local walk.
Sunny, 27°C (81°F)
- 12 June Fly Beijing to Ulaanbaatar, arriving 1050. Gun Galuut Lakes. Terelj.
Sunny, 17-22 °C (63-72°F)
- 13 June Terelj National Park.
Sunny, 2-24°C (36-75°F)
- 14 June Terelj to Hustai National Park, via Ulaanbaatar Sewage Ponds, and the Tuul River at Songin Mountain.
Sunny a.m, cloudy p.m. 5-25°C (41-77°F)
- 15 June Hustai National Park.
Cold front: north wind, drizzle a.m, dry p.m. 11-13°C (52-55°F)
- 16 June Hustai to Ogi lake via Lun Marshes & Bayan Lake.
Sunny, 2-20°C (36-68°F)
- 17 June Ogi Lake.
Light rain clearing, east wind, some sun. 6-17°C (43-63°F)
- 18 June Ogi Lake to Ulaanbaatar. Ger camp near airport.
Drizzle a.m, clearing. 8-18°C (46-64°F)
- 19 June Fly Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad. To Khan Bogd Ger camp near Yolin Am.
Ulaanbaatar: cloudy, 8°C (46°F);
Dalanzadgad: sunny, cold north wind, 11-16°C (52-61°F)
- 20 June Khan Bogd. Yolin Am.
Cold north wind, sun, showers. 4-14°C (39-57°F)
- 21 June Khan Bogd to Gobi Dunes.
Sunny, breezy, 6-29°C (43-84°F)
- 22 June Gobi Dunes.
Dry, breezy, partly sunny. 17-30°C (63-86°F)
- 23 June Gobi Dunes to Dalangadgad via Gegeet Valley.
Cloudy, wet. 17-19°C (63-66°F)
- 24 June Dalanzadgad. Fly to Ulaanbaatar late evening.
Sunny a.m, one midday storm. 15-28°C (59-82°F).
- 25 June Ulaanbaatar depart 0615.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on 1day and heard on 2 other days	N = North,12-18 June* S = South, 19-24 June**	1 = 1 – 4 individuals 2= 5 - 9 3 = 10 - 99 4 = 100 - 999

*Ulaanbaatar, Gun Galuut Lakes, Terelj, Hustai, Bayan Lake & Ogi Lake.

**Dalanzadgad, Yolín Am, Gobi sand-dunes, Gegeet Valley.

Sequence and nomenclature mainly follow *Birds of East Asia* by M. Brazil (2010).

Taxonomic notes (^{1,2, etc}) follow the list.

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Phasianidae				
Chukar Partridge	2	S	1	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>
Daurian Partridge	1	N	1	<i>Perdix dauurica</i>
Altai Snowcock	1	S	2	<i>Tetrao gallus altaicus</i>
Anatidae				
Swan Goose	5	N	4	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>
Greylag Goose	2	N	2	<i>Anser anser</i>
Bar-headed Goose	3	N	4	<i>Anser indicus</i>
Whooper Swan	4	N	2	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Common Shelduck	4	N	4	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Ruddy Shelduck	10	N S	4	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>
Gadwall	5	N	3	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Falcated Duck	1	N	2	<i>Anas falcata</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	5	N	2	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Mallard	6	N S	4	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Shoveler	5	N	3	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Northern Pintail	3	N	3	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Garganey	2	N	1	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Common Teal	5	N	3	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Red-crested Pochard	2	N	3	<i>Netta rufina</i>
Common Pochard	4	N	3	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	3	N	3	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
White-winged Scoter ¹	1	N	2	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>
Common Goldeneye	5	N	3	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Goosander	1	N	1	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Gaviidae				
Black-throated Diver	1	N	1	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
Podicipedidae				
Great Crested Grebe	3	N	1	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Ciconiidae				
Black Stork	2	N	1	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
Threskiornithidae				
Eurasian Spoonbill	1	N	3	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Ardeidae				
Chinese Pond Heron	1	S	1	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>
Grey Heron	4	N	2	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Pelecanidae				
Dalmatian Pelican	1	N	1	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>
Phalacrocoracidae				
Great Cormorant	1	N	3	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Falconidae				
Lesser Kestrel	4	N S	3	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	10	N S	1	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Amur Falcon	4	N	2	<i>Falco amurensis</i>

