Snow Leopards & Wildlife of Mongolia Tour Report 2024

12 / 20 September – 3 October 2024

by Mark Beaman

Our first 'Snow Leopards & Wildlife' tour to Mongolia was a resounding success. Among the 27 mammals recorded we had no fewer than eight sightings of Pallas's Cat (mostly very close), three Snow Leopard sightings and 20 Wild Camels in total! The latter is now one of the rarest mammals in the Old World. Not to mention our encounters with Siberian Ibex, Argali, the strange Saiga, 'Siberian' Elk, Kulan (or Asiatic Wild Ass), Przevalski's Horse, Corsac Fox, Long-eared Hedgehog and endearing pikas and jerboas.

Birdlife was more diverse and our total of 198 species was more than respectable. Major specialities included Swan Goose, Altai Snowcock, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Siberian and White-naped Cranes, Relict Gull, Mongolian (or Henderson's) Ground Jay, Daurian Jackdaw, Mongolian Short-toed and Mongolian Larks, Black-throated, Red-throated, Dusky and Naumann's Thrushes, Eversmann's (or Rufous-backed) and Güldenstädt's (or White-winged) Redstarts, Pere David's Snowfinch, Saxaul Sparrow, Siberian and Altai Accentors, Blyth's Pipit and Pine, Yellow-browed, Rustic and Pallas's Reed Buntings.

Before we headed off in search of Wild Camels in the Gobi, some of us had the chance to watch beautiful Azure Tits and Azure-winged Magpies close to Ulaanbaatar. Our journey took us first across the vast steppelands of central Mongolia, to the remote town of Bayankhongor. The first of many Cinereous Vultures, Mongolian Larks and Asian Short-toed Larks featured on the way and we also came across large flocks of Demoiselle Cranes and Eurasian Spoonbills, Swan Geese and some Eurasian Hobbies that initially had us hoping they were lingering Amur Falcons. Bayankhongor itself did produce the hoped-for Amur Falcon, an adult female that had not yet left for Africa, and an equally late Lesser Kestrel, as well as our first Red-throated Thrushes.

It was a very long journey from the capital to the remote Great Gobi National Park, situated on the Chinese border with southwestern Mongolia. From the rolling steppes, we climbed up into the Gobi Altai range and then descended into the much flatter landscapes of the Gobi Desert, where the arid plains were punctuated by low, eroded hills and occasional dramatic inselbergs. In some places, the landscape was almost black owing to the numerous black stones, presumably eroded basalt. Eventually, we reached our campsite among some of the few trees in the area.

The ranger who guided us inside the national park told us he was expecting to find Wild Camels about an hour and a half away and he was true to his word. Soon after frightening a small herd of Kulan (or Asiatic Wild Asses) by our sudden appearance, we stopped at a low hill with a good all-round view. A Wild Camel was sighted not that far away, as were some more Kulan, but getting there by 4x4s was another matter. After a roundabout journey we climbed a second hill and… nothing! No, there it was, a superb Wild Camel just coming out from behind a sandy bank and staring right at us just 100m or so away!

We had been warned that Wild Camels are really wary (no doubt from the hunting pressure they have faced in the past in China and perhaps in Mongolia as well), but this one seemed pretty unconcerned and slowly made its way past us before heading off into the hillock and dune country to the west. Numerous photographs were taken and there were a lot of smiles all around. How fortunate to see our target on the first day in Great Gobi! It is only relatively recently that genetic studies have shown beyond doubt that Wild Camels are not closely related to the domesticated Bactrian Camel, but rather a completely different species. The two camels diverged from a common ancestor as far back as 750,000 years ago! Indeed, the appearance of the Wild Camel is very different from the Bactrian with much smaller, thinner humps, a different colouration, much less hair and a differently shaped head. If anything they look more like a two-humped version of a Dromedary.

After our early success, we penetrated deeper into the park where we found another 19 Wild Camels scattered across the landscape. Our ranger-guide was reluctant to go too close with the vehicles for fear of making them run and possibly stress or even injure themselves, so we left them in peace and turned to other kinds of quarry.

Birdlife in the park was sparse but included our first Mongolian (or Henderson's) Ground Jay, some perky little Desert Warblers, 'Steppe' Grey Shrike, a Griffon Vulture and Saker Falcon.

Closer to the park headquarters, we searched bushy areas and some small wet areas for migrants and residents, turning up Saxaul Sparrow, Isabelline Shrike and Masked Wagtail as well as such obvious migrants as Black-throated Thrush, Citrine Wagtail, Blyth's Pipit, Little Bunting and White-winged Tern. Night driving failed to produce the hoped-for Long-eared Jerboa (perhaps it was too late in the season and hibernation had started) but Hairy-footed Jerboa was seen and photographed, as was the delightful Long-eared Hedgehog during a night walk near camp. Fantastic Plate-tailed Geckos were everywhere, even inside the camp's dining tent!

As we had gained some time through our good luck with the Wild Camels, we were able to make a detour and visit the bird-rich wetland of Boon Tsagaan Nuur, a well-known venue during spring birding tours to Mongolia. Here, we were delighted to find our first Relict Gull of the tour, as well as Bar-headed Goose, Pacific Golden Plover, Pallas's Gull, the endangered Dalmatian Pelican and another migrant Black-throated Thrush. A huge gathering of Great Cormorants numbered at least 3,000 individuals.

The Sharga Saiga Reserve was our next port of call and indeed it was not difficult to find these strange antelopes among the arid plains and low hills. But were they wary! The first two we encountered sped off immediately after they spotted our vehicles and the subsequent groups we found were almost as shy. Our mammal guide assured us that they would be less wary further north, so we hoped that would prove to be the case. The avian highlight at Sharga was the gathering of 700 Pallas's Sandgrouse that came to drink at the local stream.

Next, we continued to remote Ikhes Nuur, adjacent to the town of Darvi. Unusually high winds in a very exposed place made camping tricky, so we settled for a night in a very basic guesthouse in the town (beds and electricity but no toilets, such is rural Mongolia!). It was well worth coming, however, as the lake turned up an impressive flock of 70 Red-necked Phalaropes, which we could watch and photograph at very close range, and even more importantly five more Relict Gulls! This endangered species has very few known breeding sites in Kazakhstan, north China and Mongolia (Ikhes is one) and winters mainly along the northeast coast of China.

