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Tour Report

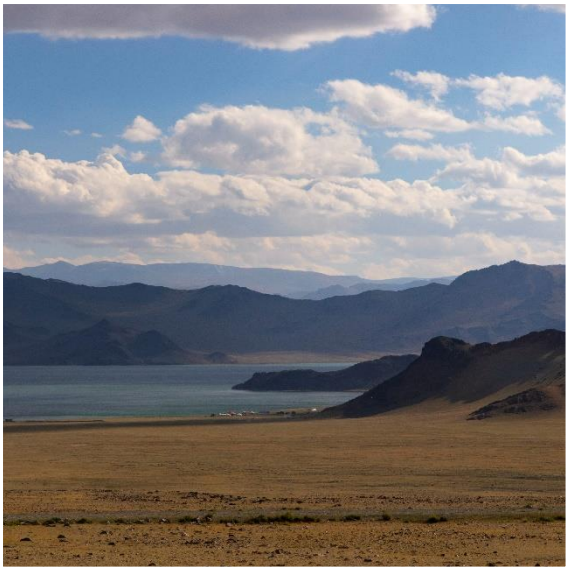
Mongolia: Cats of Mountain and Steppe

13 – 25 August 2022

Snow leopard

Corsac fox

Steppe



Cinereous vulture

Compiled by Terry Goble
Images by Steve Proctor, Colin Walker, Jill North & Terry Goble

The tour was focused on sightings of two highly elusive cats that live in remote corners of Mongolia. Of course, we would not be neglecting other wildlife as there is an exciting array of wildlife to see in Mongolia. From the bizarre Saiga antelope to the odd-looking toad-headed agama. None of the wildlife is easy to observe as we were often searching in vast open plains or scanning rocky mountains for rocky-coloured cats!

The absolute highlight of the tour was spending nearly three hours with a family of snow leopards in the wild and rugged Jargalant Mountains. I hope the time watching these beautiful animals made the difficult and remote conditions worth it. Mongolia can be a cold, tough place to visit and doesn't give up its wildlife jewels easily, but when it does it's truly stunning.

Day 1: Flight from Heathrow to Ulaanbaatar via Istanbul **Saturday 13 August 2022**

The flight was smooth and on time, which given the recent airline troubles was a relief. We landed at Istanbul airport and had a five-hour wait until our next flight. Whilst some were living the highlife others had to make do with the nap zone!

At least we all had a chance to relax before we met as a group in Ulaanbaatar. A casual glance over to a grassy area in the airport revealed at least nine red-backed shrikes, which was a nice way to start the list. The only other bird seen in the hot afternoon was a house sparrow.

The flight from Istanbul was delayed slightly, but we eventually took off into the clear blue Turkish skies. The flight was smooth and relaxed. We passed over the Altai mountains and even though it was a dark night sky the snowy mountain peaks were spectacularly visible. Passing over the mountains we flew on, below were vast empty plains with pockets of light and the occasional larger settlements. As the night gave way to the sunrise, we approached Ulaanbaatar flying over more vast steppe plains and large lakes.

An hour from Ulaanbaatar and a bank of thick clouds obscured any further views, but we had a glimpse of how wild and remote Mongolian landscapes are. We touched down on time making up for the slight delay en route. Customs were quick and painless and soon we all met for the first time as a group just outside the baggage reclaim. After introductions, we took the opportunity to obtain some local currency and set off in the minibus to our hotel to get some rest.

From the new airport, it was about an hour's drive to the hotel. En route, we saw upland buzzards dotted along fence posts. These are large buzzards and although variable are often very pale. Also seen were ravens, carrion crow and red-billed chough. There were also a few black kites seen and possibly cinereous vulture, but they were too distant to give a positive 'ID'.

We arrived at the hotel around 09:30 and quickly checked in and agreed to meet at noon for a riverside walk for migratory birds, but first some well-needed rest.

Day 2: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar Tuul River Micheel Park **Sunday 14 August 2022**

After a couple of hours resting, we met at midday and headed off for a dinner of traditional Mongolian and eastern cuisine. Once seated a few vegetables and a fish course came out to be shared and sampled by all …then a steady flow culminated into a gush of meat and vegetarian dishes. We could barely breathe let alone eat anymore so we decided to leave and head towards the park by the river and walk off our large lunch. We walked through the park, looping back around and then followed the river back to where the minibus was waiting. It was just the leg stretch needed after a long time of being inactive on a plane.

The highlights included a gorgeous and tame black, red squirrel, which gave many photo opportunities. This was our first mammal of the trip, but bird-wise perhaps the highlights included the long-tailed rosefinch, azure tit and a handsome male Amur falcon. In addition, we had some nice views of an Eastern common

nuthatch, the lovely white morphs of long-tailed tits and a couple of Arctic warblers. There may have also been a dusky warbler, but it was not seen well enough to confirm.

