



Field Guides Tour Report

Mongolia: The Gobi Desert, Steppe & Taiga 2019

Jun 8, 2019 to Jun 26, 2019

Phil Gregory & Sundeв Gombobataar

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



These three Eurasian Eagle-Owl chicks and their mother were found on a cliff-side at Bogd Mountain, quite by accident! Guide Phil Gregory happened to set up the scope pointed right at the female owl, then found that she had these three large offspring in a nest nearby. This was just one of the exciting sightings we had on the tour.

This was the third Field Guides tour to Mongolia, covering many of the key sites and habitats in central, southern and north-eastern Mongolia, including steppe, desert and boreal forest, and we succeeded very nicely. It was again a late, dry spring here, and some species like waders, wagtails and warblers were scarce or absent, but breeding was certainly in full swing. Staying primarily in ger camps was fun, but you have to get used to the low doorways and starlit nocturnal treks to the bathroom.

Most came in early to get recovered and oriented, and a couple of folks did a cultural tour, which included the National Museum and the Dinosaur Museum, well worth doing and recommended.

On day one we went to Songino and some riparian habitat along the Tuul River, and picked up the first Mongolian birds, including Asian Azure-winged Magpie, White-cheeked Starling, a nice assortment of wildfowl and Demoiselle Crane. Long-tailed Rosefinch showed nicely, as did Azure Tit and White-crowned Penduline Tit, plus White-backed Woodpecker. The big star though, was a totally unexpected Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker in the wrong habitat, a lifer for all.

Bogd Mountain strict Nature Reserve next day was good with Thick-billed and Dusky Warbler, Booted and Golden Eagle, Pine Bunting and a literally huge bonus in a massive female Eurasian Eagle Owl sat on a cliff face with 3 large fluffy chicks nearby.

Next, we headed up to Terelj and stayed at a very remote ger camp close to a lovely boreal forest site for Black-billed Capercaillie which had been lekking here the previous week. Despite the good conditions, scat and feathers, luck was not with us, but it was a superb area, with Chinese Bush Warbler, Siberian Rubythroat and Pine Bunting singing. There is even a chance of wolf here as they often hear them at night by the camp.

Terelj NP had really beautiful Siberian larch and pine forest, with many lovely wildflowers like globeflower, grass of Parnassus and yellow pasque flower. Birds included Gray-headed, Great and Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Common and Oriental Cuckoo, Pine and Black-faced Bunting, Red-throated

Thrush, Eastern Buzzard, Willow and Marsh Tit and two sightings of Ural Owl.

Next it was off to Hustai National Park, seeing the striking Mongolian Lark, and the much duller Asian Short-toed Lark being common as well. Later that day we had a great experience watching the Przewalski's Wild Horses (Takhi) in the park, a remarkable creature that has come back from near extinction and looks just like the cave paintings of those horses with erect manes. Beautiful pale buffy and blonde colouration too; a striking creature that is reintroduced here and looks to be doing quite well.

Other good mammals here were pikas, Red Deer and the delightful large Mongolian marmots, and Ian encountered a large Daurian Hedgehog when he was on a visit to the bathroom early morning, which the guys actually caught and showed us next day. Birds included Cinereous Vulture, Golden Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Amur and Saker Falcon, Rock Sparrow and Meadow Bunting. A huge and severe storm with constant rolling thunder like something from the Western Front luckily by-passed us, but destroyed a section of the main highway not far away, and we were very lucky to get through the floodwaters en route to Ugii Lake.

Heading west, we stopped at Dasinchilen wetland and Tsargaan lakes. Swan Goose and Bar-headed Goose showed nicely, also White-naped and Common Crane plus an unexpected Hooded Crane, and the rather distinctive Mongolian Gull. We had poor views of Relict Gull too, which regrettably disappeared before we could get any closer. Passerines included Pere David's Snowfinch and Paddyfield Warbler, as well as Reed Bunting. Driving to Ugii Lake, we had a neat bonus with a display fighting lark that proved to be the recently split Mongolian Short-toed Lark, called for some unknown reason Sykes's Short-toed Lark by the Cornell/Clements authorities.

The Ugii Lake area gave us terrific views of White-tailed Eagle and a very fortunate find of Pallas's Fish Eagle, Swan and Bar-headed Geese, Whooper Swans, White-winged Scoter and Red-crested Pochard, plus a few shorebirds including Eurasian Curlew and Marsh Sandpiper, and a vagrant Slender-billed Gull.

The ancient Mongol capital of Khar Korin has a large temple complex which was home to Red-billed Choughs and Blyth's Pipit. Later, a large wetland at Elsen Tasarkhai (Burd marsh) gave us a pair of White-naped Cranes with chicks, summer plumage Asian Dowitcher, Chinese Spot-billed Duck, Swan Goose, Bar-headed Geese with many goslings, and several Eastern Marsh Harriers.

Back to Ulaanbaatar next day, then our large bags headed south with the vehicle to Dalanzadgad whilst we took the early morning Hunnu Air flight and met up with them for the Gobi-Altai sector of the trip. Khanbogd ger camp has a nice rocky valley behind it that gave us Chukar, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Eastern Black Redstart, Mongolian Finch, Kozlov's Accentor, Grey-necked Bunting and Godlewski's Bunting. It was also quite nearby the gorgeous Gobi Altai Mountain valley of Yolyn Am (Lammergeier Valley), where we saw Lammergeier, as well as Cinereous and Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Saker, Wallcreeper, Mongolian (Kozlov's) and Brown Accentor, Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch, and many tame White-winged Snowfinch and Horned Larks. Altai Snowcock drew a blank as usual; you need great luck to see that species here. We also had a good mammal day with Ibex, Mongolian Gerbils and a really good number of vocal Pallas's Pika.

Driving into the edge of the Gobi proper was about 120 km on a somewhat corrugated road, astonishingly enough in heavy rain for much of it! Despite this we still found the remarkable Henderson's (Mongolian) Ground-Jay, and lots of Pallas's Sandgrouse, even seeing a nest with 2 eggs when Phil almost stood on an incubating bird. Desert Wheatear nests at the ger camp, which is sited near to the great Khongor sand dunes, and the saxaul forest there gave us the rare and localized Saxaul Sparrow, Daurian and Great-Grey Shrike (Steppe Grey) with terrific looks, and amazing numbers of Pallas's Sandgrouse along the river and gravel plains there, a real irruption year that we were very fortunate to experience as they seldom occur now.

A nocturnal mammal foray here was terrific, as we had a fabulous Long-eared Hedgehog, a nice look at a several Gobi Jerboa (remarkably like a diminutive kangaroo!) plus Siberian Jerboa, Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa, Desert Hamster (or yellow taxi!) and Mid-day Gerbil; not bad for a 45 minute tour of the camp perimeter.

Heading back towards Dalanzadgad we took a different, more remote route to the famous dinosaur site of Flaming Cliffs, (seeing both the rare Black-tailed or Goitered Gazelle and Zeren or White-tailed Gazelle plus Pallid Ground-Squirrel en route). A flight schedule change meant we could only do lunch at the ger camp at the famous site, then had to head back to Dalanzadgad for an early morning flight next day. Still, the Flaming Cliffs site is spectacular colorful desert scenery, and we found several summer plumage Oriental Plover on the journey back as the last trip addition.