Finally, it was time to head for Khovd, the only city in Western Mongolia and a small one at that. It was wonderful to spend a night in a proper hotel, with hot showers and comfortable beds, as we awaited the arrival of those arriving for the main tour. A final stop at the vast Khar Us Nuur produced 16 White-headed Ducks and a Tundra Bean Goose among other additions, while the nearby steppe turned up two much less wary Saigas, thank goodness!

We had time to explore the vicinity of Khovd in the morning. Migrants were few although they did include a young Eurasian Goshawk, a Long-eared Owl, lots of Hume's Leaf Warblers, a few Yellow-browed Warblers, a Dark-sided Flycatcher, a female Eurasian Chaffinch and the first of many Evermann's (or Rufous-backed) Redstarts. The flight from Ulaanbaatar eventually arrived and the full group headed for the Jargalant Mountains, a small range to the southeast of Khovd, famous for its Snow Leopards.

Owing to the flight delay we arrived at our 'ger camp' at the foot of the mountains at dusk and were welcomed by our smiling, happy team who showed us to our personal gers (yurts) equipped with beds, a stove and simple washing facilities. We also found there was a warm and comfortable 'dining ger', a 'shower ger' and two very clean toilets in a tin hut.

Over the following six days, we mostly followed a similar routine. After an early breakfast, we drove into the mountains to a watchpoint (no walking required) and scanned for all or much of the day for Snow Leopards with the assistance of our hard-working trackers. Some of the trackers spent the entire day hiking in the mountains trying to locate the elusive 'Grey Ghost of the Mountains' as the Snow Leopard has been referred to. Well, the Jargalant, like all the places Snow Leopards survive, is a vast landscape, and unless one is lucky enough to visit when a mother with cubs has been located and sticking to a restricted area, it is likely that sightings will be distant (telescope range) and most likely not prolonged. September is a relatively mild time of year to visit, nothing like winter, but if you want a good chance of a close encounter, then braving the winter cold in either Ladakh or Mongolia is usually necessary as this is when the heavy snow concentrates them in the valley bottoms and lower slopes.

Our first day drew a blank so we decided to try a different watchpoint (at around 2500m or around 8200ft) the following day, and this time we scored! A Snow Leopard was spotted walking along the ridgeline on the other side of the valley from us but then it vanished, only to reappear a bit later among some very extensive and complicated crags opposite us! When it reappeared there was a bit of a panic, but eventually, I managed to get the scope on the creature as it slowly made its way among the crags and snow patches for about 20 minutes. Hallelujah! We had seen the Snow Leopoard and it was time for celebration all round!

Over the following days, we had two more sightings. One frustratingly brief as the leopard soon disappeared into a rocky gulley and another at sunset with the leopard's breast and face glowing in the last of the sun's rays, albeit distantly.

Of course, there were many other mammals and birds to enjoy during our visit to the Jargalant range. We enjoyed numerous sightings of Siberian (or Asiatic) Ibexes, some pretty close, including a very fine old male and its younger companion that raced away suddenly after we had watched them for an hour. Had they seen, or thought they had seen a Grey Ghost?!

A small herd of Argali included a magnificent ram and we had some encounters with Siberian (or Mongolian) Marmots, Red Foxes and, after dark, both Siberian and Hairy-footed Jerboas. In the eroded landscapes beyond the mountains, we found more Saigas, including a relatively approachable male.

The local birdlife included Altai Snowcock (some of them watched flying in formation from one area of crags to another), Bearded Vulture, Golden Eagle, Hill Pigeon, Mongolian Ground Jay and White-winged Snowfinch and, for those able to walk up to higher levels, Altai Accentor and the striking Güldenstädt's (or White-winged) Snowfinch. A couple of bouts of cloud and rain/snow brought both local breeding species and passing migrants down into the valley bottoms and these included Two-barred and Dusky Warblers, numerous Eversmann's Redstarts, Brown and Siberian Accentors (no fewer than 40 of the latter!) and Godlewski's and Yellow-browed Buntings.

It was sad to leave the Jargalant behind and in particular our very hard-working team. We have an excellent reputation for giving generous gratuities to those who work hard for our guests and this time was no exception. They were very happy indeed and it was shocking to learn that the previous wildlife tour leader had given them a derisory amount. How can you do that to poorly paid people who work 15 or more hours a day for you?

From Khovd we flew back to Ulaanbaatar and then drove westwards to Hustai National Park. We were not blessed with good weather, quite the reverse as it was all low cloud, mist and sleet, but we enjoyed some nice encounters with the reintroduced Przevalski's Horses. It was also fascinating to see and hear the 'Siberian' form of the Elk (or Wapiti). Whether you think the Red Deer of western Eurasia is conspecific or not, it was hard to imagine that deer with such weird, almost eerie, rutting squeals and moans, or such narrow antler tines, were the same species. They seem much more akin to the North American Elk.

As we left the area we came across a large bunting flock in a weedy area that included at least 80 Pallas's Reed Buntings and at least one each of Pine and Rustic Buntings. Nearer to Ulaanbaatar, and before the city's traffic jams started, we came across a large number of Common and Demoiselle Cranes.

Heading eastwards the next morning, we just had to make a stop at the massive Ghengis (Chinggis) Khan statue not far outside Ulaanbaatar. It is both hideous and imposing at the same time. Somehow I have the feeling it is a gift from the People's Republic of China, or at least Chinese-inspired. Those Mongol warriors at the entrance gate do seem to be modelled on the Terracotta Warriors...

It was set to be a long journey to the Khalzan steppe in eastern Mongolia, so we only had time for one stop at the Gun Galuut wetlands. I was not expecting much new apart from White-naped Cranes, so arriving and immediately sighting four beautiful adult Siberian Cranes came as a big surprise! What a wonderful bonus! We used the vehicles as mobile hides and managed to get relatively close to the cranes, allowing for great views and photographs. Not far away were five beautiful White-naped Cranes while some Taiga Bean Geese flew past. The steppe in the surrounding area attracted numerous Daurian Jackdaws.

