

# Mongolia's Gobi Region: Culture and Wildlife Tour 2025

## Trip Report

By Marta Curti & Angel Muela

2-15 May 2025



**Three Snow Leopards (a mother and 2 cubs) seen during our tour. Photo by Angel Muela**

I think it is safe to say that Mongolia exceeded everyone's expectations. During our 15-day tour, we had the opportunity to explore the fantastic, expansive, and constantly shifting scenery on our drives across desert landscapes and vast steppes, and through rugged canyons, and alongside rocky cliffs. We experienced diverse weather (sunny days, snow, dust storms, high winds, and rain), and incredible cultural experiences. We stayed with a nomad family in the Gobi learning about milk and cashmere production, and sharing meals with our generous hosts. We walked through beautiful, snow-covered valleys, climbed granite peaks, visited museums, monasteries, and the famous Black Market, as we immersed ourselves in Mongolian culture and history. We also had some incredible wildlife sightings - we observed 25 species of mammals and 108 bird species during our tour.

**Tour Leaders:** Marta Curti & Angel Muela

**Local Guides:** Nara Urtnasan and Gantumur (Ganaa) Khumbaa

## Highlights of the trip

1. Watching three **Snow Leopards**, a mother and two cubs, for hours as they lounged around at the lip of a cave.
2. Getting fabulous looks at several male **Black-billed Capercaillie**!
3. Enjoying learning about the amazing culture of Mongolia, including visiting monasteries, museums, and the famous Black Market in Ulaanbaatar.
4. Staying with a nomad family in the Gobi and practicing combing goats for cashmere wool, milking goats, enjoying a few meals together, and helping set up a yurt (ger).
5. Our incredible views of a stunning, reddish **Bearded Vulture** soaring over our heads.
6. Climbing to the top of the Khongor Sand Dunes and the fantastic views it afforded.
7. The stunning, snow covered hike in Yol Valley and our impromptu snowball fight along the way!
8. Sneaking up hills to stealthily watch herds of **Argali** and **Siberian Ibex**.
9. Seeing a large number of small mammals including **Daurian Hedgehog**, **Hairy-footed Jerboa**, **Roborovski Hamster**, and **Mongolian Gerbil**.
10. Watching a close by herd of **Przewalski's Horse** in Hustai National Park and celebrating with a night of spontaneous Karaoke!



**A herd of Przewalski's Horses seen at Hustai National Park. Photo by Angel Muela**



# Itinerary

## Day 1: 2 May — Ulaanbaatar Culture & Tuul River Area Birding

Though the entire group arrived yesterday, we started our first official day of the tour today. Because of the varied interests of our group, we decided to split up this first morning. One group stayed with our guide, Nara, and visited the National Museum and the Gandan Monastery, an active monastery which is home to the majestic 26-meter-high gilded statue of Megjid Janraisig. They observed a Buddhist ceremony at the monastery and later, went shopping at the largest fine cashmere store in town.

The second group had an early morning start (5 a.m.) and drove about 2 hours to search for the **Black-billed Capercaillie**. On the drive there and back, we spotted a few bird species including **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, **Horned** and **Crested larks**, and **Isabelline** and **Northern wheatears**. We also spotted **Long-tailed Ground Squirrels** running across the open steppe. When we arrived at the area, we had walked for less than 5 minutes when our local guide, Ganaa, stopped and signaled for us to listen. We could easily hear one calling not too far off in the distance. As we approached, we were treated with an amazing sight - one large male walking among the trees, just off the small road. We watched it for several minutes as it spread its tail feathers, lifted its head to call, and occasionally made short vertical flights. We hadn't been there long when we spotted 3 more males a bit further away. The excitement built as another male approached and began sparring briefly with the first male we had been watching. We spent a few moments watching from a far. We then left and headed out to meet the rest of the group. As we were getting ready to get into the car, we heard and saw a **Red-throated Thrush** calling from



Daurian Redstart. Photo by Angel Muela

the top of a tree. We also noticed several large mounds on the ground, which were made by **False** or **Steppe Zokor**, a medium-sized, subterranean rodent.

