

MONGOLIA TOUR REPORT 2023

21 May - 8 June 2023

by János Oláh

Mongolia is an amazing country with fantastic scenery and some really special birds! It is also a vast country with very few human inhabitants: a visit to this true wilderness is an unforgettable birding experience! Our tour is usually run at the end of May when we have a good chance to observe the enigmatic Black-billed Capercaillies. It is weather dependent, but in cold springs we have a very good chance to see them displaying. Migration is also in full swing, and this is a great tour to see Siberian breeding birds in full immaculate dress. This tour is also one of our very few tours where we camp almost throughout and hence our itinerary is somewhat flexible. A truly unique adventure! This was our first visit to the country after the covid pandemic which made us postpone this tour for several years. This year we visited the Tuul River, the Gun Galuut Lake area on the east, the larch forests north of Ulaanbaatar, the fantastic Yolii Am Gorge in the Gobi Altai, the Khongorin Els sand dunes, the desert lakes in central Mongolia like Orog and Boontsagaan, the mighty Khukh Lake area in the north and Bayan Lake as well as the famous Hustai National Park on our way back to the capital.

In 2023 we have recorded 230 bird species with only 3 heard-only as well as 31 species of mammals. This was a new mammal record for Birdquest as our previous mammal record was 30 species on our last tour in 2018. There were many highlights during the 2023 tour, but Black-billed Capercaillie was voted the 'Bird of the trip' and we had the best possible experience with these special birds as we could watch them displaying for as long as we wanted! It was perhaps the very cold and late spring but somehow, we managed to get one of those days when the lekking was on its peak (maybe 2 or 3 days like this in a year). The male birds were so focused on the visiting females that they did not bother about us, and we could see the shy females as well and even witnessed mating! A truly magical and top experience! Staying with 'chickens', another great highlight was watching a displaying male and a calling pair of Altai Snowcocks during a cold and snowy, but thankfully still morning. Admiring Mongolian Ground Jays in the early morning sunlight while they are foraging amongst the mini sand dunes with Asian Desert Warbler singing from the top of the nearby bushes was a memorable moment too! But, we could also mention the party of three Great Bustards trotting behind a foraging Little Curlew or seeing the fantastic display flight of the male Oriental Plovers over their vast breeding habitat. Even on our very first day we had a true migration experience with a huge fall of migrants in Ulaanbaatar itself seeing many Siberian Rubythroats and Taiga Flycatchers and a flock of migrant thrushes with Eye-browed, Dusky, Red-throated and Naumann's Thrush all together. Fantastic! The rare White-throated or Hodgson's Bush Chat was also found despite the unusually cold and snowy conditions and in fact we saw as many as 8 birds together with migrant wheatears. All in all, there were many great moments to remember! We managed to see other iconic or sought-after birds as well like Swan Goose, Stejneger's Scoter, Demoiselle and White-naped Cranes, breeding plumaged Asiatic Dowitchers

and Broad-billed Sandpipers, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Amur Falcon, Eversmann's Redstart, Pere David's Snow Finch, Mongolian or Kozlov's Accentor, Wallcreeper, Saxaul Sparrow, Lanceolated and Thick-billed Warblers and a selection of buntings including Pine, Godlewski's and Pallas's Reed Bunting.

Mammals were also great! Our experience of seeing a wild Wolverine for several minutes while it was foraging on a hillside, which was followed by a fantastic Wolf on the same slope 30 minutes later was unbelievable. Other great mammals included Alashan Ground Squirrel, Campbell's Desert Hamster, both Long-eared and Daurian Hedgehogs, Alpine, Pallas's and Daurian Pikas and of course the Przewalski's Horses in Hustai National Park. As on most birding tours (unfortunately) we also had some misses, and it was the Relict Gull this time which eluded us. I believe this was the first ever Birdquest tour missing this declining species. Sadly, on the usual birding circuit it is very rare now and even though one was reported on one of the lakes just the previous day to our arrival we never connected with it. In future we will need to make a special visit to further west if we don't see them on the usual spots, an itinerary change that the group opted out this year.