We kept on heading east and heard that it was snowing heavily up ahead. Soon we were driving through a winter landscape of snow-covered hills and plains and gradually the amount of snow on the road increased and increased until we were making slow progress, although much better progress than the many saloon cars and trucks already stuck! Eventually, it was decided that taking the direct (dirt road) route to Khalzan in the gathering dark would be way too risky, so we pressed on along the tarred road to the town of Baruun-Urt, where we had made a hotel booking. Arriving in the town, it was pitch black. Yes, the power had failed because of the unexpected snow. For the first hour or so we made our way around the hotel with our headlamps, unable to lock our electronic room doors and with a bowl of noodles the only food in prospect. Luckily the power was restored and a decent dinner appeared, although the hot water supply never recovered!

The next morning the town was full of Little Buntings and Pallas's Leaf Warblers brought down by the snow, as well as other migrants like Pine Buntings, Red-flanked Bluetails and Naumann's Thrushes. After breakfast, we headed south towards Khalzan, following a very wet and muddy track out into the vast steppe.

As we neared Khalzan the news came through that the trackers had located a Pallas's Cat hunting in the open. Rather than head for the ger camp, we detoured straight away, praying the cat would remain. Mercifully it did just that and when we arrived we were able to get close to it as it crouched amongst the herbage 'scowling' at us (Pallas's Cats cats are surely the true 'Grumpy Cats'). Eventually, it ran off, turning from time to time to check that we were not in pursuit. A great start to our time in the Eastern Steppe.

Soon we were settling into our second 'ger camp' this time including a few chalets as well as gers. The compound was alive with Brandt's Voles – hundreds of these little critters must have been in residence just in this relatively small area, so many that even the local Upland Buzzards were constantly hunting overhead. Beyond the compound fence, Mongolian Gerbils preferred the more sandy areas. Migrants liked the small trees planted here around the camp's periphery and over the coming days, we recorded numerous migrants including Dusky Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Brambling and Pine, Little and Black-faced Buntings.

Much of our time was spent searching for Pallas's Cats and we enjoyed no fewer than eight encounters in total. Some were out in the open (including one spotlighted at night) while some were sleeping in the 'day lairs' in the rocks, most of which our trackers knew well. It was astonishing to be able to look at a Pallas's Cat just a metre away!

Our best encounter was with a cat found out in the open while hunting. It was a very heavy individual that had put on a lot of weight before winter, no doubt thanks to the huge number of rodents in the area. As a result, it was unable to run fast and allowed us to get close and get some face-on views and photographs of it standing and bounding along. Fantastic!

As well as the wonderful scowling cats, there were plenty of other creatures to enjoy. The density of raptors was amazing, especially Upland Buzzards and Steppe Eagles but also Hen Harriers and Saker Falcons. At one point we encountered a huge Eurasian Eagle-Owl and other good finds included several sightings of Pere David's Snowfinch and migrant flocks of Oriental Greenfinches and Pine Buntings. Corsac Foxes were common but shy and a herd of 50 Mongolian Gazelles did not come close to us.

After sad farewells to yet another wonderful team of camp staff and trackers (the latter stoically spending all day out in the field for us come rain or snow!), our journey back to Ulaanbaatar was uneventful as most of the snow had melted. (Interestingly, this had been the heaviest early autumn snowfall recorded in eastern Mongolia in over 30 years!)

Some of us with no flight possible for a day or more had the chance to see a few extra birds around the city, notably including Hazel Grouse, Northern (or Spotted) Nutcracker and Siberian Tit (or Grey-headed Chickadee).

It had been a truly great adventure and one that will long live in our memories.

TOP CREATURES OF THE MAIN TOUR

1st PALLAS'S CAT

2nd SNOW LEOPARD

3rd SIBERIAN CRANE

4th SIBERIAN ACCENTOR

5th PRZEVALSKI'S HORSE

TOP CREATURES OF THE WILD CAMEL EXTENSION

1st WILD CAMEL

2nd SAIGA

3rd KULAN (ASIATIC WILD ASS)

4th LONG-EARED HEDGEHOG

5th= RELICT GULL

5th= PLATE-TAILED GECKO

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' for some other reason.

MAMMALS

(27 species recorded)

Long-eared Hedgehog ***Hemiechinus auritus*** One at Great Gobi.

Tolai Hare ***Lepus tolai*** Fairly common in the Jargalant range and small numbers at Great Gobi.

Pallas's (or Mongolian) Pika ◊ ***Ochotona pallasi*** Fairly common in the Jargalant range. Also seen in the Gobi Altai and north of Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Siberian (or Mongolian) Marmot ◊ ***Marmota sibirica*** Small numbers in the Gobi Altai and in the Jargalant range. Most were already hibernating.

Eurasian Red Squirrel ***Sciurus vulgaris*** Small numbers in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel ***Spermophilus undulatus*** One in the Jargalant range.

Pallid Ground Squirrel ◊ ***Spermophilus pallidicauda*** Six north of Boon Tsagaan Nuur and one en route to Khovd.

Alashan Ground Squirrel ◊ ***Spermophilus alashanicus*** One in the Gobi Altai on the way to Great Gobi.

False (or Steppe) Zokor ***Myospalax aspalax*** Their mole-like soil mounds were observed in the Jargalant range.

Brandt's Vole ***Lasiopodomys brandtii*** Extraordinarily common in the Khalzan steppe. Up to 200 in a day.

Mongolian Gerbil (Mongolian Clawed Jird) ***Meriones unguiculatus*** Common in the Khalzan steppe. Up to 20 in a day. Also one near Khovd.

Siberian Jerboa ◊ ***Allactaga sibirica*** Fairly common in the lower reaches of the Jargalant range.

Hairy-footed (or Northern Three-toed) Jerboa ***Dipus sagitta*** Common in the lower reaches of the Jargalant range. Also one at Great Gobi.

Corsac Fox ◊ ***Vulpes corsac*** Fairly common in the Khalzan steppe. Also one near Baruun-Urt.

Red Fox ***Vulpes vulpes*** Small numbers at Great Gobi, the Jargalant range and the Khalzan steppe.

Pallas's Cat (Manul) ◊ ***Otocolobus manul*** A total of eight encounters in the Khalzan steppe! Some really really close!

Snow Leopard ◊ ***Uncia uncia*** Three encounters in the Jargalant range. One quite long, one very brief. All distant as is to be expected outside winter.