On the way back to the capital, we stopped at the Gengis Khan Statue Complex for a brief look at this monument to the founder of the Mongol Empire. We also picked up a couple of new species for the trip including **Black Kite**, **White Wagtail**, and **Daurian Jackdaw**. Our final stop before returning to the city was at the Marshall Bridge in the Riparian Forest of Tuul River. Here we saw **Mandarin Duck**, **Azure Tit**, **Common Merganser**, and the beautiful **Daurian Redstart**.

After a lovely lunch together, the entire group visited the world-famous Black Market, with rows and rows of vendor stalls selling just about anything one might need. The group enjoyed shopping for warm gloves, cashmere beanies and scarves, traditional hats, and more. We also picked up some fruits for our trip the next day. After dinner at a delicious Japanese restaurant, we all returned to our hotel for some rest.

### **Day 2: May 3 — Ulaanbaatar to Govi Gurvan Saikhan (Three Beauties of the Gobi)**

With luggage and packed breakfasts in tow, we got an early morning (5 a.m.) start to make the very long (14 hours) but very beautiful drive to the Gobi region of Mongolia, where we would spend a large part of our trip. Along the drive we made many stops to stretch our legs, and do a bit of birding. Not too far out of the city, we got really nice looks at our first of many **Demoiselle Cranes** near the side of the road. We stopped at a known Saker Falcon nest, but didn't spot any birds there. However, we did see an **Upland Buzzard**, and a little way down the road, several **Steppe Eagles** and **Cinereous Vultures** feeding on a dead sheep. In the same area, we saw a **Carriion Crow** nest with three nestlings, as well as **Red-billed Chough** and **Eurasian Hoopoe** along the way. We also saw some nice mammals, including several large herds of **Mongolian Gazelle**. We also enjoyed watching the **Mongolian Gerbils** darting across the open fields.

After lunch at a local restaurant, we stopped at a small rain-fed pond where we picked up several new species for the trip including **Gray Heron**, **Common Shelduck**, **Northern Shoveler**,



Domestic camels were an almost constant feature in Mongolia's otherwise ever-changing landscapes. Photo by Angel Muela



**Eurasian Wigeon, Water Pipit, Red-Crested and Common pochards, Tufted Duck, Black-headed Gull, Pied Avocet**, and a small flock of **Bramblings**. We also saw some more **Mongolian Gerbils** running around the lagoon. After about 20 minutes at the pond, we got back into the vehicles to continue our drive south. But, when our group spotted some domestic camels, we stopped to take some photos of them against the spectacular backdrop of the snow-covered peaks of the Altai Mountains in the Three Beauties of the Gobi National Park.

We made one more quick stop at a park in Dalanzadgad town as our guides refueled the vehicles and picked up some supplies. In the park we saw a pair of **Common Chaffinch**, another new species for our trip. We then continued our drive into the Gobi desert. We made a quick stop at a cave which snow leopards have been known to frequent. It was already late in the day, so we didn't stay long. Though the cave was empty, we did pick up a new bird for the trip, the lovely **Pied Wheatear**.

We then continued on through the beautiful canyons and open landscapes of the Gobi Desert, traveling about 20 minutes before reaching the land of a local, nomadic family still in their winter camp. We would spend the next 4 nights on their land, learning about their way of life and culture. After dinner, we took a short walk at night, but returned to our yurts after not too long in order to get some rest.

### Day 3: May 4 — Govi Gurvan Saikhan

This morning, we woke up to rain and heavy winds! Luckily, the rain subsided but the winds persisted (gusts of up to 38 mph), which made observing wildlife very difficult. Our first stop was to visit the same cave we had visited the evening before. Though we didn't see the cats, we managed to pick up some good birds and some new species for the trip including **Saker Falcon, Mongolian Finch, Eurasian Crag-Martin**, and **Godlewski's Bunting**. After a nice lunch back at our homestay, even though the wind continued to blow quite heavily, we decided to head out again onto the steppe.

Though the snow leopard cave was still empty, we enjoyed exploring the nearby surroundings. Several of us took a hike up to a nearby mountain top. Along the way, we had terrific views of the valleys below. Angel spotted an active **Cinereous Vulture** nest, we found evidence of snow leopards (old scratching and scat), and had wonderful views of an **Upland Buzzard** soaring past. Others decided to walk along the dry river bed, or just along the base of the slopes, enjoying the stunning mountains, rugged rock-faces, and beautiful, low-growing wild flowers.