Most of the bird sightings came as a large mixed flock made its way through the riverine woodland. The flock also contained many great tits and a few willow tits. As we made our way out of the park and along the riverbank, we added a few more species of birds to our tally as black kites wheeled overhead. Lots of tree sparrows and an occasional house sparrow lined the walk and a female mandarin duck made her way downstream on the river.

In a moment of sunshine, a few butterflies emerged including a few small whites, small tortoiseshell and a possible Chapman's blue. We also saw a brown butterfly that resembled a sooty satyr, but it managed to burrow itself away without being seen properly.

We then approached the minibus and drove back to our hotel. We relaxed and prepared for our evening meal. We all met up in the lobby at 19:00 and strolled to a nearby restaurant for our dinner. We ate and chatted in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, enjoying the evening and the delicious food. Soon it was time to return to our hotel and get our first full night's sleep for three days, I guess we were all looking forward to some uninterrupted sleep.

Day 3: Flight to Ulgii **Monday 15 August 2022**

We all met at 07:30 at the breakfast bar on top of the hotel. After breakfast, we all met in the lobby to begin our drive to the airport. Initially, the weather was dense fog and looked ominous. Thankfully as we approached the steppe area the fog lifted, and the sun shone brightly.

Our first stop produced a long-tailed souslik and a few raptors including upland buzzard, saker falcon, black kite, cinereous vulture and a steppe eagle. We also saw a common kestrel fly over. Not a bad start! Among the asters were a host of grasshoppers and a few butterflies. The grasshoppers included a large 'armoured' type and one that proved to be very common, a medium-sized grasshopper that performed a bouncing display flight with powder blue hindwings.

As we made our way over the steppe towards the airport, we added a few more bird species including demoiselle crane, red-billed chough, Mongolian lark and booted eagle (dark phase). A wheatear was also seen, which was probably an isabelline wheatear. Pleasingly we also saw a total of three corsac foxes, including a close encounter with a fox before it disappeared down its burrow. As we approached the airport a grounded steppe eagle was seen, but we didn't have time to stop and admire the bird. We also saw several Brandt's voles as they disappeared down their burrows.

We caught the flight to Ulgii and took off on time. The flight was very scenic as we watched the vast plains and hills give way to snow-capped mountains and glaciers. The flight was smooth and touched down a little early. We were soon on our way to a nearby ger camp where we were staying for the night ahead of our morning drive to our camp in the Jargalant Mountains.

On route our interpreter, Alta described the local customs and way of life of the local people in this region. She explained about the tradition of hunting with eagles and the eagle festival held every year. She went on to tell us about the traditional farming methods and produce. On route to the camp, we saw hundreds of black kites circling over the city and beyond. We also added Pere David's snowfinch and rock sparrow, but it was tricky trying to identify wildlife from the car and as we were on a highway, we were unable to stop. At one stop we did manage to spot a jird species and back on the road we had a glimpse of souslik and marmot. We finally added Pallas' pika on another stop, but no more mammal species until we reached camp.

We all met up for dinner after setting into our comfortable gers and enjoyed a relaxing and chatty time over dinner. We discussed the plans for the following day, which included a brief morning walk before

setting off on our drive to the camp. A brief spotlight session after dinner revealed a very speedy Siberian jerboa. This long-eared rodent resembled a miniature kangaroo as it sprang around the gers. Now it was time to get some sleep.

Day 4: Drive to Jargalant Mountains **Tuesday 16 August 2022**

Most of us were up at 05:30 all bewildered by the time! Some were convinced it was 06:30 others 05:30 … all confused. We had lost an hour during the flight and our phones had not been able to adjust, exposing our reliance on technology! Once we had resolved the issue and realised it was indeed 05:30 we relaxed and had a coffee, enjoying our new surroundings. The moon was still high with Venus shining brightly next to it … a glorious sunny morning. We listened to the 'pronking' ravens, ticking wheatears and watched the black kites drift overhead. All this set in a rugged hilly landscape.

After breakfast, we went for a short walk towards a river (although only two made it as far as the river). The two who made it as far as the river spotted ruddy shelduck and a saker falcon, the rest watched a few songbirds and had distant views of a pair of demoiselle cranes dropping into the river course.

At 09:00 we set off to the new camp mostly along a highway which meant we were unable to stop. However, we did enjoy a scheduled stop by Khar-us-noor. At this huge lake, we enjoyed a plethora of birdlife. Palla's sandgrouse was an unexpected bonus among the mass of waders, wildfowl and passerines. Terek sandpiper, white-headed duck and Richard's pipit were among the highlights of this bird-watching spectacle. We even managed a mammal in the shape of an introduced muskrat, swimming across the lake.