Mongolian Wild Ass (or Kulan) ◊ ***Equus hemionus*** A total of 14 at Great Gobi.

Wild Horse ◊ [Przewalski's Horse or Takhi] ***Equus [ferus] przewalskii*** Common at Hustai, with up to 22 each day.

Siberian Roe Deer ***Capreolus pygargus*** One heard near Ulaanbaatar.

Elk (Wapiti) ◊ ***Cervus elaphus*** 40 at Hustai. There is ongoing controversy as to whether or not the Red Deer of western Eurasia (and also the Central Asian/West Himalayan forms) should be treated as conspecific with *C. elaphus*, but after hearing the weird squeals of the rutting males at Hustai and noting the different antler structure of the East Asian/Siberian form (thank you for pointing that out Robert), it is clearly more akin to the Elk/Wapiti of North America than the European Red Deer.

Goitered (or Black-tailed) Gazelle ***Gazella subgutturosa*** Two singles at Great Gobi and four near the Jargalant range.

Mongolian Gazelle ◊ ***Procapra gutturosa*** A herd of 50 in the Khalzan steppe.

Saiga ◊ ***Saiga tartarica*** Up to 12 each day in the Sharga area, two near Khar Us Nuur and 12 near the Jargalant range. Western Mongolia is inhabited by the form *mongolica*.

Siberian (or Asiatic) Ibex ***Capra sibirica*** Fairly common in the Jargalant range. Up to 14 in a day.

Argali ◊ ***Ovis ammon*** A herd of seven in the Jargalant range.

Wild Camel ◊ ***Camelus ferus*** A total of 20 in Great Gobi. As mentioned above, recent genetic studies have shown without doubt that *C. ferus* is not closely related to the domesticated Bactrian Camel *C. bactrianus*. The two species diverged from a common ancestor as far back as 750,000 years ago!

BIRDS

(198 species recorded, including a small number seen around Ulaanbaatar by those with extra time owing to the very limited flight schedules into and out of the city)

Bar-headed Goose ***Anser indicus*** One at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Greylag Goose ***Anser anser*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day.

Swan Goose ◊ ***Anser cygnoides*** Widespread. Up to 40 in a day.

Taiga Bean Goose ◊ ***Anser fabalis*** 10 at Gun Galuut.

Tundra Bean Goose ◊ ***Anser serrirostris*** 1 at Khar Us Nuur.

Whooper Swan ***Cygnus cygnus*** Widespread. Up to 34 in a day. 10 swans flying southeast near Ulaanbaatar in early October were of this species or the following.

Tundra Swan ◊ [Bewick's Swan] ***Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii*** See preceding species.

Common Shelduck ***Tadorna tadorna*** Widespread. Up to 170 in a day.

Ruddy Shelduck ***Tadorna ferruginea*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day.

Garganey ***Spatula querquedula*** Two near Ulaanbaatar and two at Great Gobi.

Northern Shoveler ***Spatula clypeata*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day.

Gadwall ***Mareca strepera*** Widespread. Up to 200 in a day.

Eurasian Wigeon ***Mareca penelope*** Widespread. Up to 500 in a day.

Eastern (or Chinese) Spot-billed Duck ***Anas zonorhyncha*** 30 near Ulaanbaatar and one at Great Gobi.

Mallard ***Anas platyrhynchos*** Widespread. Up to 200 in a day.

Northern Pintail ***Anas acuta*** Widespread. Up to 500 in a day.

Eurasian Teal ***Anas crecca*** Widespread. Up to 1000+ in a day.

Red-crested Pochard ***Netta rufina*** 40 at Khar Us Nuur.

Common Pochard ***Aythya ferina*** Scattered records. Up to 15 in a day.

Ferruginous Duck ***Aythya nyroca*** Four at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Tufted Duck ***Aythya fuligula*** Scattered records. Up to 30 in a day.

Common Goldeneye ***Bucephala clangula*** Scattered records. Up to 100 in a day.

Red-breasted Merganser ***Mergus serrator*** A male at Great Gobi.

White-headed Duck ***Oxyura leucocephala*** 16 at Khar Us Nuur.

Hazel Grouse ◊ ***Tetrastes bonasia*** One near Ulaanbaatar.

Altai Snowcock ◊ ***Tetraogallus altaicus*** Up to 19 in a day in the Jargalant range.

Chukar Partridge ***Alectoris chukar*** Up to 50 in a day at the Jargalant range. In addition, 12 near Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

European Nightjar Caprimulgus europaeus One at Great Gobi. The form here is *plumipes.*

Pallas's Sandgrouse ◊ ***Syrrhaptes paradoxus*** 700 coming to drink in the Sharga area.

Rock Dove (Rock Pigeon) ***Columba livia*** Widespread. Up to 300 in a day. In Mongolia the entire population is feral.

Hill Pigeon ◊ ***Columba rupestris*** Fairly widespread in central and western regions. Up to 60 in a day.

Oriental (or Rufous) Turtle Dove ***Streptopelia orientalis*** One seen on two days at Great Gobi. Perhaps the same individual.

Eurasian Collared Dove ***Streptopelia decaocto*** Observed at Bayankhongor and at Great Gobi. Up to 15 in a day.

Laughing Dove ***Spilopelia senegalensis*** One seen hanging around a building near Ulaanbaatar was a surprise. Was this a vagrant or an escape?

Eurasian (or Common) Coot ***Fulica atra*** Fairly widespread. Up to 230 in a day.

Siberian Crane ◊ ***Leucogeranus leucogeranus*** A fantastic find of four beautiful adults at Gun Galuut!

White-naped Crane ◊ ***Antigone vipio*** A total of five at Gun Galuut. A pair plus a pair with a young bird.

Demoiselle Crane ◊ ***Grus virgo*** Two records of flocks of 60 near Ulaanbaatar.

Common Crane ***Grus grus*** Nine at Boon Tsagaan Nuur, 11 en route to Khovd and 150 near Ulaanbaatar.

Great Crested Grebe ***Podiceps cristatus*** Fairly widespread. Up to 30 in a day.

Black-necked (or Eared) Grebe ***Podiceps nigricollis*** Two singles at Khar Us Nuur.