Our tour started in Ulaanbaatar Airport after a morning flight. We quickly made our way to our hotel and changed into birding gear. The previous day it was sub-zero temperature with snow and now for us, for the tour start it was sunshine and spring! We have wasted no time and visited the Tuul River floodplain and had a great birding session with many migrants! As we walked along the river there were Siberian Rubythroats under every bush and Taiga Flycatchers everywhere! Best of all however was a large mixed thrush flock foraging around us. There were many tricky to ID birds and probably hybrids too, but we managed to see proper adults of four species which included Eye-browed, Dusky, Naumann's and Red-throated Thrush. Resident birds were also present and lovely Azure Tits and Azure-winged Magpies were a delight to watch. An afternoon visit to some ponds produced our first Stejneger's Scoters and Horned Grebe plus a great selection of migrants. It was a truly great day of birding to start our 2023 Mongolia tour!

Early next morning we left the capital and drove to the east stopping to admire the huge statue of Genghis Khan before reaching the fantastic Gun Galuut Nuur (Lake) area where we had a great introduction of the birding on the steppe lakes! It was packed with birds, and we counted up to 44 Stejneger's Scoters, a migrant flock of Black-tailed Godwits with two Asiatic Dowitchers, a fine Little Curlew foraging on the lakeside while three Great Bustards were marching on the fields behind him. Both Demoiselle and White-naped Cranes were seen, and Mongolian Larks were abundant. From here we drove to the north into the taiga larch forest. On our way we saw displaying Blyth's pipits and many Daurian Jackdaws! On arrival to the forest, we could feel it was very early stage of spring yet, perhaps the first real warmer weather for the spring just arrived with us. Forest was silent but we found a few birds around camp like fantastic Red-throated Thrushes, Willow and Coal Tits, Hawfinches and Olive-backed Pipits. Distant Eastern (or Siberian) Roe Deers were seen on a slope while at dusk we could hear Wolves hauling nearby. Magical atmosphere it was but the temperature was dropping fast, and it was a cold night. After dinner for those who were up for the challenge, we tracked down a magnificent Ural Owl.

We were up early next day well before dawn. A hot coffee and tea were very welcome, and we were soon on our way to look for Black-billed Capercaillies. We had not much fresh info's but were very hopeful as it was a superb windless morning. As we were getting closer to the lekking area we started to hear birds calling: the lekking was on! After some careful positioning we got close enough to admire the spectacle! And the sound was unbelievable too! We could not ask a better performance, and we stayed with the several lekking males for two hours and we even managed to see female birds and actual mating too. A truly lifetime experience to see these special birds in

the very height of their spring display and we all agreed it could not have been better. We had happy faces going back to camp which got even more happier with a fine male Hazel Grouse perched nearby and Pine Buntings singing on the larch trees. The taiga forest was awakening from its long winter sleep. We packed up and spent some time to look for a Steppe Zokor but no luck for this underground mammal. We drove back to the Gun Galuut area for overnight and waited until dusk for gulls coming to roost to the lakes. They certainly did come but no Relict Gulls were found amongst them.

Following a last morning birding at Gun Galuut we drove towards the Gobi Altai Mountains. In the late afternoon we set up our camp by the dry lakebed of Har us Nuur. We were now in the transition zone between the steppes and the semi-desert, and we found our first Pere David's Snow Finches as well as had a nice mammaling section at dusk with several Campbell's Desert Hamsters and Daurian Hedgehog. Pre-breakfast produced a Pallas's Sandgrouse, a migrant Dusky Thrush and Mongolian Finches. We still had a few hours' drive to reach Dalanzadgad and we continued to Yolii Am where we even had time for a little birding. This fantastic area called the 'valley of the Lammergeiers' and it is a scenic valley with an impressive gorge. Our first afternoon birding produced our top target, the near endemic Mongolian or Kozlov's Accentor. Well, it is surely not the most colourful bird but in its subtle way it is good-looking, and it is an accentor! A singing male gave us a superb show alongside some Brown Accentors in its dwarf juniper habitat on a steep hillside. Our mission was completed, and we even had time for a spotlighting night-drive through the valley which produced no cats but a few Argali and Siberian Ibexes. Next morning, we drove all the way to the gorge and had a wonderful few hours birding at this great place! Our first stop was for a migrant White's Thrush flushed from the roadside – a welcome surprise! As we left our cars behind and started to walk the gorge, we had many White-winged Snowfinches and Twites along the streamside with occasional Water Pipits, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinches and Little Buntings. In the lovely sunny morning Cuckoos were calling and regal Bearded Vultures were patrolling over our heads. A party of 15 Himalayan Griffon Vultures were also in the air and a Golden Eagle was cruising high too. On the rock faces and scree breeding plumaged Wallcreepers males were chasing females and Godlewski's Buntings were feeding quietly. It was enjoyable birding, but it was time for us to leave for the semi-desert! Mongolian and Black-tailed (Goitered) Gazelles were seen along the route but our search for the iconic Oriental Plover was fruitless. Eventually we arrived to Khongorin Els, the most picturesque sand dunes of Mongolia. The sand dunes are 180km long and stretch between Gurvan Saikhan and Nemegt Range's both part of the Gobi Altai Mountain range. At their widest point, the dunes are 27 km wide and just 1km at their narrowest. These massive dunes cover an area of 965sq km and stand out clearly from any satellite image. A pallidrostris Great Grey Shrike was seen and we had a great sunset with camels roaming around us. Magical! Our spotlighting produced Long-eared Hedgehog and Northern Three-toed Jerboa.