We set off again and arrived an hour later at our ger camp set in the foothills of the Jargalant Mountains. The views were spectacular as our gers were set against a backdrop of rugged peaks and rolling foothills. We settled in and set off for a walk into a nearby canyon. As we walked up a few birds could be heard calling and a surprise Eurasian cuckoo flew up the valley. Crag martins zipped around and a smart eastern black redstart with its reddish belly setting it apart from the more familiar black redstart. We returned to camp for dinner and showers. After we sat and did our daily species count most retired for the evening, whilst others went on a night walk. This was quite productive with both Siberian and Mongolian jerboas seen and probably both Mongolian and midday jirds, along with many Pallas' pika. There was enough time to enjoy the stunning night sky, unpolluted by light. The Milky Way swept across the gem-encrusted sky, truly awe-inspiring.

Day 5: Snow leopard watching **Wednesday 17 August 2022**

Today was an exciting day as it was our first attempt at sighting a snow leopard. We set off after breakfast to a lookout ridge full of hope and expectation. The scenery en route was stunning, distant glaciers could be seen among the jagged peaks as we climbed up through the valley. We spotted a few mammals as we went up, lots of souslik, pika and marmots by their burrows. There were also some nice birds including a little owl and Eurasian cuckoo.

At the ridge, we set up camp to begin our long vigil scanning for snow leopard. During the morning shift, we were occasionally distracted by other wildlife including a juvenile lammergeier, steppe eagle, cinereous vulture, saker, chough and plenty of marmots.

Despite the number of eyes trained on the opposite slopes, there were no sightings of leopards, but this all changed just before lunch when one of the group spotted a snow leopard trotting down the hill. Unfortunately, it very quickly disappeared, and we were left to wonder how it could have eluded so many eyes searching for it. Although we redoubled our efforts amid much excitement it managed to do what snow leopards are famous for ... it vanished.

As the excitement abated and we finished our lunches and continued the scanning vigil a yell from another group member exclaimed that she could see the cat in the gully and got heart rates racing again. Sadly,

history repeated itself and only she saw the leopard before it vanished again, only this time not to be seen again that day. Still, three people had managed a glimpse of this beautiful animal and at least everybody else knew there was a possibility of seeing it again. We were determined to try again the next day.

We returned to camp and rested until we met up again at 19:00 for our evening meal. We enjoyed our food in a happy chatty atmosphere buoyed by the sighting and hopeful of more. After a tiring day, most went to bed, whilst a couple of people searched for nocturnal animals and were rewarded by a Siberian jerboa, a few jirds and a jerboa that turned out to be a Mongolian three-toed jerboa.

Day 6: Mountain viewpoint **Thursday 18 August 2022**

We all met for breakfast at 07:00 and then got prepared to leave for the mountain viewpoint at 08:00. On our way over the peaks (it was astonishing what the land cruisers could traverse), we saw a few different mammal species including mountain hare, tarbagan marmot, long-tailed souslik and many Palla's pika. There was a notable flock of water pipits along a dry stream bed flushed away by the vehicles and our now familiar entourage of wheatears and horned larks.

On this occasion, we stopped en route and made a small detour to look for ibex. After a while of scanning, we were able to get scope views of a distant pair of ibex, although we were to see a few more all the sightings were of distant animals. Now it was time to focus our attention on our main target species as we reached the viewpoint and set up 'scopes again. This time we found a lovely, sandy-coloured red fox. This was seen near the same spot as the leopard was seen the previous day, so we looked to see if the fox looked nervous!

It was soon time for a mountain lunch and although we had yet to find a snow leopard, we did have a host of exciting birds to keep us entertained. Two black kites were flying very low overhead looking for our lunch scraps and giving excellent photo opportunities that the group took full advantage of. Aside from the kites, we saw golden and steppe eagles, cinereous vulture, lammergeier and saker falcons and a few passerines that most missed whilst focused on the slopes including Guldenstadt's redstart.

The afternoon followed the same pattern as the morning session and soon it was time to descend the mountain and return to the camp for dinner. Some went for a surprisingly hot shower before dinner and then we all met around 19:30 for an enjoyable meal and relaxed and friendly conversation. A few different people went on the 'jerboa hunt' after dark, whilst others uploaded the photos or just had an early night.

Day 7: Lake Durgun **Friday 19 August 2022**

We decided to take a break from the mountains in the knowledge that any news of sightings would be relayed to us via the tour manager and we could then get to the viewpoint as fast as we could.

We set off on a morning walk down the gully next to the camp. The gully has a few bushes and was sheltered a little from the biting wind and looked like a good migrant trap. It turned out to be exactly that as we enjoyed fleeting views of two hoopoe, a wryneck, spotted flycatcher, a smart lesser whitethroat and a booted warbler. There were in addition lots of pikas and jirds scurrying around. The only surprise was that there seemed to be few predators around these gullies.

After breakfast we set off for Lake Durgun we stopped again shortly after to look at a different-looking souslik and realised it was a new species for us the red-cheeked ground squirrel (souslik). We continued to an area of trees and a small stream just outside the village of Chandmani. This looked like another migrant magnet, and we walked around spotting a few butterflies and dragonflies in addition to an interesting suite of birds. Overhead among the many black kites, a single light phased booted eagle passed over. Among the trees were a few exotic-looking hoopoe, spotted flycatcher and a few yellow-browed warblers.