Our bags met up with us at the hotel in Ulaan Baatar next morning, and we had an enjoyable farewell dinner at a Mongolian barbecue restaurant. Many thanks to our very hard working and careful drivers Bilgai (Terelj section) and especially Bataa who was with us for the entire trip, and to Gombo, Mr Birding Mongolia, our expert local guide and organizer who did a terrific job. The young trainee Dauka was also a very handy spotter, water man, sound recorder, photographer and general helper, and I think we improved his English quite a bit. We are grateful to them for making the tour so memorable and for many kindnesses to our group. Also thanks to Sue and Rowan of Sicklebill Safaris who basically arranged things in Mongolia, and to Sharon at Field Guides who co-ordinated the whole enterprise and did her customary great job.

Thanks of course also to the group for coming along. I am glad we shared this adventurous, somewhat weather afflicted trip with good humor, and enjoyed so many memorable sightings. I hope the photos turn out nicely. Safe travels and I look forward to seeing you again on future trips, and best wishes to Larry and Ian on the rocky road to 7000 species. Thanks also to Ian for sharing his scope, and to John for some good spotting; always very helpful to have a team effort in finding things.

Mongolia is a great trip for landscapes in a very unusual country, with some rare and seldom-seen birds, and an unexpectedly good selection of mammals- why not join us for another memorable adventure there in 2020?

Itinerary

- Sat Jun 8: Arrival in Ulaan Baatar (UB) for those doing the cultural option. Zuchi Hotel overnight.
- Sunday June 9: Optional tour of Ulaanbaatar for early arrivals, including National Museum and the Dinosaur Museum, though Choisin Lama temple was closed this year for renovations. Highly recommended! Overnight Zuchi Hotel
- Monday Jun 10: Tuul River riparian habitat at Songino and damp thickets near the Kuwait-Mongolia Research Centre at Bogd Mt. Overnight at Zuchi Hotel. Overcast with showers

- Tues Jun 11: Steppe areas en route to Terelj NP, overnight Khadag ger camp. Fine conditions.
- Wed Jun 12: Shar Guya Black-b Capercaillie site dep. 0300 NP: then Tuul River riparian en route to Terelj. Overnight Tumen Khaan ger camp. Warm and sunny
- Thurs Jun 13: Tumen Khaan area/ Terelj riparian then to 1800 above Tumen Khaan taiga forest, good weather.
- Friday Jun 14: Tumen Khaan area 0630-0730 then 5 hours to Hustai NP, wild horse visit pm, overnight Moltsoog Els ger camp.
- Sat Jun 15: Heavy rain and strong wind, steppe near Moltsoog then pm to Baishant dry valley in Hustai, huge thunderstorm late pm, overnight Moltsoog Els ger camp.
- Sun Jun 16: Negotiated floodwater that had destroyed main road to reach Dashinchilen Marsh, then to Ugii Lake and ger camp overnight. Overcast.
- Mon Jun 17: Ugii Lake SW shore am, then pm to Khar Korin via N shore of Ugii Lake. Overnight Anja ger camp. Overcast then fine.
- Tues Jun 18: Kharkorin temple then to Burd marsh/Elsen Tasarkhai and Hoyor Zagal ger camp. Fine conditions.
- Wed Jun 19: Hoyor Zagal to Ulaanbaatar via Tuul River bridge, overnight at Zuchi Hotel. Fine conditions
- Thurs Jun 20: Early morning flight 0620 via Hunnu Air to Dalangadzaad, then via plantation farm to Khanbogd ger camp. Pm to nearby dry valley, warm and sunny
- Fri Jun 21: Yolyn Am (2600m or 8200') early morning dep 0400, then pm to Mukher Shivery dry valley. Overnight Khanbogd ger camp. Overcast but pleasant.
- Sat Jun 22: Plantation near Khanbogd then drive 120 km on corrugated road into Gobi via Thuhun Balai fuel stop. Very windy and coming into heavy rain as we reached the Ground-Jay site. Overnight in cabins at Gobi Erdene ger camp.
- Sun Jun 23: Khongoryn Gol saxaul forest, then pm to nearby marsh. Night walk at Gobi Erdene. Fine conditions
- Mon Jun 24: Gobi Erdene to Flaming Cliffs (116 km 5+ hours), Bulgan plantation en route, then to Dalangadzaad (90Km) arriving at hotel 1930. Fine but windy later
- Tues Jun 25: Hunnu Air to Ulaan Baatar 0745, fine conditions. Shopping options in UB and farewell dinner.
- Wed Jun 26: Early morning departures home

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

- BAR-HEADED GOOSE** (*Anser indicus*) – Lovely looks from Ugii and Elsen Tasarkhai/Burd marsh, with several broods of goslings seen. Highest totals were about 30 birds at Ugii and 100 at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- SWAN GOOSE** (*Anser cygnoides*) – Great views of just 6 at Dashinchilen wetlands, 300 at Ugii Lake and 3 plus 4 juvs. at Elsen Tasarkhai. This rare species only breeds in Russia, Mongolia and China with the border zones between these countries being their key breeding location. They winter in North and South Korea and central China. The world population is about 60,000–90,000 birds and declining as a result of habitat loss and unsustainable levels of hunting.
- WHOOPEER SWAN** (*Cygnus cygnus*) – A pair nesting at Songino, 2 at Dashinchilen, 6 at Ugii Lake and one at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- RUDDY SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – Quite widespread, starting at Songino, then with 20 at Ugii wetlands and several pairs at Khongoryn Els.
- COMMON SHELDUCK** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – 10 at Dashinchilen and 4 at Ugii.
- GARGANEY** (*Spatula querquedula*) – One at Songino, one in flight at Dashinchilen and a pair at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- NORTHERN SHOVELER** (*Spatula clypeata*) – 10 at Dashinchilen, one at Ugii and 6 at Elsen Tasarkhai
- GADWALL** (*Mareca strepera*) – 70 at Songino, then 8 at Dashinchilen and 6 at Ugii.
- EURASIAN WIGEON** (*Mareca penelope*) – One drake at Ugii and 5 at Elsen Tasarkhai.
- EASTERN SPOT-BILLED DUCK** (*Anas zonorhynchos*) – Four at Elsen Tasarkhai; it is curiously scarce in Mongolia.
- MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Five day records, with 10 at Songino, 70 at Dashinchilen then 10 at Ugii and Elsen Tasarkhai.
- GREEN-WINGED TEAL (EURASIAN)** (*Anas crecca crecca*) – One at Songino, one at Dashinchilen and a single at Khongoryn Gol.
- RED-CRESTED POCHARD** (*Netta rufina*) – A flock of 17 at Ugii Lake, a very striking and not at all common species, with 2 additional birds later.
- COMMON POCHARD** (*Aythya ferina*) – 10 at Songino, 15 at Dashinchilen, 110 at Ugii and 1 at Elsen Tasarkhai. Now sadly a declining species classified as Vulnerable.
- TUFTED DUCK** (*Aythya fuligula*) – 30 at Songino, 1 at Ugii and 2 at Elsen Tasarkhai. Always a nice bird to see, the drake is quite striking.
- WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (SIBERIAN)** (*Melanitta deglandi stejnegeri*) – 8 on Ugii Lake, and now split by the IOC as Stejneger's Scoter.
- COMMON GOLDENEYE** (*Bucephala clangula*) – Dauka counted 58 on Ugii Lake.
- COMMON MERGANSER** (*Mergus merganser*) – Small numbers only from Songino and Terelj.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