We got up to an almost windless morning with a male Desert Wheatear singing around our tents. It took some time, but we got great looks of Saxaul Sparrows amongst the sand dunes, but we had no sign of any Desert Warblers. Supporting cast included Hill Pigeons, Demoiselle Cranes and Pallas's Sandgrouse. By the time we finished our breakfast – with a Midday Gerbil hiding amongst our kitchen gear – and packing the wind was getting stronger and we soon set off to our longish drive towards the Orog Nuur north of the Bogd Mountains. It was a slow and long driving day with some stunning scenery and some more Saxaul Sparrows. It was late afternoon when we arrived to Orog Nuur.

Our target for the morning was to find the Mongolian or Henderson's Ground Jay which we very quickly did, and these charismatic birds gave us a stunning show while feeding in their 'mini sand dune' habitat. We saw a party of 5 birds and could study and enjoy their behaviour for as long as we wanted. The only slight distraction was a lovely pair of Asian Desert Warblers for a few minutes. Orog Nuur itself had rather low water level and we noted very few waterbirds in the heat haze though distant singing Paddyfield Warblers were seen in the reedbed. We drove to the nearby Kholboolj Nuur where we set up camp and drove around the lake in the fantastic afternoon light. It was a birdy lake, and we got our first Swan Goose of the tour and a great selection of breeding plumaged waders like Pacific Golden Plover, Greater Sand Plover, 55 Broad-billed Sandpipers, Red-necked Stint, Spotted Redshank and Asiatic Dowitchers. The evening spotlighting produced a few Siberian Jerboas or 'mini kangaroos' as our drivers called them right around our tents!

It was a windy morning yet again and there were very few new birds around the lake but we managed to find a few Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers near camp and migrating flocks of Whiskered and White-winged Terns were arriving. We were soon on our way towards Bayankhongor where we got some more supplies and seen Hume's Leaf Warbler, Arctic and Dusky Warblers in the parking lot of the supermarket – plus a lot of very dark Tree Sparrows. Later we drove to Boontsagaan Nuur with a few stops on the way to check more places for Oriental Plovers as we missed them near Dalanzadgad. This time we found two displaying males with relative ease and spent some time enjoying and photographing these beauties. A breeding plumaged male Oriental Plover is amongst the best-looking waders in the world and seeing their wired display flight several times was certainly a tour highlight! We arrived to Boontsagaan Nuur in time to check the estuary for the roosting gulls and we had high hopes as a Relict Gull was seen the previous evening! Unfortunately, we were not that lucky like other birders and could not find any amongst the Pallas's, Vega, Black-headed and Common Gulls. There were about 20 Swan Geese and over 200 Caspian Terns. Well, we still have another day of birding in this great location! The following morning was great weather and fantastic birding although there were much less gulls in the morning than we counted in the previous evening. There were lots of birds and early morning counted 378 Great Crested Grebes on the lake as well as 114 Spoonbills and 14 Tundra Swans. A fine pair of Pallas's Fish Eagles were continuously around, and we checked the lake shore for several kilometres for gulls and waders. A marshy area held 9 Asiatic Dowitchers and more Broad-billed Sandpipers were seen too. The afternoon was very different though as the wind was picking up and by late afternoon it was a gale forced (80km/h) wind. It has decimated our camp and all the tents were down, so we had to seek shelter in some nearby bungalows. It was a life saver, but birding was impossible, even standing on your feet was a challenge.