Eurasian Hobby	3	N		1	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Saker Falcon	3	N	S	1	<i>Falco cherrug</i>
Accipitridae					
Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier)	2		S	1	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>
Black-eared Kite ²	10	N	S	3	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>
White-tailed Eagle	1	N		1	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Himalayan Griffon Vulture	3	N	S	3	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	1	N		3	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>
Eurasian Black (Monk) Vulture	10	N	S	3	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>
Eastern Marsh Harrier	2	N		2	<i>Circus spilonotus</i>
Hen Harrier	1	N		1	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Eurasian Buzzard	-	1h	N	1	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Long-legged Buzzard	1		S	1	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>
Upland Buzzard	8	N	S	3	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>
Booted Eagle	3	N	S	1	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Steppe Eagle	6	N	S	2	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>
Great Spotted Eagle	1	N		1	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
Golden Eagle	5	N	S	1	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>
Rallidae					
Common Moorhen	1	N		1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Common Coot	3	N		1	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Gruidae					
Common Crane	1	N		1	<i>Grus grus</i>
White-naped Crane	2	N		2	<i>Grus vipio</i>
Demoiselle Crane	9	N	S	3	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>
Recurvirostridae					
Black-winged Stilt	4	N		3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	3	N		4	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Charadriidae					
Northern Lapwing	5	N		3	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	9	N	S	3	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Greater Sand Plover	3		S	3	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>
Oriental Plover	2		S	1	<i>Charadrius veredus</i>
Pacific Golden Plover	1	N		1	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
Scolopacidae					
Eurasian Woodcock	1		S	1	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>
Common Snipe	2		S	1	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Eastern Black-tailed Godwit ³	2	N		3	<i>Limosa melanuroides</i>
Eurasian Curlew	2	N		3	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Redshank	5	N	S	2	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Green Sandpiper	1		S	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	2	N		2	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	2	N		1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Laridae					
Pallas's (Great Black-headed) Gull	2	N		1	<i>Larus ichthaetus</i>
Mongolian Gull	4	N		3	<i>Larus mongolicus</i>
Caspian Gull	1	N		1	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>
Little Gull	1	N		1	<i>Larus minutus</i>
Common Black-headed Gull	4	N		3	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Slender-billed Gull	1	N		1	<i>Larus genei</i>
Black Tern	1	N		1	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
White-winged Tern	3	N		3	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
Whiskered Tern	1	N		1	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
Common Tern	6	N		3	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Caspian Tern	1	N		1	<i>Sterna caspia</i>
Gull-billed Tern	2	N		1	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
Pteroclididae					
Pallas's Sandgrouse	4		S	3	<i>Syrnhaptes paradoxus</i>
Columbidae					
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	11	N	S	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Hill Pigeon	2		S	1	<i>Columba rupestris</i>
Eurasian Collared Dove	2		S	2	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>