CHUKAR (*Alectoris chukar*) – One atop a ridge at Yol Am, and another in a dry valley en route to Flaming Cliffs.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

GREAT CRESTED GREBE (*Podiceps cristatus*) – 6 on the lake at Songino where it was nesting, and then about 22 on Ugii Lake.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) – Common in the towns. [I]

HILL PIGEON (*Columba rupestris*) – A pair nesting under the eaves of a house in Terelj, and a flyby at Khongoryn. I suspect hybridization with Feral Pigeons is having an effect on this species.

ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVE (*Streptopelia orientalis*) – Heard at Terelj and an unexpected flyby at Khanbogd.

EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVE (*Streptopelia decaocto*) – Half a dozen at the 3 dilapidated farms/ plantations we visited around Dalanzadgad, Khanbogd and Bulgan. A fairly recent arrival in Mongolia.

Pteroclididae (Sandgrouse)

PALLAS'S SANDGROUSE (*Syrhaptes paradoxus*) – A wonderful year for them, as it was green in the south. At Khongoryn, we saw something like 10000 birds in a day and small vocal flocks were constantly flying over calling. We also found a nest at the Ground-Jay site when Phil almost trod on a bird that flushed up, revealing two beautiful olive-brown eggs with dark mottling. One of the birds of the trip, very lucky to have a boom in numbers. Several major irruptions took place in western Europe, notably in 1863, 1888 and 1908, when thousands of birds were seen, and it even bred in countries as far apart as Great Britain, Sweden and Poland. This has always been something of a legendary bird for British birders and it is great to see them well.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

COMMON CUCKOO (*Cuculus canorus*) – Great to hear this so often, and we saw them around Terelj.

ORIENTAL CUCKOO (*Cuculus optatus*) – Frequent by voice in the riparian habitat and boreal forest, and we saw them well at Terelj. Voice is really the only practical way to separate from Common Cuckoo, though the buffish undertail coverts might be useful.

Apodidae (Swifts)

COMMON SWIFT (*Apus apus pekinensis*) – Just a few from Terelj, Hustai and Flaming Cliffs.

PACIFIC SWIFT (*Apus pacificus*) – Quite frequent around Ulaan Baatar, and also looked to be nesting in the sandstone cliffs at some sites.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

EURASIAN MOORHEN (*Gallinula chloropus*) – Just 3 at Elsen Tasarkhai wetlands.

EURASIAN COOT (*Fulica atra*) – 10 at Dasinchilen, 15 at Ugii and 30 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Gruidae (Cranes)

DEMOISELLE CRANE (*Anthropoides virgo*) – This wonderful graceful bird was widespread in small numbers around Hustai and Elsen Tasarkhai, with pairs with juveniles seen a couple of times, and a big flock of 64 on floodwater near Khar Korin.

WHITE-NAPED CRANE (*Antigone vipio*) – 4 at Dashinchilen with 4 chicks, and 2 with 2 chicks at Elsen Tasarkhai; a rare and fabulous bird, with a population estimated at c.6500 individuals and probably declining.

COMMON CRANE (*Grus grus*) – John got us onto a single flying over at Dashinchilen.

HOODED CRANE (*Grus monacha*) – A single bird at Dashinchilen was unexpected and was Phil's first in Mongolia, where it is very local and uncommon.

Recurvirostridae (Stilts and Avocets)

BLACK-WINGED STILT (*Himantopus himantopus*) – Three day records from Dashinchilen, Ugii and Elsen Tasarkhai, max. 15 birds.

PIED AVOCET (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) – Three day records from Dashinchilen and Ugii, max. 70 birds.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

NORTHERN LAPWING (*Vanellus vanellus*) – Seen in the wet meadows at Dashinchilen, Ugii, Elsen Tasarkhai and Khongoryn, where they look to be nesting.

GREATER SAND-POLOVER (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) – A striking summer plumaged adult male out in the steppe near Mukher Shiver, nice to see one in this plumage.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER (CURONICUS) (*Charadrius dubius curonicus*) – Seen on 4 days, starting at Songino, then Ugii and Khongoryn Gol. These are the western taxon with the "peeooo" call; eastern birds call quite differently.

ORIENTAL PLOVER (*Charadrius veredus*) – Elusive, but finally found them on the penultimate day en route to Dalanzadgad, with a fine adult male out in the steppe which most folks saw in the scope before it flew. Luckily we drove out after it and found two birds, one of which showed very nicely. We flushed another from near the road later which landed for some nice photos. Great to see this species in summer plumage, as we only see them in winter dress in Australia.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

EURASIAN CURLEW (*Numenius arquata*) – 8 flying over at Ugii Lake were an unexpected addition.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT (*Limosa limosa*) – One at Dashinchilen, then a couple in full breeding dress at Elsen Tasarkhai, with one in the vocal wittering display too. This is the rare eastern taxon melanuroides.

ASIAN DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus semipalmatus*) – Hard this year, but Gombo picked one out in long grass at Elsen Tasarkhai, and we then saw 2 birds in flight, with one landing out for good views. Both birds were in the red summer plumage, with the black tubular bill distinctive.

COMMON SNIPE (*Gallinago gallinago*) – One in display at Elsen Tasarkhai, and another at Khongoryn wetlands.

COMMON SANDPIPER (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – Just one from Terelj this trip., a late migrant.

GREEN SANDPIPER (*Tringa ochropus*) – 3 from Dasinchilen, 2 at Ugii and then a single at Khongoryn Gol.

MARSH SANDPIPER (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – One bird from Ugii Lake, shorebirds were scarce this year.

WOOD SANDPIPER (*Tringa glareola*) – Just 6 from Ugii this trip.

COMMON REDSHANK (*Tringa totanus*) – A few at Songino and Elsen Tasarkhai, they nest in the wet meadows but losses to stock trampling must be high!

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

SLENDER-BILLED GULL (*Chroicocephalus genei*) – One fine adult at Ugii Lake was a surprise and unusually far east, it is a vagrant to Mongolia and this was only the second Gombo had seen.

BLACK-HEADED GULL (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – A handful at Dashinchilen, and maybe 80 at Ugii Lake, all carefully checked for Relict Gull.

RELICT GULL (*Ichthyaeetus relictus*) – One adult in breeding dress at Dashinchilen, both Gombo and I thought it was this species due to the active feeding behavior and the extensive white patch on the tertials, but it was distant and in heat haze. I wish we had taken some record shots.

Unfortunately it flew off without us seeing it go as we walked out towards it- darn! None of the Black-headed Gulls showed the white tertial patch.