Dawn next day the wind was manageable, and we checked the lake one last time for gulls. We were hoping that the very strong westerly wind pushed birds to this side of the huge lake. It certainly did as we had many more Black-headed Gulls but still could not find any Relict Gulls. A few migrants were around like Daurian Redstart, Dusky Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher but nothing new was found. We packed up and left towards the north, we had a fair bit of drive to reach Khukh Nuur! It was a long drive through fantastic scenery, the Khangai Mountains were spectacular! We were expecting less wind in the coming days, but the weather forecast looked interesting with cold, and snow predicted. Roadside birds included many Pere David's Snowfinches, Hoopoes, Upland Buzzards and lots of Horned Larks. We arrived to Khukh Lake in the late afternoon and after setting up camp we could scan the hillsides for Snowcocks. Temperature was dropping and although no Snowcocks were to be seen but a fantastic Wolverine spotted on the hillside as it was foraging and coming towards us! WOW! We could watch this

amazing mammal for about 10 minutes before it disappeared. Just as we were discussing this great sighting with some hot teacup in our hands a Grey Wolf was also spotted at the very same slope just before dusk. WOW!

Our stay around Khukh Lake was not usual as throughout the entire tour weather was playing major importance. Our full day was blessed with a good morning without precipitation and strong wind. We could find some of our targets like fantastic Eversmann's and Gldenstdt's Redstarts as well as Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush but there were no sign of Altai Snowcocks or Altai Accentors. Siberian Stonechats were also evident, but no White-throated Bush Chats were found in any of the territories. After lunch we started an exploration and it was fruitful as we managed to find a flock of White-throated Bush Chats feeding with Northern Wheatears, clearly not occupying their territories yet. It also started to snow heavily, no wonder these freshly arrived migrants were still in flocks at the base of the mountain. It was a great experience watching both sexes of these scarce breeding birds feeding right around us. Other migrants were also noted such as the ocularis 'Siberian' White Wagtail, Pallas's Leaf and Dusky Warblers and Siberian Rubythroat. Late afternoon the snowing got even more intensive and upon arrival back to our camp all our tents were covered by snow. Our last morning at Khukh Lake was white with 18cm of fresh snow but still, no wind. Altai Snowcocks were calling from the mountain by the camp and after anxious scanning we found a male displaying on a snow free ledge. Almost everybody managed good looks through the scope but then it just flew off. More birds were still calling but it took us another 30 minutes to find a calling pair. This time we could watch them for 20 minutes in perfect morning light. Amazing experience and another definite tour highlight! Several 'Khangai' Asian Rosy Finches were also seen high up on the mountain, but they were on a constant move, not easy to see them. Birds were confused with the fresh snow and took shelter on the steepest rock faces without snow. All the birds we saw the previous morning in the bushes were up on the rock faces including redstarts, warblers, pipits, buntings, rubythroats etc. We also found a large flock of Altai Accentors high up on the hillside, not the best looks but again they were still in winter 'flock' mode. Happy with our morning and the snowcocks we left the snowy landscape behind and retrace our steps back to the south.

Our camp was in riverine habitat and early morning we found a skulking Thick-billed Warbler, Oriental Reed Warbler, Hume's, Dusky, Arctic and Pallas's Leaf Warblers, many Asian Brown and Spotted Flycatchers, Pied Wheatear as well as the usual obligate birds like Ruddy Shelduck and Demoiselle Crane. We quickly packed up as we had a mostly travel day and left towards Sangin Dalai Nuur where we had our picnic lunch while watching breeding Asiatic Dowitchers, Marsh Sandpipers and a selection of migrating waders like Pacific Golden Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Temminck's Stints. From here we made our way to Bayan Lake through a maze of dirt roads arriving in the late afternoon. The reedy edge of the lake held Bearded Tits and Paddyfield Warblers for us and also Eastern Marsh Harriers and Eastern Spot-billed Ducks gave excellent looks. There were and many Swan Geese around too. Later in the evening we heard Baillon's Crake and Brown-cheeked Rail calling in the reedbed, but they did not seem to be interested to come out. Dating Daurian Hedgehogs and Siberian Jerboas were seen around camp. We had great birding the following morning with Little Grebe and Falcated Duck added to our list. But we enjoyed great looks of White-naped Cranes, singing Oriental Reed and Paddyfield Warblers and Asiatic Dowitchers. From here we drove to Hustai National Park where we tracked down the famous Przevalski's Horses, seeing about 35 of them and after a long search we flushed Daurian Partridges but they did not want to play. By the end of the day, we ended up by the Tuul River on the southern boundary of the park. Late afternoon produced excellent looks of White-crowned