Our next stop was shortly after in the village for a few supplies and ice creams before heading out across the flat plains in search of saiga antelope and heading towards the lake. The now hot and sunny morning created both a mirage and heat haze over the flat arid desert plain. When we did see distant saiga antelope they were hazy shimmering objects that we could make out but not discern. In addition, the mirage effects made the antelopes appear to be in the middle of the lake! We pressed on towards the lake, which seemed to be close and distant at the same time, making it very difficult to judge where the lake began. Eventually, we made it to the shores of the lake and disembarked from the cars. Whilst our drivers and crew got to work making coffees and teas and then cooking lunches, we explored the lake and its rich birdlife. There was a large variety of waders, waterfowl, gulls and steppe species to pick through. The highlights were a smart breeding plumaged Pallas' gull, gull-billed tern, red-necked stint and Richard's pipit among many other species.

After a filling and enjoyable lunch by the lake, we set off back to the camp in the cooler conditions of late afternoon. This made the views of the antelopes much clearer and although still distant the views were much clearer, and we could make out the salient features of this unusual beast including its famous huge nose. Other mammal sightings on the way back included Tolai hare and several red-cheeked ground squirrels. Our route back took us through some good habitat for Henderson's ground jays and one likely candidate was seen only to disappear up a gully. The cars however continued back to camp, and we were unable to spot any more as there was a decision to get back for the shower rota!

After showers and a hearty dinner, we made plans to try for the leopards the next day and then most retired whilst others went on the now nightly Jerboa quest, this time in windy conditions. The wind meant that sightings were few, but on return to the camp we finally picked out the 'miniature kangaroos' bouncing between the land cruisers. After photographing the minibeasts it was time to turn in.

Day 8: Snow leopard watching **Saturday 20 August 2022**

Today was our last hope of sighting the snow leopard so waking to the sight of heavy rain was our worst fear. However, it managed to get a little worse when the rain turned to sleet and snow. This would make it near impossible for even the cruisers to make the journey up the mountain. Our last hope to cling to was that the snow would give way to the sun and the path up the mountain would melt in the afternoon. Now that was looking like a remote possibility. Despite the news confirming that the morning drive up the mountain was cancelled the group remained in excellent spirits and we enjoyed a very good, humoured breakfast.

The change of plans involved descending to the lower slopes to look for goitered (black-tailed) gazelles and another attempt at the elusive ground jay. As we prepared to leave camp distant sunshine seemed to be headed towards our mountains and gave us a glimmer of hope.

After we went down it was not long before we found a small group of gazelles, which promptly fled. Illegal hunting is thought to be still widespread in Mongolia, so the wildlife is consequently shy of humans. We spotted a few more groups of goitered gazelles, all were fleeting as the gazelles trotted away. We continued along keeping a look out for elusive jays until one of the group casually saw a large bird on a ridge. A glance over revealed Henderson's jay, our second target species. It gave good views before melting away into the many ridges and gullies.

We decided to take a circular route back and spotted a few more gazelles and ground jays. One jay offered very good views and a few alighted from the car to follow on foot. Now we were bathed in glorious sunshine and the Jargalant Mountains were visible again now our hopes began to grow. In the meanwhile, we had a jay to find. Whilst looking we also noted a few migrants including a handsome desert warbler and a 'dancing' spotted flycatcher. The jays eventually gave reasonable views, and their short flights revealed the pied markings on the wings of this attractive bird. Now we had to return for lunch and await news of the plans for the afternoon.

During a filling and enjoyable lunch, we received the news we hoped for, the snow on the mountain had melted enough to allow the cars to get up the peaks. The snow still lay on the higher ground, however, this only added to the majesty of the surroundings and the way up seemed ever more beautiful enhanced by the snowy peaks.

As we ascended there was an air of hope and optimism after a very enjoyable morning. Our optimism was enhanced by the crackling of the radio announcing a sighting of leopards at the viewpoint. So, we decided to ignore all stops and set off at pace. Then disaster! Our car had a puncture, but this was quickly resolved with the help of Alta. The following vehicles hosted the group from our vehicle and Alta kindly stayed to assist the driver.

We soon approached the viewpoint, and three leopards were all on view! After frantically ensuring that all the group had a good look at these amazingly camouflaged animals, we relaxed and enjoyed an incredible two-and-a-half hours of viewing a mother and her two adult offspring. We even managed to watch the mother hunt and kill a marmot before watching them feed and interact on occasions. It was a magical couple of hours that flew past until the cool evening chill marked the time to descend as the three leopards curled up sleeping and looked to be settled.

On our return, we stopped for a little owl, Tolai hare and a chukar. For one of the group finally seeing the horned lark was another highlight and another finally got her fur fix! Back at dinner, we caught up with two of the group who stayed until the leopards left and saw a red fox. Dinner was enjoyed in great spirits and the evening concluded with an audience with Alta and Sorezen. They told us about the origins and aspirations of his company and we were given an opportunity to thank his staff and spotters for their hard work and particularly for the spotters' finding leopards in very demanding conditions.