PALLAS'S GULL (*Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus*) – Two adults in black-headed breeding dress at Ugii Lake, a very nice sight.

HERRING GULL (MONGOLIAN) (*Larus argentatus mongolicus*) – A few at Dashinchilen lakes and 60 at Ugii. A large, heavy billed and rather distinctive taxon. The whole taxonomy of the “Herring Gull/Yellow-legged Gull” group is horribly complex, and *mongolicus* is now often treated as a subspecies of Vega Gull. Others assign it as a subspecies of Caspian Gull, *Larus cachinnans*, or as a separate species (Mongolian Gull *L. mongolicus*), or even as part of American Herring Gull (*HBW/BirdLife*). Personally, I found them rather distinctive in both adult and immature plumage; it has a long heavy bill and very dark flight feathers in some plumages. The new Olsen Gulls Photoguide splits it as Mongolian Gull, which seems eminently sensible.

GULL-BILLED TERN (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) – John saw one at Dashinchilen and there was another briefly at Ugii Lake.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Two at Ugii Lake were a good find of a scarce species here.

BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*) – Two in summer plumage at Ugii Lake, quite rare in Mongolia.

WHITE-WINGED TERN (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) – Lovely views, with over 90 at Ugii and 50 at Elsen Tasarkhai marsh, most in the striking summer plumage. The alternative name of White-winged Black Tern is so appropriate, I don't know why it was ever dumbed down to the far more confusing and less appropriate White-winged Tern.

WHISKERED TERN (*Chlidonias hybrida*) – 2 at Dashinchilen and 15 at Ugii Lake, in full breeding plumage. Much shorter tailed than the local dark race of Common Tern.

COMMON TERN (LONGIPENNIS) (*Sterna hirundo longipennis*) – The local race *longipennis*, has a black bill and much greyer plumage compared to European birds, almost resembling Whiskered Terns. The first were at Songino then at Dashinchilen and Ugii Lake, a beautiful species and a potential split.

Gaviidae (Loons)

ARCTIC LOON (*Gavia arctica*) – John saw one fly out at Ugii Lake on one of his early morning forays, sadly none at Elsen Tasarkhai marsh this year.

Ciconiidae (Storks)

BLACK STORK (*Ciconia nigra*) – One terrific adult in flight in Terelj, always a lovely bird to see and the only one of the trip, though the old nest was still visible at Hustai.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – 90 at Ugii Lake, and a dead bird at Khongoryn marsh.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*) – Very small numbers at the main wetlands, max 10 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

GREAT EGRET (EURASIAN) (*Ardea alba alba*) – A single at Ugii Lake was a surprise as egrets are very scarce in Mongolia, and this was Phil's first record here.

CHINESE POND-HERON (*Ardeola bacchus*) – A vagrant to Mongolia, we had 2 birds in the very smart breeding dress at Khongoryn Gol. I wonder if this species is colonizing?

Threskiornithidae (Ibises and Spoonbills)

EURASIAN SPOONBILL (*Platalea leucorodia*) – 1 at Dashinchilen, 4 at Ugii and 7 at Elsen Tasarkhai.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

BEARDED VULTURE (*Gypaetus barbatus*) – Two singles up near Khadag, then 2 in the Yolyn Am valley which is famous for them. The livestock density in Mongolia must give plenty of feeding opportunities.

CINEREOUS VULTURE (*Aegypius monachus*) – We saw 15 of this huge vulture around a carcass near Hoyor Zagal, a good count, then odd birds at Terelj, Khadag ger camp and Yol Am. Surprisingly widespread for what is overall a rare bird, with a total population of > 20,000. They seem to be often used in hawk displays too, with several forlorn birds on perches for the tourists en route to Terelj.

HIMALAYAN GRIFFON (*Gyps himalayensis*) – Three with Cinereous Vultures near Hoyor Zagal, then some 32 rising up early in the morning at Yol Am, with a few seen later as well.

GREATER SPOTTED EAGLE (*Clanga clanga*) – One soaring high over the riparian woodlands near Terelj was a good find.

BOOTED EAGLE (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) – Great views of a dark phase bird at Bogd, then another at Shar Guy.

STEPPE EAGLE (*Aquila nipalensis*) – Very small numbers this year, with 6 day records and a maximum of just 6 near Hustai.

GOLDEN EAGLE (*Aquila chrysaetos*) – A good trip for them, with 6 day records, the first at Bogd then seen in Hustai and near Ugii before one perched up on the crags at Yol Am.

EASTERN MARSH-HARRIER (EASTERN) (*Circus spilonotus spilonotus*) – 3 at Dashinchilen and 3 at Elsen Tasarkhai, with some fine males.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK (EURASIAN) (*Accipiter gentilis schvedowi*) – One flushed off a Blue Hare carcass above Tumen Khaan, but the views were very brief.

BLACK KITE (BLACK-EARED) (*Milvus migrans lineatus*) – Widespread and seen in small numbers almost every day of the trip, with 40 at Ugii and most. This is the Black-eared taxon *lineatus* which is sometimes suggested as a split.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – A single fine adult at Ugii Lake showed nicely.