Black-winged Stilt ***Himantopus himantopus*** Two at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and one at Ikhes Nuur.

Pied Avocet ***Recurvirostra avosetta*** Scattered records. Up to 300 in a day.

Pacific Golden Plover ***Pluvialis fulva*** 30 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and up to 25 at Ikhes Nuur.

Grey (or Black-bellied) Ploiver ***Pluvialis squatarola*** Two at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and three at Gun Galuut.

Little Ringed Plover ***Charadrius dubius*** One on the way to Great Gobi.

Northern Lapwing ***Vanellus vanellus*** Widespread. Up to 30 in a day.

Kentish Plover ***Anarhynchus alexandrinus*** 100 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and up to 6 at Ikhes Nuur.

Eurasian Curlew ***Numenius arquata*** 10 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Black-tailed Godwit ◊ [Eastern Black-tailed Godwit] ***Limosa [limosa] melanuroides*** 20 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and one at Chinggis.

Pin-tailed (or Pintail) Snipe ***Gallinago stenura*** One near Ulaanbaatar.

Common Snipe ***Gallinago gallinago*** Two singles at Great Gobi and one at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Red-necked Phalarope ***Phalaropus lobatus*** An impressive gathering of 70 at Ikhes Nuur and 15 at Tsagaan Nuur.

Common Sandpiper ***Actitis hypoleucos*** Two at Great Gobi.

Green Sandpiper ***Tringa ochropus*** Two near Ulaanbaatar, eight at Great Gobi and up to two at Chinggis.

Wood Sandpiper ***Tringa glareola*** Up to 10 at Great Gobi and five at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Common Redshank ***Tringa totanus*** Fairly widespread. Up to seven in a day.

Spotted Redshank ***Tringa erythropus*** Scattered records. Up to 30 in a day.

Ruff ***Calidris pugnax*** Six at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Curlew Sandpiper ***Calidris ferruginea*** 10 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Temminck's Stint ***Calidris temminckii*** Fairly widespread. Up to 15 in a day.

Sanderling ***Calidris alba*** One at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Dunlin ***Calidris alpina*** Six at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and up to 10 at Ikhes Nuur.

Little Stint ***Calidris minuta*** Scattered records. Up to 30 in a day.

Caspian Tern ***Hydroprogne caspia*** 20 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

White-winged (or White-winged Black) Tern ***Chlidonias leucopterus*** One on two days at Great Gobi was likely the same individual. Also two at Ikhes Nuur.

Common Tern ***Sterna hirundo*** One at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Black-headed Gull ***Chroicocephalus ridibundus*** Widespread. Up to 500 in a day.

Pallas's (or Great Black-headed) Gull ◊ ***Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*** 15 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Relict Gull ◊ ***Ichthyaetus relictus*** One first-winter at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and five at Ikhes Nuur.

Common Gull ***Larus canus*** Six at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Mongolian Gull ◊ ***Larus mongolicus*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day.

Great Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax carbo*** Widespread. Up to 150 in a day apart from an amazing 3000 at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Eurasian Spoonbill ***Platalea leucorodia*** Scattered records. Up to 400 in a day.

Great Egret ***Ardea alba*** Widespread. Up to 115 in a day.

Grey Heron ***Ardea cinerea*** Widespread. Up to 40 in a day.

Dalmatian Pelican ◊ ***Pelecanus crispus*** Six at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Osprey ***Pandion haliaetus*** One at Hustai.

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) ***Gypaetus barbatus*** Fairly common in the Jargalant range. Also one at Hustai.

Crested (or Oriental) Honey Buzzard ***Pernis ptilorhynchus*** One near Khovd.

Griffon (or Eurasian Griffon) Vulture ***Gyps fulvus*** One in Great Gobi.

Cinereous (or Eurasian Black) Vulture ***Aegypius monachus*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day! Mongolia must now hold a high percentage of the surviving population!

Booted Eagle ***Hieraaetus pennatus*** A dark morph migrating south over the Jargalant range.

Steppe Eagle ***Aquila nipalensis*** Widespread. Up to 60 in a day. It was interesting to see how late these eastern birds stay before migrating, no doubt owing to the abundance of non-hibernating rodents.

Golden Eagle ***Aquila chrysaetos*** Fairly common in the Jargalant range. Also a first-year in the Khalzan steppe.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk ***Accipiter nisus*** Fairly widespread and fairly common, mostly on migration.

Northern Goshawk ***Accipiter gentilis*** One on migration near Khovd and one near Ulaanbaatar.

Western Marsh Harrier ***Circus aeruginosus*** Two singles at Khar Us Nuur.

Hen Harrier ***Circus cyaneus*** Common in the Khalzan steppe. Scattered records elsewhere.

Black Kite [Black-eared Kite] ***Milvus [migrans] lineatus*** Widespread and numerous initially, with up to 300 in a day, but none after 20 September.

Upland Buzzard ◊ ***Buteo hemilasius*** Widespread. Up to 80 in a day.

Eastern (or Japanese) Buzzard ◊ ***Buteo japonicus*** One at Baruun-Urt and two singles in the Khalzan steppe.

Little Owl ***Athene noctua*** One at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Long-eared Owl ***Asio otus*** Singles near Khovd and at Baruun-Urt.

Short-eared Owl ***Asio flammeus*** One at Baruun-Urt and one in the Khalzan steppe.

Eurasian Eagle-Owl ***Bubo bubo*** One in the Khalzan steppe.

Eurasian Hoopoe ***Upupa epops*** One at Great Gobi.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker ◊ ***Picoides tridactylus*** Two near Ulaanbaatar.

Great Spotted Woodpecker ***Dendrocopos major*** Common near Ulaanbaatar.

Black Woodpecker ***Dryocopus martius*** A male near Ulaanbaatar.

Grey-headed Woodpecker ***Picus canus*** Two near Ulaanbaatar.

Lesser Kestrel ***Falco naumanni*** An adult female at Bayankhongor.

Common Kestrel ***Falco tinnunculus*** Widespread and not uncommon.

Amur Falcon ◊ ***Falco amurensis*** An adult female at Bayankhongor.

Eurasian Hobby ***Falco subbuteo*** Two on the way to Bayankhongor and up to three daily at Great Gobi.