Penduline Tits, several Lesser Kestrels and Amur Falcons, White-cheeked Starlings and migrant Dark-sided and Asian Brown Flycatchers. Our usual evening excursion yielded a Corsac Fox den with 5 cubs, a fantastic Campbell's Desert Hamster and many Siberian Jerboas.

Next morning, we had similar set of species around camp though a few more Arctic and Dusky Warblers were seen and migrating Cuckoos were obvious too. The best find was a Daurian Pika which took up residency under a huge dead willow tree. From Hustai we drove to a 'former' Yellow-breasted Bunting site near Ulaanbaatar but no birds were found. This critically endangered species is slowly going from all known sites and there is very little hope to see it on a regular circuit now unless you luck into a migrant somewhere. Also, the site which still had a pair last year has changed a lot since my last visit in 2018, became much drier and albeit the breeding habitat itself is still there the encroachment of human development is threatening the place. After this disappointing visit we made our way to Terelj National Park. We had a full day to explore this taiga forest habitat and we have visited many excellent habitats for Chinese Bush Warbler which arrives about this time of the year. We have not seen or heard any though, and as we later found out they were not even recorded at the ringing stations until this date - they were obviously late on this cold spring. Birding was exciting however and both Oriental and Common Cuckoos were seen, and we also managed to find a nice Lanceolated Warbler which gave excellent looks. This was also a freshly arrived individual just setting up its territory. But there were other goodies such as Pine and Black-faced Buntings, lovely singing Siberian Rubythroats and Olive-backed Pipits. The brandt race of Eurasian Jay showed well and we got fantastic views of Wryneck, Black Woodpecker and Two-barred Warbler. We returned to Ulaanbaatar after the taiga forest birding where a most welcome hot shower was waiting, and it was somewhat strange to sleep in a bed after all the camping. Our Mongolia tour was a great adventure yet again and it was time to say good-bye to our fantastic team of local drivers (Huyagaa, Altnaa, Lkhagvaa and Byambaa), our kitchen crew (Muugi and Naraa) and of course our local helper and guide Nastaa! They worked hard to give us the best possible experience in their homeland! It was an enjoyable tour with some sightings we will never forget!

BIRDS OF THE TOUR

1st: Black-billed Capercaillie

2nd: Mongolian or Henderson's Ground Jay

3rd: Oriental Plover

4th: Saxaul Sparrow

5th: Altai Snowcock

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

BIRDS

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* Great looks on the breeding grounds as well!

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Swan Goose ♦ *Anser cygnoides* Many excellent sightings at some lakes like Bayan and Boontsagaan. Vulnerable.

Taiga Bean Goose ♦ *Anser fabalis* A few were seen at Aygiin Nuur near Gun Galuut. These were the large *middendorffii* race.

Tundra Bean Goose ♦ *Anser serrirostris* One was seen at Aygiin Nuur and one at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Mute Swan ♦ *Cygnus olor* Two were seen at Boontsagaan Nuur. Real, wild, category A for purists!

Tundra Swan ♦ *Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii* Four were seen at Kholboolj Nuur and 16 at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*

Garganey *Spatula querquedula*

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Falcated Duck *Mareca falcata* Great looks at Bayan Nuur.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

Eastern Spot-billed Duck (Chinese S-b D) *Anas zonorhyncha* Great looks at Bayan Nuur.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* Hundreds were seen. Vulnerable.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Stejneger's Scoter ♦ *Melanitta stejnegeri* Unusual high numbers were seen this year with 44 counted at Gun Galuut one day!

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*

Hazel Grouse ♦ *Tetrastes bonasia* Fantastic looks of a male and briefly a female of the *sibiricus* race in forest habitat.

Black-billed Capercaillie ♦ *Tetrao urogalloides* Absolutely amazing performance of lekking males, mating females. We could watch them for 3 hours and eventually walked away. Lifetime birding experience! Voted bird of the trip.