- PALLAS'S FISH-EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*) – A great find at Ugii Lake, this rare bird is hard to come by here now and we had very good views.
- EASTERN BUZZARD** (*Buteo japonicus*) – 3 at Shar Guy and 2 at Tumen Khaan, a split from Common Buzzard.
- LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD** (*Buteo rufinus*) – A single from the bus as we neared Ugii, the bare tarsus showing very well, then up to 6 at Khongoryn Gol, with one nest having 4 large chicks and two adults nearby, one dark and one light. Hybrids with Upland Buzzard are widespread but these looked good as pure bred this year.
- UPLAND BUZZARD** (*Buteo hemilasius*) – Nesting at Hustai, and a striking species with those big white primary patches and a dark belly patch. We had some 10 day records and it was often seen from the bus, with nests on the power pylons. Max 10 birds in one day.
- Strigidae (Owls)*
- EURASIAN EAGLE-OWL** (*Bubo bubo*) – One of the great finds of the trip. Phil happened to put his scope bang onto a huge female sat on a cliff face at Bogd, and then there were 3 large fluffy grey feathered juveniles nearby. Very exciting; a magnificent bird and Phil's first good view of it, one of the largest owls in the world.
- LITTLE OWL (LITTLE)** (*Athene noctua plumipes*) – A fine very pale bird at Moltsog Els, perched up on power poles and the boundary fence, and even in the ladies bathroom one morning, much to Jenny's surprise!
- URAL OWL** (*Strix uralensis*) – A great adventure in the taiga forest above Tumen Khaan, where persistent playback eventually got a response and we got fleeting views of the large pale bird several times, though it was extremely wary. Happily, Dauka lured in another at Tumen Khaan that night, and we all got scope views of it in a larch tree, some of us in their pajamas!
- LONG-EARED OWL (EURASIAN)** (*Asio otus otus*) – A very unexpected find at Baishant dry valley in Hustai, it flew out and looked much like a Short-eared owl, but Phil saw it come back later and got a perched view of a curiously pale grey-buff Long-eared Owl, almost exactly matching the color of the local rocks.
- Upupidae (Hoopoes)*
- EURASIAN HOOPOE** (*Upupa epops*) – A few sightings from Songino and Terelj.
- Picidae (Woodpeckers)*
- EURASIAN WRYNECK** (*Jynx torquilla*) – A calling bird at Bogd was a fine addition to the trip.
- EURASIAN THREE-TOED WOODPECKER** (*Picoides tridactylus*) – A mega find at Songino riparian forest. Phil heard a woodpecker tapping persistently in the old poplars, and we tracked it down to find it was actually an amazing male Eurasian Three-toed, a lifer for all of us. It was out of the usual coniferous montane forest range and habitat, quite what it was doing here is a mystery. Luckily it was there again next day so everyone got to see it.
- WHITE-BACKED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos leucotos*) – Another great woodpecker from Songino riparian, a female White-backed showed briefly but quite well, and was the only one this trip.
- GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dendrocopos major*) – Surprisingly few, we saw females at Terelj and Khadag.
- LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER** (*Dryobates minor kamschatkensis*) – One briefly at Songino, then a drumming male at Terelj riparian before we had several sightings in the park near Terelj town next day. This local race has a large white back patch quite unlike the European birds. Video on Smugmug.
- GRAY-HEADED WOODPECKER** (*Picus canus*) – Good looks at a female bird in the riparian at Terelj, it was fortunately quite responsive.
- Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*
- EURASIAN KESTREL** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – Five day records of singles starting at Songino then Terelj and Hustai.
- AMUR FALCON** (*Falco amurensis*) – Singles from Songino, then good looks in Hustai NP with several males seen as well as a female with a yellow-cere, a nice comparison with Eurasian Hobby.
- EURASIAN HOBBY** (*Falco subbuteo*) – A fine perched bird at Bogd showed the yellow cere as opposed to the orange cere of the similar female type Amur Falcon, and had extensive reddish "trousers". Others was seen later near Hustai and Ugii.
- SAKER FALCON** (*Falco cherrug*) – We saw two active nests in Khustai, with one nest having 2 chicks, and lovely views of the adult perched nearby. Two singles seen at Yol Am were the only other record, one of them a very pale creamy color below with a pale head. These are very valuable birds these days, in great demand for falconry in Arabia where they fetch thousands of dollars. That Kuwait-Mongolia research place we visited was something to do with all this it seems, and Mongolia is now the stronghold for this threatened species.
- Laniidae (Shrikes)*
- ISABELLINE SHRIKE (DAURIAN)** (*Lanius isabellinus isabellinus*) – Pale brown birds with buffish underparts and white wing patches were at the plantation near Dalanzadgad, then one at Bulgan and at the Saxaul forest. They belong with this group, formerly variously called Red-tailed or Isabelline Shrike but now usually called Daurian Shrike.
- BROWN SHRIKE** (*Lanius cristatus*) – One at Songino and one near Shar Guy, the only records this trip.
- GREAT GRAY SHRIKE (STEPPE)** (*Lanius excubitor pallidirostris*) – A couple of birds in the Saxaul forest dunes at Khongoryn, with black bills in the pale summer plumage. Taxonomy still unresolved and it likely this will end up assigned somewhere else.
- Oriolidae (Old World Orioles)*
- BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE** (*Oriolus chinensis*) – Good views of two very flighty birds at a small plantation near Khanbogd, a vagrant in this part of Mongolia. Another oriole sp. was with them but was not seen well enough to identify to species.
- Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*
- EURASIAN JAY (BRANDT'S)** (*Garrulus glandarius brandtii*) – Singles in the taiga forest at Terelj and Shar Guy, this is a dark-eyed race that also occurs in Hokkaido, and the whole complex is long overdue for splitting up.
- AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE (AZURE-WINGED)** (*Cyanopica cyanus cyanus*) – A noisy group of 6 at Songino had a nest there, and I got some nice tape of their vocalizations. They were the only ones of the trip. IOC split this from the Iberian Magpie of Spain and Portugal, but Clements as always lags with Old World taxonomy.
- EURASIAN MAGPIE (EURASIAN)** (*Pica pica bactriana*) – Quite common in the taiga zone and around Ulaan Baatar, this is the race leucoptera which is not recognised by Clements for some reason.

MONGOLIAN GROUND-JAY (*Podoces hendersoni*) – The weather had turned not only very windy but now rainy when we got to the odd Carragana desert scrub that these birds like, but we persevered and luckily Phil got onto a small group. We had quite good views of these odd courser-like terrestrial corvids with the big white wing patch, but sadly the weather was not conducive to video this year. A great bird, it'd be nice but very hard now to see all 4 members of the genus.

EURASIAN NUTCRACKER (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*) – Heard in the boreal forest above Tumen Khaan. [*]

RED-BILLED CHOUGH (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) – Unexpectedly common, noisy and commensal with humans, even in Ulaan Baatar. Most ger camps had a few around except in the Gobi.

DAURIAN JACKDAW (*Corvus dauuricus*) – Quite common around Shar Guy and Terelj, with up to 60 pied adults and dark-eyed immatures, also seen at Songino on day one.

ROOK (*Corvus frugilegus pastinator*) – 5 at Songino and also seen as we went to our farewell dinner in the centre of Ulaan Baatar, where there is a nesting colony!

CARRION CROW (*Corvus corone orientalis*) – Small numbers from UB, Songino, Hustai and Ugii, then again at Terelj; another potential split.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – Widespread in small numbers, with some nice looks from Hustai, Ugii, the Gobi and Terelj.

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (BRANDT'S) (*Eremophila alpestris brandti*) – This was one of the commonest larks in the desert areas. A recent genetic study sampled numerous individuals from across this species very wide range, and concluded that it should be split into six species, with brandti becoming a monotypic species, Brandt's, Steppe or Mongolian Horned Lark. The various checklists are as ever lagging.

SYKES'S SHORT-TOED LARK (*Calandrella dukhunensis*) – A great surprise was encountering this species in song flight as we got within 5km of Ugii Lake, though sadly I did not get to record it. The tail is dark with pale outers, the song completely different to Asian Short-toed, and there is a small dark mark on the sides of the neck with some fine gorget streaking. It was split from Greater Short-toed Lark and is seemingly closer to Hume's Short-toed than that species. The authors of the paper where it is split, and Gombo, name it Mongolian Short-toed Lark, with the range still being worked out, but the inimitable Cornell-Clements axis now rename it Sykes's Short-toed, in their by now customary unhelpful and confusing manner! A lifer for all of us.

MONGOLIAN LARK (*Melanocorypha mongolica*) – One spectacular species, with huge white wing patches and black chest band; they were common around Hustai (up to 100 in day) and Ugii.

ASIAN SHORT-TOED LARK (*Alaudala cheleensis cheleensis*) – The default small lark of the tour, a split from Lesser Short-toed but the taxonomy is still unsettled so it may be changed. Often seen and heard in display flight at Hustai and Ugii, and also seen at Khongoryn. Gombo tells me these latter Gobi birds are a different race with a different song, and a looming split.