Saker Falcon ◊ ***Falco cherrug*** Widespread and not uncommon. It was a relief to see that they are still hanging on in Mongolia given the desperate situation further west owing to smuggling for the insatiable Gulf Arab falconry trade!

Great Grey Shrike ◊ [Steppe Grey Shrike] ***Lanius [excubitor] pallidirostris*** One at Great Gobi and two at Ikhes Nuur.

Isabelline Shrike ***Lanius isabellinus*** Scattered records from the west.

Eurasian Jay ***Garrulus glandarius*** Common near Ulaanbaatar.

Azure-winged (or Asian Azure-winged) Magpie ***Cyanopica cyanus*** 20 in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Eurasian Magpie ***Pica pica*** Widespread. Up to 45 in a day.

Mongolian (or Henderson's) Ground Jay ◊ ***Podoces hendersoni*** Three in Great Gobi and surroundings and one near the Jargalant range.

Northern (or Spotted or Eurasian) Nutcracker ***Nucifraga caryocatactes*** Common near Ulaanbaatar.

Red-billed Chough ***Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*** Widespread. Up to 80 in a day.

Daurian Jackdaw ◊ ***Coloeus dauuricus*** 300 heading east from Ulaanbaatar and four in the Khalzan steppe.

Rook ◊ [Oriental Rook] ***Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator*** Up to 100 in a day in the wider Ulaanbaatar region.

Carrion Crow ◊ [Oriental Crow] ***Corvus [corone] orientalis*** Common in the Ulaanbaatar region, around Khovd and at Hustai.

Northern (or Common) Raven ***Corvus corax*** Widespread. Up to 40 in a day.

Coal Tit ***Periparus ater*** Common in the Ulaanbaatar area and one near Khovd.

Siberian Tit (Grey-headed Chickadee) ◊ ***Poecile cinctus*** Two near Ulaanbaatar.

Marsh Tit ***Poecile palustris*** Small numbers in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Willow Tit ***Poecile montanus*** Common in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Azure Tit ◊ ***Cyanistes cyanus*** Common in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Great Tit ***Parus major*** Fairly common in the Ulaanbaatar area.

Eurasian Skylark ***Alauda arvensis*** Numerous as we headed east from Ulaanbaatar and in the Khalzan steppe. Up to 2000 in a day.

Crested Lark ***Galerida cristata*** Up to four each day at Great Gobi.

Horned Lark ◊ ***Eremophila alpestris*** Widespread. Often very common with up to 500 in a day. The form in Mongolia is *brandti*.

Mongolian Short-toed Lark ***Calandrella dukhunensis*** Up to 20 in a day in the Khalzan steppe.

Mongolian Lark ◊ ***Melanocorypha mongolica*** 50 as we headed for Bayankhongor, but much more numerous and widespread east of Ulaanbaatar as far as the Khalzan steppe, with up to 200 in a day.

Asian Short-toed Lark ◊ ***Alaudala cheleensis*** Widespread. Up to 70 in a day. Not observed in the Jargalant surrounds.

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) ***Riparia riparia*** Scattered records. Up to 30 in a day.

Eurasian Crag Martin ***Ptyonoprogne rupestris*** Three in the Jargalant range.

Barn Swallow ***Hirundo rustica*** Widespread until late September. Up to 60 in a day.

Hume's Leaf Warbler ***Phylloscopus humei*** Recorded in the Gobi Altai, in the Khovd area and in the Jargalant range. Up to 30 in a day.

Yellow-browed Warbler ***Phylloscopus inornatus*** Scattered records of up to 8 of these migrants.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler ***Phylloscopus proregulus*** One at Hustai, 100 in a migrant 'fall' at Barruun-Urt and small numbers in the Khalzan steppe.

Dusky Warbler ***Phylloscopus fuscatus*** Single migrants in the Jargalant range and at Baruun-Urt.

Common Chiffchaff [Siberian Chiffchaff] ***Phylloscopus [collybita] tristis*** Up to six daily in the Jargalant range.

Two-barred (or Two-barred Greenish) Warbler ***Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus*** Two migrants in the Jargalant range.

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler ***Helopsaltes certhiola*** A migrant was seen in the Khalzan steppe.

Lesser Whitethroat ***Curruca curruca*** Scattered records of one or two migrants of the form *blythi.*

Lesser Whitethroat [Hume's Whitethroat] ***Curruca [curruca] althaea*** One in the Gobi Altai appeared to be on migration.

Asian Desert Warbler ◊ ***Curruca nana*** Three at Great Gobi.

Eurasian Nuthatch ***Sitta europaea*** Common near Ulaanbaatar.

Eurasian Treecreeper ***Certhia familiaris*** Two singles near Ulaanbaatar.

Common (or European) Starling ***Sturnus vulgaris*** Scattered records of up to 80.

Mistle Thrush ***Turdus viscivorus*** Up to four in the Jargalant range.

Black-throated Thrush ◊ ***Turdus atrogularis*** Single males at Great Gobi, Boon Tsagaan Nuur and near Ulaanbaatar.

Red-throated Thrush ◊ ***Turdus ruficollis*** Fairly widespread. Up to 12 in a day.

Dusky Thrush ◊ ***Turdus eunomus*** A total of four of these late migrants in the Khalzan steppe and one near Ulaanbaatar.

Naumann's Thrush ◊ ***Turdus naumanni*** Two of these late migrants at Baruun-Urt and two singles in the Khalzan steppe.

Dark-sided Flycatcher ***Muscicapa sibirica*** One near Khovd.

Siberian Rubythroat ***Calliope calliope*** A male in the Khalzan steppe looked rather out of place.

Red-flanked Bluetail ***Tarsiger cyanurus*** 20 in a migrant 'fall' at Baruun-Urt, one at Chinggis and two in the Khalzan steppe.

Taiga (or Red-throated) Flycatcher ***Ficedula albicilla*** One in the Ulaanbaatar area and one at Bayankhongor.

Eversmann's (or Rufous-backed) Redstart ◊ ***Phoenicurus erythronotus*** Positively common in the Jargalant range with up to 60 in a day as the weather concentrated them in the valleys. Also seen near Khovd.

Black Redstart ***Phoenicurus ochruros*** Fairly widespread. Most common in the Jargalant range where up to 30 in a day.