Daurian Partridge ♦ *Perdix dauurica* A pair was seen briefly in Hustai NP by some.

Altai Snowcock ♦ *Tetraogallus altaicus* Amazing looks of a displaying male and a calling pair on our crispy and snowy but windless morning at Khukh Lake. Magical!

Japanese Quail ♦ *Coturnix japonica* Two were seen at Gun Galuut.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* Non-leader heard-only at Bayankhongor.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*

Great Bustard ♦ *Otis tarda* Three were seen at Gun Galuut. This was the *dybowskii* race. Vulnerable.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus*

Common Cuckoo (Eurasian C) *Cuculus canorus*

Pallas's Sandgrouse ♦ *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* Many excellent sightings of this iconic species!

Rock Dove (R Pigeon) *Columba livia*

Hill Pigeon ♦ (Blue H P) *Columba rupestris* A few sighting on the tour, especially in the south.

Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous T D) *Streptopelia orientalis*

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Brown-cheeked Rail ♦ (Eastern Water R) *Rallus indicus* heard-only

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Eurasian Coot (Common C) *Fulica atra*

Baillon's Crake *Zapornia pusilla* heard-only

White-naped Crane ♦ *Antigone vipio* Excellent looks at Gun Galuut and Bayan Nuur. Vulnerable.

Demoiselle Crane ♦ *Grus virgo* Repeated excellent looks of this graceful species!

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* One was seen at Bayan Nuur by some.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Horned Grebe ♦ (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus* Several breeding plumaged birds. Vulnerable.

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis*

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*

Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola*

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian S P) *Charadrius mongolus* The migrant *mongolus* race was seen at Gun Galuut and Boontsagaan Nuur.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*

Oriental Plover ♦ *Charadrius veredus* Definitely one of the top birds of the tour and we had amazing looks of displaying males! Fantastic!

Little Curlew ♦ *Numenius minutus* Great looks of this rare bird at Gun Galuut.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

Black-tailed Godwit ♦ (Eastern B-t G) *Limosa [limosa] melanuroides* Good numbers were seen at the various wetlands.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Broad-billed Sandpiper ♦ *Calidris falcinellus* Up to 55 were counted at Kholboolj Nuur.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Asian Dowitcher ♦ (Asiatic D) *Limnodromus semipalmatus* Amazing looks of breeding plumaged birds. A total of 28 were logged on the tour.

Swinhoe's Snipe ♦ *Gallinago megala* About seven were seen at Gun Galuut.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Little Gull *Hydrocoloeus minutus*

Pallas's Gull (Great Black-headed G) *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* Up to 55 were counted at Boontsagaan Nuur.

Common Gull (Common G) *Larus canus*

Vega Gull ♦ (Mongolian G) *Larus [vegae] mongolicus* Frequently seen, the usual 'large' gull at wetlands.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons*

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*

White-winged Tern (W-w Black T) *Chlidonias leucopterus*

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*

Black-throated Loon (B-t Diver) *Gavia arctica* Non-leader sighting at Khukh Nuur.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* Fantastic bird, fantastic looks at Yolii Am.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon V) *Gyps himalayensis*

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

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* Many great sightings. Endangered.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

Black Kite (Black-eared K) *Milvus [migrans] lineatus*

Pallas's Fish Eagle ♦ *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* An adult pair gave excellent looks at Boontsagaan Nuur. Endangered.

Upland Buzzard ♦ *Buteo hemilasius* Commonly encountered, a highly variable species.

Eastern Buzzard ♦ (Japanese B) *Buteo [japonicus] japonicus* Just a few seen in forest habitat in the north.

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus* One was seen in the east.

Ural Owl ♦ *Strix uralensis* Great looks of a superb pale individual in forest habitat at night.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dryobates minor*

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Amur Falcon ♦ *Falco amurensis* Just a few seen at the end of the tour in the Ulanbaator area.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco Subbuteo* non-leader

Saker Falcon ♦ (Saker) *Falco cherrug* Several excellent looks of this massive-built falcon. Superb!
Endangered.

Peregrine Falcon (Peregrine) *Falco peregrinus*

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*

Great Grey Shrike ♦ (Steppe G S) *Lanius [excubitor] pallidirostris* A breeding pair was seen near
Khongorin Els.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* We had great looks of the *brandtii* race in Terelj NP.