ASIAN SHORT-TOED LARK (*Alaudala cheleensis beicki*) – The pale birds in the Gobi belong here, and are a pending split, with a quite different song and presumably genetic distinctions.

EURASIAN SKYLARK (ASIAN) (*Alauda arvensis kiborti*) – Very few, just 2 near Khadag, one at Dashinchilen, then singles at Khongoryn.

CRESTED LARK (*Galerida cristata magna*) – A good pick up at the plantation at Bulgan, with 2 birds in the fields there, a good find by Dauka. Yet another group that awaits analysis with several potential splits.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

PALE SAND MARTIN (*Riparia diluta*) – Another taxonomic puzzle, this taxon lacked any marking below and was rather distinctive, but is clearly very localized. We saw a couple near Khar Korin, then a small colony in an eroded stream bank at Elsen Tasarkhai.

EURASIAN CRAG-MARTIN (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) – Small numbers from the dry valley at Khanbogd, then at Yol Am where they were collecting mud from the stream. Photo on Smugmug.

BARN SWALLOW (TYTLER'S) (*Hirundo rustica tytleri*) – Small numbers from Songino on to Hustai and Ugii, with some nesting at the ger camps there. There was considerable variation in the intensity of the rufous underparts, some birds strongly coloured, others much more diffuse, and I wonder if it might be sexual dimorphism?

COMMON HOUSE-MARTIN (EASTERN) (*Delichon urbicum lagopodum*) – A few around Terelj, then 10 at Tuul River bridge and small numbers from the dry valley at Khanbogd, Yol Am and Mukher Shivert valley. This eastern taxon is split by HBW/BirdLife.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

COAL TIT (*Pariparus ater*) – Just two records from the taiga near Terelj; this race has a small crest.

MARSH TIT (*Poecile palustris*) – Just one from Terelj riparian, the glossy black cap and a single quiet call distinguish from the very similar Willow Tit, which also shows a pale wing panel here.

WILLOW TIT (WILLOW) (*Poecile montanus baicalensis*) – Small numbers around Terelj in the poplar woods there.

AZURE TIT (AZURE) (*Cyanistes cyanus yenisseeensis*) – Lovely looks from Songino, a very attractive species and highly prized by birders.

GREAT TIT (*Parus major*) – Small numbers were vocal in the poplar woods at Terelj.

Remizidae (Penduline-Tits)

WHITE-CROWNED PENDULINE-TIT (*Remiz coronatus*) – Nice views of 2 birds from the Tuul River area, with everyone seeing the ones at Songino.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

EURASIAN NUTHATCH (*Sitta europaea*) – Seen a couple of times in the poplar woods at Terelj, this form is very white below.

Tichodromidae (Wallcreeper)

WALLCREEPER (*Tichodroma muraria*) – We had good luck with this elusive species, seeing 2 males seen as we entered the gorge at Yol Am. A monotypic family too, and always a great bird to see.

Phylloscopidae (Leaf Warblers)

YELLOW-BROWED WARBLER (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) – A single at the Terelj River valley and some odd greyish birds near Tumen Khaan that may prove to be something else.

PALLAS'S LEAF WARBLER (*Phylloscopus proregulus*) – One seen well at Songino.

SULPHUR-BELLIED WARBLER (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) – Gombo led us on an epic march up the gorgeous rocky valley at Mukher Shivert, in really beautiful desert scenery reminiscent of Oman. Happily, he located Sulphur-bellied Warbler at his second site, and it stayed around calling and

showing well so everyone got to see it. Video on Smugmug; this is a really odd Phylloscopus that inhabits rocky slopes, and was amazingly a vagrant to Sweden last year!

DUSKY WARBLER (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) – A couple at singing at Bogd, and one from Terelj.

Acrocephalidae (Reed Warblers and Allies)

THICK-BILLED WARBLER (*Arundinax aedon*) – One at Bogd was singing and showed quite well, and there was another at the Terelj riparian.

PADDYFIELD WARBLER (*Acrocephalus agricola*) – Good views in the reeds at Dashinchilen, and singing well.

ORIENTAL REED WARBLER (*Acrocephalus orientalis*) – Seen well in the reeds at Dashinchilen and Elsen Tasarkhai, and very vocal.

Locustellidae (Grassbirds and Allies)

PALLAS'S GRASSHOPPER-WARBLER (*Locustella certhiola*) – Heard calling in response to playback at Dashinchilen, but unfortunately did not want to show. [*]

CHINESE BUSH WARBLER (*Locustella tacsanowskia*) – A very good find at Shar Guy in dense bushes at the edge of the taiga forest, they skulked like little mice on the ground and called nicely.

Sylviidae (Sylviid Warblers)

ASIAN DESERT WARBLER (*Sylvia nana*) – We left it late, but Gombo got us one at Khongoryn Gol dunes, the yellow legs and pale eye showing nicely.

BARRED WARBLER (*Sylvia nisoria*) – Curiously, a very showy vocal bird was singing from power lines at the plantation near Dalangadzad; great to see one in breeding dress. Unfortunately I did not have my recorder with me!

LESSER WHITETHROAT (CURRUCA/BLYTHI) (*Sylvia curruca blythi*) – Another species with a vexatious taxonomy, the birds singing at Terelj sure don't sound anything like those in Western Europe.

GREATER WHITETHROAT (*Sylvia communis*) – Seen at Bogd, Terelj, Ugii and Yol Am.

Muscicapidae (Old World Flycatchers)

DARK-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa sibirica*) – A single in the pine forest at Shar Guy, lightly streaked on the chest and with a pale eyering. Also seen well at the Terelj riparian woods.

ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER (*Muscicapa dauurica*) – A couple of records from Terelj taiga, and then one in the strong winds at the plantation near Khanbogd.

SIBERIAN RUBYTHROAT (*Calliope calliope*) – A fine showy male at the Tuul River at Songino, and heard at Terelj

RED-FLANKED BLUETAIL (*Tarsiger cyanurus*) – One in the boreal forest above Tumen Khaan, quite wary and not showing for long periods.

TAIGA FLYCATCHER (*Ficedula albicilla*) – Fine looks at summer plumage red-throated males in the poplar woods at Terelj.

COMMON REDSTART (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*) – Good views of singing males from Terelj.

BLACK REDSTART (EASTERN) (*Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides*) – Nice looks from the Khanbogd dry valley and at Yol Am. A distinctive eastern form that is way overdue for splitting, they don't look or sound like the European birds. Recording on the IBC site.

DAURIAN REDSTART (*Phoenicurus aureus*) – A fine male with a juvenile at Baishant dry valley in Hustai, then a few in the poplar woods at Terelj.

RUFIOUS-TAILED ROCK-THRUSH (*Monticola saxatilis*) – Good views of males on rocky outcrops at Bogd, Shar Guy and Khanbogd valley, quite a spectacular species.

NORTHERN WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) – Widespread pretty much throughout in small numbers, starting at Songino.

PIED WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe pleschanka*) – Males and females seen at several sites including Baishant dry valley and Khanbogd.