Common Redstart ***Phoenicurus phoenicurus*** Two in the Gobi Altai, one near Khovd and a sudden fall of 20 in the Jargalant after bad weather overnight.

Daurian Redstart ***Phoenicurus auroreus*** Small numbers around Ulaanbaatar and at Hustai but common in the east with up to 20 in a day.

Güldenstädt's (or White-winged) Redstart ◊ ***Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*** Up to 25 of these wonderful birds in a day in the Jargalant range.

Amur (or Stejneger's) Stonechat ***Saxicola stejnegeri*** One in the Khalzan steppe.

Northern Wheatear ***Oenanthe oenanthe*** One in the Gobi Altai and two singles in the Jargalant range.

Isabelline Wheatear ***Oenanthe isabellina*** Widespread in the west. Up to 20 in a day.

Desert Wheatear ***Oenanthe deserti*** Widespread in the west. Up to 40 in a day.

Pied Wheatear ***Oenanthe pleschanka*** Fairly widespread in the west in small numbers.

Rock Sparrow (Rock Petronia) ***Petronia petronia*** Scattered records of up to 100.

White-winged Snowfinch ***Montifringilla nivalis*** Up to 60 in a day in the Jargalant range. Two in the Gobi Altai.

Pere David's Snowfinch ◊ ***Pyrgilauda davidiana*** A flock of 40 in the Khalzan steppe and the following day a flock of eight followed by a single.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow ***Passer montanus*** Widespread. Up to 100 in a day.

Saxaul Sparrow ◊ ***Passer ammodendri*** Up to 80 in a day at Great Gobi.

House Sparrow ***Passer domesticus*** Fairly common in the Ulaanbaatar region and a few at Chinggis.

Altai Accentor ◊ ***Prunella himalayana*** Up to 30 in a day in the Jargalant range.

Siberian Accentor ◊ ***Prunella montanella*** 40 in a migrant 'fall' in the Jargalant range and up to three in a day in the Khalzan steppe.

Brown Accentor ◊ ***Prunella fulvescens*** Up to 15 in a day in the Jargalant range.

Citrine Wagtail ***Motacilla citreola*** Scattered records from the west. Up to 30 in a day.

Grey Wagtail ***Motacilla cinerea*** Scattered records of up to three in the west.

White Wagtail (form unknown) ***Motacilla alba*** Scattered records of small numbers where the form could not be determined.

White Wagtail ◊ [Masked Wagtail] ***Motacilla [alba] personata*** Two at Great Gobi.

White Wagtail ◊ [Baikal Wagtail] ***Motacilla [alba] baicalensis*** Up to 25 daily at Great Gobi.

White Wagtail ◊ [East Siberian Wagtail] ***Motacilla [alba] ocularis*** Three near Ulaanbaatar, one daily at Great Gobi and one near Baruun-Urt.

Richard's Pipit ***Anthus richardi*** One in the Khalzan steppe.

Blyth's Pipit ◊ ***Anthus godlewskii*** Three at Great Gobi and two at Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

Tree Pipit ***Anthus trivialis*** One near Khovd.

Water Pipit ◊ ***Anthus spinoletta*** One at Boon Tsagaan Nuur and two at Khar Us Nuur.

Eurasian Chaffinch ***Fringilla coelebs*** A female near Khovd and Robert had another at Darvi. A rare migrant in western Mongolia.

Brambling ***Fringilla montifringilla*** Scattered records of small numbers.

Hawfinch ***Coccothraustes coccothraustes*** Three near Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolian Finch ◊ ***Bucanetes mongolicus*** A flock of 50 at the edge of the Jargalant range.

Plain Mountain Finch ◊ ***Leucosticte nemoricola*** A flock of 11 in the Jargalant range.

Common (or Scarlet) Rosefinch ***Carpodacus erythrinus*** An immature at Great Gobi.

European Greenfinch ***Chloris chloris*** An immature near Khovd.

Oriental (or Grey-capped) Greenfinch ***Chloris sinica*** A migrant flock of 20 in the Khalzan steppe.

Twite ***Linaria flavirostris*** Fairly widespread. Up to 40 in a day. The form here is *altaica.*

Pine Bunting ◊ ***Emberiza leucocephalos*** Up to 50 migrants in a day in the Khalzan steppe. In addition, a male at Hustai and four near Ulaanbaatar.

Rock Bunting ***Emberiza cia*** Two single males in the Jargalant range.

Godlewski's Bunting ◊ *Emberiza godlewskii* Three in the Jargalant range during the big migrant 'fall'.

Meadow Bunting ◊ *Emberiza cioides* A male in the Jargalant range.

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* Scattered records, mostly of small numbers, but no fewer than 250 in the migrant 'fall' at Baruun-Urt.

Yellow-browed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza chrysophrys* A single migrant in the Jargalant range.

Rustic Bunting ◊ *Emberiza rustica* A female in the big bunting flock at Hustai.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* Common in the east including 50 at Baruun-Urt. Elsewhere, singles at Ulaanbaatar and at Great Gobi.

Pallas's Reed Bunting ◊ *Emberiza pallasi* At least 80 in the big bunting flock at Hustai. It was not possible to determine the subspecies involved.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* A female in the Khalzan steppe.



If only our Snow Leopards had been as close as this one! (image by Mark Beaman)



Wild Camel in Great Gobi (image by Mark Beaman)



Wild Camel in Great Gobi (image by Mark Beaman)



Whooper Swans (image by Mark Beaman)



White-naped Cranes (image by Mark Beaman)



Upland Buzzard (image by Mark Beaman)



Upland Buzzard dark morph (image by Mark Beaman)



Watching for Snow Leopards in the Jargalant range (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Tit (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Ibex (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Ibex (image by Mark Beaman)



'Siberian' Elk (image by Mark Beaman)



'Siberian' Elk (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Cranes (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Cranes (image by Mark Beaman)



Siberian Accentor (image by Mark Beaman)



Sharga reserve at dusk (image by Mark Beaman)



Saxaul Sparrows (image by Mark Beaman)



Saiga (image by Mark Beaman)



Travel in Mongolia can be an adventure! (image by Mark Beaman)



Relict Gulls (image by Mark Beaman)



Red-throated Thrush (image by Mark Beaman)