Azure-winged Magpie (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus* A party of 8 were seen along the Tuul
River. Nominate.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Mongolian Ground Jay (Henderson's GJ) ♦ *Podoces hendersoni* Fantastic looks of this superb
bird!

Red-billed Chough *Pyrhcorax pyrrhcorax*

Daurian Jackdaw ♦ *Coloeus dauuricus* We had many superb sightings throughout.

Rook ♦ (Oriental R) *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator* Repeated good looks in steppe habitat.

Carrion Crow ♦ (Oriental C) *Corvus [corone] orientalis* Regularly seen.

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax*

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

Azure Tit ♦ *Cyanistes cyanus* This lovely bird was seen several times.

Great Tit *Parus major*

White-crowned Penduline Tit ♦ *Remiz coronatus* Excellent looks along the Tuul River.

Bearded Reedling (B Tit) *Panurus biarmicus*

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*

Horned Lark ♦ (Shore L, Mongolian H L) *Eremophila [alpestris] brandti* Very common
throughout the tour.

Mongolian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis* non-leader sighting

Mongolian Lark ♦ *Melanocorypha mongolica* What a fantastic lark species. Many sightings throughout.

Asian Short-toed Lark ♦ *Alaudala cheleensis* Common throughout the tour.

Pale Martin ♦ *Riparia diluta* Regular sightings.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Both *tytleri* and *gutturalis* were regularly seen.

Siberian House Martin ♦ *Delichon lagopodum* Regular sightings of this recently split species.

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Common Chiffchaff (Siberian C) *Phylloscopus [collybita] tristis*

Two-barred Warbler (T-b Greenish W) *Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*

Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*

Paddyfield Warbler ♦ *Acrocephalus agricola* Singing birds were seen at two locations.

Thick-billed Warbler ♦ *Arundinax aedon* One was seen near Bayankhongor and one in Terelj NP.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*

Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*

Asian Desert Warbler ♦ *Curruca nana* Fantastic looks of a pair in desert habitat.

Common Whitethroat *Curruca communis*

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* One was seen at Terelj NP, the very pale *baicalensis* race.

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*

Eurasian Treecreeper (Common T) *Certhia familiaris*

White-cheeked Starling ♦ *Spodiopsar cineraceus* Great looks along the Tuul River.

White's Thrush ♦ *Zoothera aurea* A migrant was seen well at Yolie Am.

Eye-browed Thrush ◊ *Turdus obscurus* Several breeding plumaged birds were seen in a mixed thrush flock along the Tuul River.

Red-throated Thrush ◊ *Turdus ruficollis* Many sightings in forest habitat and a few migrants too.

Dusky Thrush ◊ *Turdus eunomus* Several breeding plumaged birds were seen in a mixed thrush flock along the Tuul River. Also seen at Gun Galuut and Har Us Nuur.

Naumann's Thrush ◊ *Turdus naumanni* Several breeding plumaged birds were seen in a mixed thrush flock along the Tuul River.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope*

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

Eversmann's Redstart ◊ (Rufous-backed R) *Phoenicurus erythronotus* Excellent looks at Khukh Nuur.

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* A few sightings of the *phoenicuroides* race.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureoreus*

Güldenstädt's Redstart ◊ (White-winged R) *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* Great sightings at Khukh Nuur. Beautiful bird!

Common Rock Thrush (Rufous-tailed R T) *Monticola saxatilis* A few were seen at Khukh Nuur.

White-throated Bush Chat ◊ (Hodgson's Bushchat) *Saxicola insignis* Definitely a tour highlight to see a flock of 8 birds feeding in steppe habitat in the snow. Vulnerable.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia) *Petronia petronia*

White-winged Snowfinch (Eurasian S) *Montifringilla nivalis*

Pere David's Snowfinch ◊ *Pyrgilauda davidiana* Regularly encountered in steppe habitat.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Saxaul Sparrow ♦ *Passer ammodendri* Two pairs were seen in saxaul forest in the south.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Altai Accentor ♦ *Prunella himalayana* Distant views of a flock of 15 birds in the wintry, snowy conditions at Khukh Nuur.

Brown Accentor ♦ *Prunella fulvescens* Many great looks in adequate habitat!

Kozlov's Accentor ♦ (Mongolian A) *Prunella koslowi* Fantastic looks of a singing bird in Yolii Am.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis*

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

White Wagtail ♦ (Baikal W) *Motacilla [alba] baicalensis* Commonly seen throughout the tour.