An altogether outstanding day ended when 11 tired wildlife watchers retired for the night taking their memories of the day with them.

Day 9: Flight to Ulaanbaatar and night in hotel **Monday 21 August 2022**

Today was a travelling day so after a little lie-in and after our breakfast we packed up our belongings and set off leaving Jargalant Mountains. We dropped down onto the plain and hoped to find saiga antelopes in better light and hopefully closer. However, the plains were very quiet and a ground jay and three goitered gazelles were all we were able to spot.

The route to Khovd took us past the home of one of our drivers. As we approached his ger and farm we saw two parties of Pallas' sandgrouse a little way on either side of the track. When we arrived at our driver's home, he made us very welcome, and we got to meet his family before he then showed us his crop of watermelons and shared the juicy melons with us. His irrigated farm had encouraged lots of butterflies and a few dragonflies, and we watched a few as we enjoyed the freshest watermelons we are ever likely to have.

We thanked him for his kindness and said goodbye to his family as we set off again this time on our way to Khar-Us Noor (a different site). We stopped here to watch the varied birdlife and to sit with tea or coffee. There were a few of the internationally scarce white-headed ducks, black-necked grebe and butterflies such as dappled and small bath white. It made for a relaxing break from the drive.

We had agreed to stop in Khovd for lunch and stopped at a 'Western style' restaurant. We enjoyed a relaxing lunch and then drove the short distance to the airport where we said 'goodbye' to Alta and Sorensen and made our way to departures. The plane was delayed, but once underway we managed to make up some of the lost time. We relaxed and enjoyed a smooth and scenic flight to Ulaanbaatar.

Due to the late arrival and the closure of the airport food halls we had a picnic in the airport sorted by Uugan. It was quite a novelty to sit and picnic in a quiet airport before we had to leave to make our way to

the hotel for the night. After checking in we all retired to our rooms to rest and look forward to arriving at Manul Camp for the second part of our Mongolian adventure.

Day 10: Drive to Manul Camp **Tuesday 22 August 2022**

We set off for Manul camp in the morning just after 08:00 - we had a lie-in to catch up on some sleep. The route took us along a maintained road for half the journey, but we soon left the road to follow a track over the grassy plains and hilly landscape towards the camp. We saw quite a nice selection of wildlife, which included birds such as golden eagle, Mongolian lark, Asian short-toed lark (lots!) and Blyth's pipit. The mammals included new records for us of argali (wild sheep) and Mongolian gazelle. We also saw a few Brandt's vole, which Atilla thought we should be seeing a lot more of (possibly due to the unseasonal wet weather).

We arrived at camp and sat down to enjoy coffee and tea and some snacks before settling in when a little later had a filling lunch. Several people had commented on the gorgeous heady herbal aroma of the vegetation, perhaps another result of the heavy rains as it would normally be a dry and arid habitat.

After lunch, we headed out on a wildlife drive to look for wapiti. We were unable to locate any deer on this occasion, but we did have some nice birds including Palla's reed bunting, Pere David's snowfinch and some familiar cinereous vultures and saker falcon. We returned to camp for warming drinks and more snacks before setting out again at 16:00.

We drove to a viewpoint over suitable Pallas' cat habitat and scanned the rocky hillside for any movement. We watched an interaction between a saker falcon and a steppe eagle. The falcon was diving down on the eagle, which twisted in mid-air to face the falcon with its large talons. Other mammals on view included a very handsome corsac fox, its sandy coat looking luxuriant in the late afternoon sun. There were also a few Tarbagan marmots around, but the cat eluded us. We returned to the camp, flushing a Japanese quail among large numbers of Asian short-toed larks and a few Mongolian larks.

After dinner most retired to their gers, whilst others went out on a night drive trying a bit of spotlighting. There were a few Tolai hares and Siberian jerboas around, but otherwise quiet and we returned to camp to get some sleep. The sky in this remote camp was again spectacular and the scenery overhead was breathtaking.

Day 11: Searching for Pallas's cat **Wednesday 23 August 2022**

Woke to overcast skies, but at least the forecast rain was holding off for the time being. Breakfast was taken at 07:30 in order to be out in time to spot wildlife in the cool morning. We drove to a site known to have been used by Pallas' cats, en route we stopped where wolves had been seen, although we didn't see any we found a herd of about twelve wapiti. After spending a little time enjoying the animals we move on to a rocky area. Here we alighted from the car to search for the elusive cat. Despite much scanning, we saw marmots, steppe eagle and a few passerines, but no cats.

We then moved to a completely different habitat of sandy soils and a few trees! Here we found the Mongolian gerbil (jird) and several migrant passerines. The highlights included a smart Siberian ruby-throat, yellow-browed warbler and a few pine and Pallas' buntings. There were a few post-breeding common rose finch, but we eventually saw one with a pink flush.