DESERT WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe deserti*) – Small numbers in the Gobi around Khongoryn and Gobi Erdene, where I taped one singing at dawn, cut on the IBC site.

ISABELLINE WHEATEAR (*Oenanthe isabellina*) – One of the default birds of the trip, seen most days and by far the most common wheatear.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

RED-THROATED THRUSH (*Turdus ruficollis*) – They proved a bit tricky this year and we had none at the Terelj riparian site, but got great looks at a pair above Tumen Khaan in the larch forest, with another male next day by Tumen Khaan as a catch-up for Martha.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

WHITE-CHEEKED STARLING (*Spodiopsar cineraceus*) – A nest at Songino in a tree hollow, with some 10 birds nearby.

Prunellidae (Accentors)

BROWN ACCENTOR (*Prunella fulvescens*) – Very good looks and photographs at Yol Am, with one bird singing atop a ridge in the dawn light, and others later.

MONGOLIAN ACCENTOR (*Prunella koslowi*) – Gombo rustled us up a fine responsive singing bird by Khanbogd, video on the Smugmug and IBC sites, and there was one at Yol Am next day. The PC guys have abolished the name of poor Mr Kozlov for whom this bird is named.

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

GRAY WAGTAIL (*Motacilla cinerea*) – A pair on the Tuul River near Terelj were the only sighting this trip.

EASTERN YELLOW WAGTAIL (MANCHURIAN) (*Motacilla tschutschensis macronyx*) – I think only John saw one fly over at Dashinchilen, of uncertain taxon, wagtails were very scarce this year for some reason.

CITRINE WAGTAIL (GRAY-BACKED) (*Motacilla citreola citreola*) – Gombo spotted a distant grey-backed male at Khongoryn Gol, and we got good scope views.

WHITE WAGTAIL (TRANSBAIKALIAN) (*Motacilla alba baicalensis*) – Widespread in small numbers from Songino on, but none in the Gobi. This is a white faced and grey backed form long overdue for splitting out into the component species.

RICHARD'S PIPIT (*Anthus richardi*) – Seen at Bogd, Hustai and Khongor, and best told from Blyth's by the loud "schreep" call, the two are otherwise very similar though there are some breeding habitat differences.

BLYTH'S PIPIT (*Anthus godlewskii*) – This tricky species was seen at Songino, then in Hustai and in display flight at Khar Korin temple and Yol Am.

OLIVE-BACKED PIPIT (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – Vocal and evidently nesting at the boreal forest around Terelj.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

HAWFINCH (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – A few folks got glimpses at Songino and Terelj, but for most of us the bird in the old plantation at Bulgan was the first, a good catch-up.

COMMON ROSEFINCH (*Carpodacus erythrurus*) – A male at Songino, and often heard around Terelj with 2 males in the riparian there.

HIMALAYAN BEAUTIFUL ROSEFINCH (*Carpodacus pulcherrimus argyrophrys*) – Great views of a male and female at Yol Am, and Martha saw one at Mukher Shivert, an uncommon species in Mongolia. This subspecies *argyrophrys* is now regarded by both Clements and the IOC as a race of the present species rather than, as previously, of Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *C. davidianus*. They were formerly considered conspecific as Beautiful Rosefinch *C. pulcherrimus*.

LONG-TAILED ROSEFINCH (*Carpodacus sibiricus*) – Again this year some folks saw one at the Zuchi Hotel car park, but for most the riparian at Songino was the go and we had fine views of 5 birds there, including one male calling quite loudly, which was duly taped. Recording on the IBC site.

MONGOLIAN FINCH (*Bucanetes mongolicus*) – Great views of this odd little finch in the wadi at Khanbogd, then again at Yol Am, Mukher Shivert and out towards Flaming Cliffs.

TWITE (*Linaria flavirostris*) – Just two from Yol Am, sadly a dip for Susan, they were elusive today.

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – Two flew by calling as we were loading the vehicle at Dalanzadgad, a strange place to encounter it! Presumably subspecies *altaiensis*, with the taxonomy of the group as yet unresolved.

EURASIAN SISKIN (*Spinus spinus*) – Only heard briefly in the Terelj meadow where we saw Black Stork. [*]

Emberizidae (Old World Buntings).

GODLEWSKI'S BUNTING (*Emberiza godlewskii*) – Two fine singing birds at Mukher Shivert dry valley, coming in very nicely.

MEADOW BUNTING (*Emberiza cioides*) – A couple of sightings from Baishant dry valley at Hustai, with a fine singing male being very striking in summer plumage. Video on the Smugmug site.

PINE BUNTING (*Emberiza leucocephalos*) – Great views of males at Bogd mountain, then around Khadag ger camp and at Tumen Khaan where it was nesting.

GRAY-NECKED BUNTING (*Emberiza buchanani*) – Good views and singing well in the valley by Khanbogd, the greyish head and lack of grey on the chest are quite distinctive in good light.

PALLAS'S BUNTING (*Emberiza pallasi lydiae*) – Our group missed it at Dashinchilen this year, but happily the low dry bushy steppe near Ugii ger camp gave us two good sightings of males of this small billed species with the whitish underparts and pale rump.

REED BUNTING (*Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhulina*) – One in the reeds at Dashinchilen.

BLACK-FACED BUNTING (SPODOCEPHALA/SORDIDA) (*Emberiza spodocephala spodocephala*) – Seen in the poplar woods along the Terelj river on two days, quite shy but everyone got it eventually. Note that the one we see in Japan is very different and split by HBW/BirdLife as Masked Bunting, high time IOC and Clements followed suit.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

SAXAUL SPARROW (*Passer ammodendri*) – This species is only found where the Saxaul tree (*Haloxylon ammodendron*, *Amaranthaceae*) survives. It occurs in some six disjunct desert areas across Central Asia, favouring shrubs such as Saxaul near rivers and oases. We saw them very well at Khongoryn, where they were nesting in the occupied nests of Long-legged Buzzard.

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Small numbers from Ulaan Baatar, Hustai and Khar Korin.

EURASIAN TREE SPARROW (*Passer montanus*) – The default sprog in Mongolia and seen almost every day. Looked to be nesting alongside Saxaul Sparrow in the active nests of Long-legged Buzzard at Khongoryn.

ROCK SPARROW (*Petronia petronia*) – Good views from Hustai, then the Tuul River bridge, Khanbogd and Yol Am. The white tail tips are distinctive.

WHITE-WINGED SNOWFINCH (*Montifringilla nivalis*) – Common and tame at Khanbogd dry valley and Yol Am.

PERE DAVID'S SNOWFINCH (*Montifringilla davidiana*) – We saw this nicely near Ugii Lake and Khar Korin. Dumbed down by the PC crowd to Small Snowfinch in some checklists, this species is always associated with susliks or pikas, as they breed in their burrows. It is named after the famous Abbé Père Armand David, a 19th century French missionary to China, who was also a naturalist, intrepid explorer and author.

MAMMALS

LONG-EARED DESERT HEDGEHOG SP. (*Hemiechinus auritus*) – One at Gobi Erdene on the night walk no-one showed up for!

DAURIAN PIKA (*Ochotona daurica*) – A couple were seen at Hustai by some folks.