White Wagtail ♦ (Siberian W) *Motacilla [alba] ocularis* A single bird was seen by some at Khukh Nuur.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*

Blyth's Pipit ♦ *Anthus godlewskii* Excellent looks of displaying birds!

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Water Pipit ♦ *Anthus spinoletta* A few were seen at Yolii Am and Khukh Nuur. The *blakistoni* race.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Mongolian Finch ♦ (M Trumpeter F) *Bucanetes mongolicus* Just a few sightings.

Asian Rosy Finch ♦ *Leucosticte arctoa* Many individuals but only distant looks at Khukh Nuur.

Common Rosefinch (Scarlet R) *Carpodacus erythrinus* Several encounters on the tour. It was amazing to see a 'yellow form' male near Orog Nuur.

Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch ♦ *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* Many great looks in Yolii Am.

Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch *Carpodacus sibiricus* Several encounters with this smart-looking bird.

Twite *Linaria flavirostris*

Pine Bunting ♦ *Emberiza leucocephalos* A common breeding bird in forest habitat. Many sightings.

Godlewski's Bunting ♦ *Emberiza godlewskii* A pair was seen very well at Yolii Am.

Meadow Bunting ♦ *Emberiza cioides* Several pairs were seen in Hustai NP.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla*

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

Pallas's Reed Bunting ♦ *Emberiza pallasi* Great looks. Both the nominate and the 'lydiae' race were seen well. The latter is sometimes called 'Mongolian' Reed Bunting.

MAMMALS

Long-eared Hedgehog *Hemiechinus auritus* A total of four were seen in desert habitat.

Daurian Hedgehog *Mesechinus dauuricus* Three were seen in steppe habitat.

Wolf *Canis lupus* A fantastic observation of one individual at Khukh Lake just 30 minutes later as the Wolverine. On the very same slope.

Corsac Fox *Vulpes corsac*

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Wolverine ♦ *Gulo gulo* An absolutely fantastic observation of one at Khukh Nuur. We could watch it for 15 minutes on a mountain slope.

Wild Horse ♦ (introduced) *Equus [ferus] przewalskii* A total of 35 were counted in Hustai NP.

Siberian Roe Deer *Capreolus pygargus*

Wapiti (American Elk) *Cervus canadensis*

Siberian Ibex *Capra sibirica*

Goitered Gazelle (Black-tailed G) *Gazella subgutturosa*

Argali *Ovis ammon*

Mongolian Gazelle ♦ *Procapra gutturosa* Many sightings in the south.

Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus*

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

Alpine Pika ♦ *Ochotona alpina* Four were seen at Khukh Nuur.

Daurian Pika ♦ *Ochotona dauurica* Just one was found in Hustai NP.

Pallas's Pika (Mongolian) *Ochotona pallasii* Commonly seen at Yolii Am.

Mongolian Marmot *Marmota sibirica*

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*

Alashan Ground Squirrel ♦ (A Souslik) *Spermophilus alashanicus* Best looks were at Yolii Am.

Pallid Ground Squirrel ◊ (P Souslik) *Spermophilus pallidicauda* A few were seen. Recently split from *S. erythrogegens* and now near-endemic to Mongolia.

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel (L-T Souslik) *Urocitellus undulatus*

Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*

Hairy-footed Jerboa ◊ (Hairy-footed J) *Dipus sagitta* A few were seen near Khongorin Els.

Mongolian Mountain Vole *Alticola semicanus*

Gobi Altai Mountain Vole ◊ *Alticola barakshin* Excellent views at Yolii Am.

Brandt's Vole *Lasiopodomys brandtii*

Campbell's Desert Hamster ◊ *Phodopus campbelli* Three were seen at Har Us Nuur and one at Hustai NP.

Central Midday Jird ◊ (M-d Gerbil) *Meriones meridianus* It was identified three times on the tour.

Mongolian Jird ◊ (M Gerbil) *Meriones unguiculatus* Regularly encountered. Not easy to see the dark claws!

REPTILES

Tuvan Toed-headed Agama *Phrynocephalus versicolor*

Gobi Racerunner *Eremias przewalskii*

Multi-ocellated Racerunner *Eremias multiocellata*

Mongolian Racerunner *Eremias argus*