We then drove back to camp for lunch and as we were enjoying a relaxed and good-humoured lunch the rain began to fall and proceeded to get heavier. A decision was taken to postpone the drive out until 16:00 in the hope that the rain would pass. In the meanwhile, a Durian hedgehog turned up to cheer us. We all braved the rain to admire and photograph the hedgehog, which had now rolled into a tight ball.

The rain began to ease and as we set out on our evening drive, eventually stopped. We drove with 'Cat man', who has been looking for a Pallas' cat den for us and has been studying the Pallas' cat for the last 20 years. We went to some likely-looking Pallas' cat habitat where he had placed two cam-trail cameras. After finding the cameras, and downloading the images we returned the cameras. We then went to look at a site where an eagle owl roosts. We walked around the site, scanning as we went, but there was no sign of the owl.

Then the rain returned, and we decided to head back to the camp to dry out and warm up with a hearty dinner. As the rain continued to fall quite heavily, we decided to cancel the night drive and instead had an early night after our dinner.

Day 12: Drive to Ulaanbaatar **Thursday 24 August 2022**

Today we got up a little earlier and set off at 07:00 to Hustai National Park. It was a long drive to the park and apart from a few buzzards and other birds, there was not a lot of wildlife to see en route. We drove on as quickly as the roads allowed us to get to the park. We did manage to add Durian jackdaw and rook to our bird list and later Pacific swift.

We finally made the park entrance and scanned for the large herds of Mongolian gazelle. We did eventually find the herds feeding high up on a distant hillside, and in the foreground we watched two Corsac foxes searching amongst the tall grasses for rodents. After viewing the gazelles, we moved on to look for Prezwalski's horse, a species saved from extinction by a reintroduction from zoo animals.

We eventually located a herd of horses mixed in with wapiti. A couple of the group moved closer to the herd to get some photos, whilst the rest watched them through the telescopes. Throughout the day we saw many marmots and a few eagles, including golden eagle.

We then drove to the park entrance and campsite. We stopped here for a filling buffet lunch and a little shopping in the park store. After we set off back to Ulaanbaatar, a much shorter journey of about two hours once we had negotiated the traffic. On arrival, we went to our rooms and got ready for our final dinner of this trip.

We met again around 19:00 and walked to a nearby restaurant (the same one as used previously). Here we enjoyed our meals in a lively and relaxed atmosphere and thanked Uugun and his hard-working drivers and staff. Now we returned to our hotel to get some sleep for an early start and a long journey home.

Day 13: Flight to the UK via Istanbul **Friday 25 August 2022**

We met at the lobby at 18:00 and drove to the airport. A quiet drive but it was nice to see a flock of five demoiselle cranes as we approached the international airport. We arrived in good time and met up after checking in for breakfast at the airport for a breakfast together. After our sandwich and coffee, we made our way to departures, saying goodbye to Uugan and beginning our long journey home.

The plane left slightly late, but we were soon on our way and heading for Istanbul. The flight was slightly bumpy with a short spell of turbulence. It was then smooth all the way into Istanbul where we headed for the nap zone to catch up with our red-backed shrikes! In the stop-over period, we chalked up red-backed shrikes, hoopoe, kestrel, peregrine, yellow-legged gulls and house sparrow.

We had a slight delay for our final flight back to Heathrow, the earlier BA flight was also slightly delayed. We landed around 21:00 and some had to get off for their various trips home, but a few met at the luggage carousel to say a warm farewell.

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Checklist

	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13
	BIRDS														
1	Japanese quail	*Coturnix japonica*									✓				
2	Chukar partridge	*Alectoris chukar*				H	✓		✓						
3	Daurian partridge	*Perdix dauurica*										✓			
4	Greyleg goose	*Anser anser*			✓			✓		✓					
5	Whooper swan	*Cygnus cygnus*			✓	✓			✓	✓					
6	Ruddy shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*			✓	✓			✓	✓			✓		
7	Mandarin duck	*Aix galericulata*		✓											
8	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*				✓			✓						
9	Eurasian widgeon	*Mareca penelope*				✓			✓	✓	✓				
10	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*							✓						
11	Northern shoveler	*Anas clypeata*							✓	✓	✓				
12	Red-crested pochard	*Netta rufina*				✓			✓		✓				
13	Common pochard	*Aythya ferina*				✓			✓		✓				