MONGOLIAN (PALLAS'S) PIKA (*Ochotona pallasi*) – Very common this year at Yol Am, they were all over the place and quite tame, the whistled alarm call was very noticeable.

NORTHERN (BLUE) HARE (*Lepus timidus*) – We flushed a Goshawk off the remains of one in the taiga forest at Terelj, a shame the bird was so elusive!

TOLAI HARE (*Lepus tolai*) – Some folks saw this at the Tuul River in UB, and there was one near Mukher Shivert.

SIBERIAN MARMOT (*Marmota sibirica*) – Common in Khustai NP, quite a large animal and no doubt very tasty for Golden Eagles as well as Mongolians.

LONG-TAILED GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus undulatus*) – Quite common in Hustai and Terelj.

DAURIAN GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus dauricus*) – Seen as we got near Hiyor Zagal.

RED-CHEEKED (PALLID) GROUND SQUIRREL (*Spermophilus pallicauda*) – Nice looks at several on the drive to Flaming Cliffs, a small pale species with a very fluffy tail.

EUROPEAN RED SQUIRREL (*Sciurus vulgaris*) – Just one this year from the Tuul River in UB, a very dark animal with a white belly and tufted ears. Shame I missed the video opportunity.

BRANDT'S VOLE (*Lasiopodmys brandtii*) – This year was again an irruption year and we saw many scurrying over the roads at Hustai and Ugii.

MONGOLIAN GERBIL (JIRD) (*Meriones unguiculatus*) – Seen near Ugii Lake and then on the steppe near Hiyor Zagal.

MID-DAY GERBIL (JIRD) (*Meriones meridianus*) – A couple seen at Yol Am, and one on the night walk at Gobi Erdene.

GREAT GERBIL (*Rhombomys opimus*) – Great looks at one by its burrow in the saxaul dunes at Khongoryn Gol, a large species that must be very vulnerable to polecat predation, not to mention Long-legged Buzzards. Their large burrow holes were frequent throughout the saxaul forest.

GOBI JERBOA (*Allactaga bullata*) – Seen on the night walk at Gobi Erdene, a large-eared species.

MANCHURIAN ZOKOR (*Myospalax psilurus*) – Many dug earth mounds in long lines in the riparian areas at Terelj; this is one of those odd fossorial burrowers like a mole. It does apparently sometimes show on the surface and I have an ambition to see one. None of our Mongolian friends had seen it.

CORSAC FOX (*Vulpes corsac*) – One near Khar Korin showed well, very pale and short legged with large ears, and John saw another at Hiyor Zagal.

MARBLED POLECAT (*Vormela peregusna*) – Martha made one of the great finds of the trip, calling me over to see a mammal in the saxaul dunes at Khongoryn Gol. I was expecting a Gobi Jerboa, and was astonished to see a Marbled Polecat walking towards us! It allowed very nice views and photos, see the Smugmug site, and amazingly we saw two together slightly later, I suspect a female with a big youngster. That afternoon whilst looking for Desert Warbler in the same area, I found what is evidently the den, with two animals coming in and out of an old jerboa burrow. A seldom seen species and a really striking animal; a lifer for all except Gombo who had seen it just once before. Pallas's Cat last year, Marbled Polecat this, I wonder what 2020 will bring?

WILD HORSE (*Equus caballus*) – Wonderful views of 19 of these great creatures in Hustai, some with foals and with a stallion keeping guard of his herd and driving off younger males. The erect mane is very striking, as is the long tail and pale colouration with black stockings. The reintroduction scheme for what was an animal extinct in the wild seems to be working well, with about 260 animals now in the park, and some also at two other parks in Mongolia.

RED DEER (*Cervus elaphus*) – A few hinds at Hustai and one distant stag on a ridge.

GOITERED GAZELLE (*Gazella subgutturosa*) – Also known as the Black-tailed Gazelle, the black tail distinctively erect when they run. We saw 3 in the dry steppe towards Flaming Cliffs, with Ian spotting two small ones in some tall grass and the female nearby. They showed a distinct dark brown flank stripe and sides to the rump in some lights, reminiscent of Thompson's Gazelle. This is actually also the one we have seen in the UAE, although that may have been split by now.

ZEREN (*Procapra gutturosa*) – 3 running in the steppe near Flaming Cliffs, the large white rump is distinctive as is the reddish-brown pelage. It is also called Mongolian or White-tailed Gazelle.

IBEX (*Capra ibex*) – Lovely views of 3 in Yol Am on the slopes above the ice patch, with 4 later near the car park, and 7 on the drive to Flaming Cliffs.

Herps

TOAD-HEADED AGAMA (*Phrynocephalus versicolor*) – Common in the Gobi, this is the variably patterned one with the pink armpits and curled up tail.

SIBERIAN (RADDE'S) TOAD (*Bufo raddei*) – Seen well at Ugii Lake and Elsen Tasarkhai, quite well-patterned above with the females much darker.

GOBI RACERUNNER (*Eremias przewalskii*) – The dark stripy or spotty pinkish lizard from the Gobi dunes.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Birds of the trip were pretty uniform overall, with Pallas's Sandgrouse way up there, along with Eurasian Eagle Owl and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, though Mongolian Ground-Jay also featured, as did Ural Owl.

Marbled Polecat was of course the big winner with the mammals, though the gazelles were a welcome find, as were the ibex and the obliging Przewalski's Wild horses.

Additional mammals:

The night walk around Gobi Erdene was again very rewarding this year despite the damp conditions prevailing, with 8 species of small mammal:

Long-eared desert hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*)- One lovely animal gave brief photo ops, quite different to the much larger and heavier Daurian Hedgehog (*Mesechinus dauuricus*) we were shown at Moltsoog Els.

Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa (*Cardiocranius paradoxus*) Seen well on the night walk at Gobi Erdene, a small greyish jerboa with a long, bare and quite fat tail. Gombo and Dauka spent ages getting photos and it is seemingly rarely encountered, a new species for Phil.

Siberian Jerboa (*Allactaga sibirica*) One on the night walk at Gobi Erdene, it has shorter ears than Gobi Jerboa and Dauka was sure of it.

Gobi Jerboa (*Allactaga bullata*) The commoner one on the night walk, I saw a couple, the long ears very noticeable.

Northern Three-toed Jerboa (*Dipus sagitta*) A small long tailed jerboa with relatively small ears, I had brief views of one outside the fence, tentatively a new mammal for Phil.

Mid-day Gerbil (*Meriones meridianus*)- One running and sheltering under a bush, active at night as well as at mid-day it seems.

Desert Hamster (*Phodopus roborovskii*) - Four seen on the walk, known as the yellow taxi in Mongolia as they dart about everywhere! A new mammal for Phil.

Grey Hamster (*Cricetulus migratorius*) A small grey hamster with no dorsal stripe is presumably this species, also another new mammal for Phil.

Butterflies

A very poor spring for them, we saw remarkably few and I got exactly two species photographed.

A painted lady (*Vanessa cardui*) was seen at Khongoryn.

Totals for the tour: 189 bird taxa and 23 mammal taxa