Red-necked Phalaropes (image by Mark Beaman)



Red-necked Phalarope (image by Mark Beaman)



Przevalski's Horses (image by Mark Beaman)



Plate-tailed Gecko (image by Mark Beaman)



Pere David's Snowfinch (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Leaf Warbler (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Sandgrouse (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Pika (image by Mark Beaman)



Mongolian Jerbil (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Cat (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Cat (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Cat (image by Mark Beaman)



Pallas's Cat in its den (image by Mark Beaman)



Naumann's Thrush (image by Mark Beaman)



Mongolian or Henderson's Ground Jay (image by Mark Beaman)



Long-eared Hedgehog (image by Mark Beaman)



Kulans or Mongolian Wild Asses (image by Mark Beaman)



The Khalzan steppe on a frosty morning (image by Mark Beaman)



Steppe and badlands near the Jargalant range (image by Mark Beaman)



The Jargalant range (image by Mark Beaman)



Our 2024 group and our fantastic Jargalant team (image by Mark Beaman)



Our Jargalant camp at dawn (image by Mark Beaman)



The Jargalant range from Khar Us Nuur (image by Mark Beaman)



Isabelline Shrike (image by Mark Beaman)



Ikhes Nuur (image by Mark Beaman)



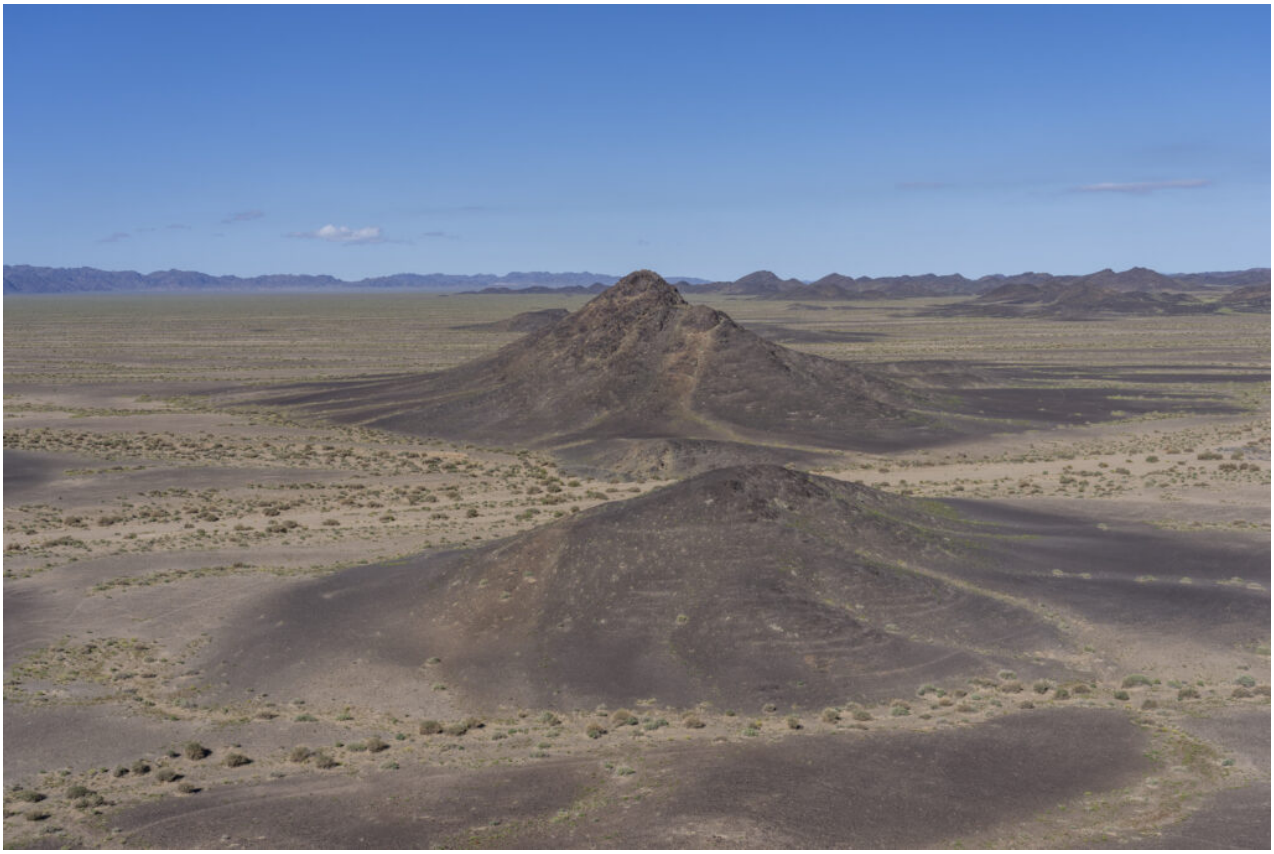
Hill Pigeon (image by Mark Beaman)



Hairy-footed or Northern Three-toed Jerboa (image by Mark Beaman)



Guldenstadt's or White-winged Redstart (image by Mark Beaman)



Great Gobi National Park (image by Mark Beaman)



Goitred Gazelle (image by Mark Beaman)



The Genghis Khan (Chinggis Khaan) statue east of Ulaanbaatar (image by Mark Beaman)



Eurasian Eagle-Owl (image by Mark Beaman)



Early snow in Eastern Mongolia (image by Mark Beaman)



Dusky Thrush (image by Mark Beaman)



Daurian Jackdaws (image by Mark Beaman)



Cinereous Vultures (image by Mark Beaman)



Cinereous Vulture (image by Mark Beaman)



Brown Accentore(image by Mark Beaman)



Brandt's Vole (image by Mark Beaman)



Brambling (image by Mark Beaman)



Boon Tsagaan Nuur at sunset (image by Mark Beaman)



Blyth's Pipit (image by Mark Beaman)



Black-throated Thrush (image by Mark Beaman)



Bearded Vulture (image by Mark Beaman)



Bactrian Camel (image by Mark Beaman)



Azure Tit (image by Mark Beaman)



Amur Falcon (image by Mark Beaman)



Altai Snowcocks (image by Mark Beaman)



Altai Snowcocks (image by Mark Beaman)



Altai Accentor (image by Mark Beaman)