Cuculidae						
Common Cuckoo	3	4h	N	S	1	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Oriental Cuckoo	-	1h	N		1	<i>Cuculus optatus</i>
Strigidae						
Little Owl	1			S	1	<i>Athene noctua</i>
Apodidae						
Common Swift	5		N	S	1	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pacific Swift	9		N	S	3	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
Upupidae						
Eurasian Hoopoe	8		N	S	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Picidae						
Eurasian Wryneck	1	1h	N		1	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	1		N		1	<i>Picus canus</i>
Black Woodpecker	1		N		1	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
White-backed Woodpecker	1		N		1	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>
Laniidae						
Isabelline Shrike	5			S	2	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>
Steppe Grey Shrike ⁴	1			S	1	<i>Lanius pallidirostris</i>
Oriolidae						
Black-naped Oriole	1			S	1	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>
Corvidae						
Azure-winged Magpie	1		N		1	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>
Common Magpie	6		N		3	<i>Pica pica</i>
Henderson's (Mongolian) Ground Jay	3			S	1	<i>Podoces hendersoni</i>
Red-billed Chough	8		N	S	4	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>
Daurian Jackdaw	3		N		3	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>
Rook	2		N		3	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>
Carrion Crow	5		N		2	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Common (Northern) Raven	13		N	S	2	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Paridae						
(Northern) Great Tit	2		N		1	<i>Parus major</i>
Azure Tit	3		N		1	<i>Parus cyanus</i>
Coal Tit	1		N		1	<i>Parus ater</i>
Willow Tit	1		N		2	<i>Parus montanus</i>
Remizidae						
White-crowned Penduline Tit ⁵	1		N		1	<i>Remiz coronatus</i>
Hirundinidae						
Common Sand/Pale Martin ⁶	3		N	S	1	<i>Riparia riparia/diluta</i>
Barn Swallow	6		N	S	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Eurasian Crag Martin	3			S	2	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>
Northern House Martin	5		N	S	2	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Alaudidae						
Mongolian Lark	7		N	S	3	<i>Melanocorypha mongolica</i>
Greater Short-toed Lark	1		N		1	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>
Asian Short-toed Lark	11		N	S	4	<i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>
Crested Lark	2			S	2	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Eurasian Skylark	4		N		1	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Shore Lark	12		N	S	4	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
Sylviidae						
Oriental Reed Warbler	3		N		2	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>
Paddyfield Warbler	1		N		1	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>
Dusky Warbler	-	1h	N		-	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Radde's Warbler	-	1h		S	-	<i>Phylloscopus schwartzi</i>
Yellow-browed Warbler	1		N		2	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	1		N		1	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>
Asian Desert Warbler ⁷	2			S	1	<i>Sylvia nana</i>
Greater Whitethroat	1	1h	N		1	<i>Sylvia communis</i>
Timaliidae						
Bearded Tit	1		N		2	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>
Sittidae						
Eurasian Nuthatch	1		N		2	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Sturnidae						
Daurian (Purple-backed) Starling	1			S	1	<i>Sturnus sturninus</i>

White-cheeked Starling	1		N		1	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
Turdidae						
Naumann's Thrush	-	1h	N		1	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>
Muscicapidae						
Black Redstart	3			S	1	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>
Daurian Redstart	1		N		1	<i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	13		N	S	4	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Northern Wheatear	6		N		2	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Pied Wheatear	6		N	S	3	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>
Desert Wheatear	4			S	2	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>
Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	2			S	1	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>
Taiga Flycatcher ⁸	1		N		1	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>
Passeridae						
Saxaul Sparrow	1			S	2	<i>Passer ammodendri</i>
House Sparrow	5		N	S	3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	13		N	S	3	<i>Passer montanus</i>
Rock Sparrow	9		N	S	2	<i>Petronia petronia</i>
White-winged Snowfinch	3			S	3	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>
Père David's Snowfinch	4		N		3	<i>Montifringilla davidiana</i>
Prunellidae						
Brown Accentor	1		N		1	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>
Koslov's (Mongolian) Accentor	1			S	2	<i>Prunella koslowi</i>
Motacillidae						
Yellow Wagtail	2		N		2	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Citrine Wagtail	4		N	S	1	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
Grey Wagtail	1		N		1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	7		N	S	1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Richard's Pipit	3		N		1	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
Blyth's Pipit	1		N		1	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>
Tawny Pipit	1		N		1	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Tree Pipit	1			S	1	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Olive-backed Pipit	1		N		2	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
Fringillidae						
Twite	1			S	1	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>
Mongolian Finch	5			S	3	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>
Long-tailed Rosefinch	1		N		2	<i>Uragus sibiricus</i>
Common Rosefinch	2		N	S	1	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch ⁹	2			S	1	<i>Carpodacus pulcherrimus</i>
Emberizidae						
Pine Bunting	1	1h	N		2	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>
Godlewski's Bunting	3			S	3	<i>Emberiza godlewskii</i>
Meadow Bunting	2		N		1	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
Grey-necked Bunting	1	1h		S	1	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>
Yellow-breasted Bunting	1		N		1	<i>Emberiza aureola</i>
Black-faced Bunting	1			S	1	<i>Emberiza spodocephala</i>
Pallas's Reed Bunting	1		N		1	<i>Emberiza pallasii</i>

Taxonomic Notes (Refs: *Handbook of Birds of the World* (Lynx); *Birds of East Asia* (Mark Brazil – Helm).