14	Common cuckoo	Cuculus canorus				✓			✓			✓			
15	Pallas's sandgrouse	*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*				✓				✓	✓				
16	Rock dove	*Columba livia*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Hill pigeon	*Columba rupestris*				✓	✓	✓		✓					
18	Eurasian collared dove	*Steptopelia decaocto*							✓		✓	✓			
19	Eurasian coot	*Fulica atra*							✓		✓				
20	Demoiselle crane	*Grus virgo*			✓	✓			✓					✓	✓
21	Great crested grebe	*Podiceps cristatus*				✓			✓		✓				
22	Black-winged stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*				✓			✓		✓				
23	Pied avocet	*Recurvirostra avosetta*									✓				
24	Northern lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*				✓									
25	Kentish plover	*Charadrius alexandrinus*							✓						
26	Eurasian curlew	*Numenius arquata*							✓						
27	Black-tailed godwit	*Limosa limosa*									✓				
28	Temmink's stint	*Calidris temminckii*				✓			✓		✓				
29	Little stint	*Calidris minuta*							✓		✓				
30	Common sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*				✓									
31	Green sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*				✓									
32	Common redshank	*Tringa totanus*									✓				

33	Wood sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*				✓									
34	Black-headed gull	*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*				✓									
35	Pallas's gull	*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*							✓						
36	Vega gull (mongolian)	*Larus vegae mongolicus*			✓	✓			✓						
37	Caspian tern	*Hydroprogne caspia*							✓						
38	Common tern	*Sterna hirundo*				✓			✓		✓				
39	White-winged tern	*Chlidonias leucopterus*				✓									
40	Great cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*				✓			✓		✓				
41	Eurasian spoonbill	*Platalea leucorodia*				✓			✓		✓				
42	Grey heron	*Ardea cinerea*				✓			✓		✓				
43	Great egret	*Ardea alba*				✓			✓		✓				
44	Lammergeier	*Gypaetus barbatus*					✓	✓		✓					
45	Cinereous vulture	*Aegypius monachus*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
46	Booted eagle	*Hieraaetus pennatus*			✓				✓						
47	Steppe eagle	*Aquila nipalensis*			✓		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
48	Golden eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*				✓		✓				✓		✓	
49	Eurasian sparrowhawk	*Accipiter nisus*									✓	✓	✓		
50	Western marsh harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*							✓		✓				
51	Black (black-eared) Kite	*Milvus migrans lineatus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

52	Upland buzzard	*Buteo hemilasius*		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
53	Little owl	*Athene noctua*					✓			✓	✓	✓			
54	Common kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	
55	Amur falcon	*Falco amurensis*		✓										✓	
56	Saker falcon	*Falco cherrug*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Brown shrike	*Lanius cristatus*											✓		
58	Isabelline shrike	*Lanius isabellinus*				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
59	Steppe (great grey) shrike	*Lanius excubitor pallidirostris*									✓				
60	Eurasian hoopoe	*Upupa epops*							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
61	Eurasian magpie	*Pica pica*		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Red-billed chough	*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	
63	Durian jackdaw	*Coloeus dauuricus*												✓	
64	Rook	*Corvus frugilegus pastinator*												✓	
65	Carrion crow	*Corvus corone orientalis*		✓	✓	✓			✓					✓	
66	Northern raven	*Corvus corax*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
67	Azure tit	*Cyanistes cyanus*		✓											
68	Great tit	*Parus major*		✓											
69	Horned lark	*Eremophila alpestris*				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

70	Mongolian lark	*Melanocorypha mongolica*			✓							✓	✓		
71	Asian short-toed lark	*Alaudala cheleensis*							✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Sand martin	*Riparia riparia*			✓	✓					✓				
73	Pale martin	*Riparia diluta*				✓			✓						
74	Common house martin	*Delichon urbicum*			✓	✓		✓	✓					✓	
75	Eurasian crag martin	*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*				✓	✓	✓		✓					
76	Barn swallow	*Hirundo rustica*		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
77	Dusky warbler	*Phylloscopus fuscatus*											H		
78	Yellow-browed warbler	*Phylloscopus inornatus*							✓				✓		
79	Artic warbler	*Phylloscopus borealis*		✓											
80	Lesser whitethroat	*Sylvia curruca*							✓	✓	✓		✓		
81	Common whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*								✓	✓				
82	Asian desert warbler	*Sylvia nana*								✓	✓				
83	Eurasian nuthatch	*Sitta europaea asiatica*		✓											
84	Spotted flycatcher	*Muscicapa striata*							✓	✓	✓				
85	Taiga (red-throated) flycatcher	*Ficedula albicilla*											✓		
86	Black redstart	*Phoenicurus ochruros*				✓	✓	✓							
87	Güldenstädt's redstart	*Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*					✓	✓							

88	Common rock thrush	*Monticola saxatilis*				✓									
89	Siberian stonechat	*Saxicola stejnegeri*									✓		✓		
90	Northern wheatear	*Oenanthe oenanthe*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
91	Isabelline wheatear	*Oenanthe isabellina*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
92	Desert wheatear	*Oenanthe deserti*								✓	✓				
93	Pied wheatear	*Oenanthe pleschanka*									✓		✓	✓	
94	House sparrow	*Passer domesticus*		✓	✓	✓						✓			
95	Rock sparrow	*Petronia petronia*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
96	Eurasian tree sparrow	*Passer montanus*		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
97	Western yellow wagtail	*Montacilla flava*				✓			✓		✓				
98	Citrine wagtail	*Montacilla citreola*											✓		
99	White wagtail	*Montacilla alba baicalensis*		✓	✓	✓			✓		✓				
100	Blyth's pipit	*Anthus godewskii*										✓	✓	✓	
101	Water pipit	*Anthus spinoletta*				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				
102	Mongolian finch	*Bucanetesmongolicus*				✓									
103	White-winged snowfinch	*Montifringilla nivalis*					✓			✓					
104	Common rosefinch	*Carpodacus erythrinus*											✓		
105	Ortolan bunting	*Emberiza hortulana*				✓									

106	Pine bunting	*Emberiza leucocephalos*											✓		
107	Long-tailed rosefinch	*Uragus sibiricus*		✓											
108	Pere david's snowfinch	*Pyrgilauda davidiana*			✓							✓			
109	Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*				✓									
110	Little tern	*Sternula albifrons*				✓									
111	Terek sandpiper	*Xenus cinereus*				✓									
112	Willow tit	*Poecile Montanus*		✓											
113	Gull-billed tern	*Gelochelidon nilotica*							✓						
114	Richard's pipit	*Anthus richardi*							✓						
115	Booted warbler	*Iduna caligata*							✓						
116	Henderson's ground jay	*Podoces hendersoni*								✓					
117	Red-necked stint	*Calidris ruficollis*							✓						
118	Common swift	*Apus apus*				✓									
119	Pacific swift	*Apus pacificus*												✓	
120	Greater sandplover	*Charadrius leschenaultii*							✓						
121	Mongolian sandplover	*Charadrius mongolus mongolus*							✓						
122	Ferruginous duck	*Aythya nyroca*									✓				
123	Palla's reed bunting	*Emberiza pallasi*										✓	✓		

124	Eastern yellow wagtail	*Montacilla tschutschensis*												✓	
	MAMMALS	***MAMMALIA***													
1	Brand's vole	*Lasiopodomys brandtii*		✓								✓			
2	Mongolian jird	*Meriones unguiculatus*				✓	✓								
3	Midday jird	*Meriones meridianus*					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
4	Siberian jerboa	*Allactaga sibirica*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
5	Mongolian jerboa	*Stylodipus andrewsi*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
6	Palla's pika	*Ochotona pallasi*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
7	Long-tailed ground squirrel	*Spermophilus undulatus*			✓		✓	✓		✓				✓	
8	Red-cheeked ground squirrel	*Spermophilus erythrogenys*							✓						
9	Tarbagan marmot	*Masrmota sibirica*			✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
10	Tolai hare	*Lepus tolai*							✓	✓		✓			
11	Red fox	*Vulpes vulpes*						✓		✓	✓				
12	Corsac fox	*Vulpes corsac*			✓							✓		✓	
13	Snow leopard	*Uncia uncia*				✓				✓					
14	Przewalski's horse	*Equus ferus przewalskii*												✓	
15	Goitered gazelle	*Gazella subgutturosa*								✓	✓				
16	Saiga antelope	*Saiga tatarica*							✓						

17	Siberian ibex	*Capra sibirica*						✓							
18	Red deer	*Cervus elaphus*											✓	✓	
19	Red squirrel	*Sciurus vulgaris*		✓											
20	Muskrat	*Ondatra zibethicus*				✓									
21	Mountain hare	*Lepus timidus*					✓	✓							
22	Mongolian gazelle	*Procapra gutturosa*										✓	✓	✓	
23	Argali	*Ovis ammon*											✓		
24	Durian hedgehog	*Mesechinus dauuricus*											✓		
	REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS														
1	Toad-headed agama	*Phrynocephalus helioscopus*				✓			✓	✓					
2	Mongolian toad	*Strauchbufo radde*												✓	
	INVERTEBRATES														
1	Small white	*Pieris rapae*													
2	Pale clouded yellow	*Colias hyale*													
3	Small tortoiseshell	*Aglais urticae*													
4	Indian red admiral	*Vanessa indica*													
5	Eastern dappled white	*Euchloe ausonia*													
6	Small bath white	*Pontia chloridice*													

7	Lots of blue species to be identified														
8	Blue-tailed damselfly	*Ischnura elegans*													
9	Siberian winter damselfly	*Sympecma paedisca*													
10	Red-veined darter	*Sympetrum fonscolombii*													
11	Banded darter	*Sympetrum pedemontanum*													
12	Black darter	*Sympetrum danae*													
13	Hawkmoth	*Hyles costata*													
14	Large cricket sp	*Deracantha onos*													
	PLANTS														
1	Dragon's head	*Draco cephalum*													
2	Yellow poppy	*Papaver nudicaule*													
3	Alpine aster	*Aster alpinus*													
4	Medic burnet	*Sanguisorba offcinalis*													
5	Fireweed	*Chamerion augustifolium*													
6	Gentiana	*Gentiana barbata froel*													
7	Mongolian stinging nettle	*Urtica cannabina*													