- 1 White-winged Scoter is a recent split from Velvet Scoter, *M. fusca*.
- 2 Black-eared Kite is a recent split (adopted by Brazil but not universally) from Black Kite, *M. migrans*.
- 3 Eastern Black-tailed Godwit is a recent split from Black-tailed Godwit, *L. limosa*.
- 4 Grey shrikes in Mongolia are confusing. The common breeding taxon in the Gobi is usually now referred to as Steppe Grey Shrike, *L. pallidirostris*, which is often lumped with Southern Grey Shrike, *L. meridionalis*. However, no subspecies of *meridionalis* appears to occur in Mongolia (see HBW, vol 13, p. 787). Great Grey Shrike, *L. excubitor sibiricus* breeds in N. Mongolia.
- 5 White-crowned Penduline Tit is a recent split from the European species *R. pendulinus*.
- 6 Sand Martins seen twice, briefly in flight, were not specifically identifiable.
- 7 Desert Warblers in Asia and Africa have recently been split as separate species.
- 8 Taiga Flycatcher is a recent split from Red-breasted Flycatcher, *F. parva*. Some books call it Red-throated Flycatcher.
- 9 Beautiful Rosefinch has recently been split into two species: Himalayan and Chinese.

MAMMALS (order and nomenclature follows *Mammals of the World – a Checklist* by Duff & Lawson)

Daurian Pika	3	N		1	<i>Ochotona daurica</i>
Pallas's Pika	4		S	3	<i>Ochotona pallasi</i>
Tolai Hare	5		S	2	<i>Lepus tolai</i>
Siberian (Tarbagan) Marmot	4	N		3	<i>Marmota sibirica</i>
Alashan Ground Squirrel	3		S	3	<i>Spermophilus alashanicus</i>
Long-tailed Ground Squirrel	5	N		2	<i>Spermophilus undulatus</i>
Siberian Chipmunk	1	N		1	<i>Tamias sibiricus</i>
Brandt's Vole	3	N		4	<i>Microtus brandti</i>
Midday Jird (Gerbil)	1		S	3	<i>Meriones meridianus</i>
Corsac Fox	1	N		1	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>
Red Deer	1	N		3	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>
Goitered (Black-tailed) Gazelle	1		S	3	<i>Gazella subgutterosa</i>
Siberian Ibex	2		S	2	<i>Capra sibirica</i>
Argali Sheep	4	N	S	3	<i>Ovis ammon</i>
Przewalski's Horse	1	N		3	<i>Equus przewalski</i>

Bactrian Camels were also seen but are domesticated.

OTHER ANIMALS included Tuva Toad-headed Agama (*Phrynocephalus versicolor*) and Gobi Racerunner (*Eremias przewalskii*).

BIRDS SEEN IN BEIJING, 11 and 12 June. Bold = those not seen in Mongolia.

Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>
Common Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>
Common Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
White-cheeked Starling	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Chinese Grosbeak	<i>Eophona migratoria</i>

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.

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Amur Falcon



Bearded Vulture



Black Stork



Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch



Citrine Wagtail



Daurian Jackdaw



Daurian Partridge



Daurian Redstart



Demoiselle Crane



Godlewski's Bunting



Golden Eagle and Saker Falcon



Greater Sandplover



Great Spotted Eagle



Grey-necked Bunting



Henderson's Ground Jay



Long-tailed Rosefinch



Eurasian Black Vulture



Oriental Plover



Paddyfield Warbler



Pallas's Reed Bunting



Père David's Snowfinch



Red-billed Chough



Saker Falcon



Saxaul Sparrow



Pallas's Sandgrouse



Steppe Grey Shrike



Swan Geese



White-winged Snowfinches



Yellow-breasted Bunting



Przewalski's Horses



Pallas's Pika



Tolai Hare

Front cover: Mongolian Lark

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