A breathtaking view atop a hill in Three Beauties of the Gobi NP. Photo by Anna Quintin



We made it back to our homestay right in time for dinner with our local family. We partook in a traditional welcome ritual offered. Byambaakhuu, one of our hosts, passed around a snuff jar. We all placed a small bit of tobacco from the jar on our fists and took a sniff. We sipped vodka made from goats milk, and ate dried yogurt, cookies, salad, and fried noodles with sheep meat. With Nara's help translating, we were able to ask a lot of questions and learned so much about our host family and the nomadic lifestyle. As we were talking, we suddenly noticed that our guides, the host family, and all of our drivers had quickly run outside. We came to find out that one of our yurts had collapsed due to the heavy winds. We all pitched in to help re-assemble it. Despite working in the cold and wind, it was fascinating to see how all the different parts came together to mount these unique structures. Once the yurt was back together, we all turned in for the night. Despite the chill, our yurts were warm thanks to the small stoves in the center of each, which were heated by burning domestic animal dung.

#### Day 4: May 5 — Govi Gurvan Saikhan

This morning, we woke up to some heavy winds (though less so than yesterday), snow on the ground, and a lot of fog. The nomad family we were staying with was busy milking their goats, so a few of us tried our hand at it, and some were more successful than others!

Afterwards, we decided to visit the Havtsgait Petroglyphs site which boasts an incredible collection of early bronze-age rock carvings, in hopes the weather would clear eventually, and that wildlife watching would be a bit easier. Along the way, we stopped at a site with several abandoned buildings (an old meeting place for nomad families). There we saw several **Lesser Kestrels**, and also picked up **Hill Pigeon** for our list. We then drove another 15 minutes or so and parked our cars beneath a small hill. Several of us climbed the short, but steep incline and were rewarded with incredible views of the mountains behind us and open steppe almost as far as the eye could see.



An example of the many petroglyphs seen at Havtsgait. Photo by Marta Curti



And of course, we saw some of the beautiful petroglyphs carved on the myriad of stones scattered atop the ridge.

Before heading back for lunch, we decided to make one more stop at the snow leopard cave. No sooner had we arrived, than Ganaa spotted an adult female **Snow Leopard** peering out from the large, rocky cavity. After a few moments, we saw one and then another cub walk into the cavern to join her! Due to this incredible opportunity, our local team brought us lunch (rather than returning to the camp to eat) and we spent the rest of the afternoon watching these magnificent cats as they wiled away their afternoon in the cave. We also picked up some more new species for the trip including **Black Redstart** and **Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush**, and we had nice views of a **Bearded Vulture** flying overhead. After several hours, some of the group decided to head back to the camp. A few of us stayed until dark, to get as much time watching these amazing cats as possible. Just as the sun had set, we watched as several bats emerged from the cave. The snow leopard cubs tracked the bats' movements, moving their heads quickly from side to side. One of the cubs swatted at a bat with its enormous paw, but missed. It was an incredible day and an incredible snow leopard sighting. Once back at our camp, we enjoyed another dinner with our host family, toasted our snow leopard sighting, and enjoyed delicious home-made yogurt. After dinner, when walking to our yurts, we noticed that the sky was relatively clear and the stars were beautiful and bright. It was a terrific end to a terrific day.



One of two Snow Leopard cubs walking into a cave to join its mother. Photo by Angel Muela

#### Day 5: May 6 — Govi Gurvan Saikhan

We began our day with a nice, homemade breakfast, prepared by our awesome chef. After breakfast, we headed out back onto the steppe. The beautiful landscapes continued to take our breaths away. We were in search of a **Bearded Vulture** nest that Ganaa knew about. Somewhere



along the way, as we drove through dry riverbeds and dirt roads, Ganaa realized he made a wrong turn somewhere. But it turned out to be fortuitous. Annaic spotted a herd of **Argali** on a slope across the valley. We watched them for a little while, then decided to try to get closer. We ended up sneaking up a hillside, crouching low behind rocks, or laying on our bellies, to get a better look and so as not to scare the herd away. In total, we probably saw 50 Argali or more. After about 20 minutes, we headed back down the slope and were greeted by a **Saker Falcon** flying low overhead!

Back in the vehicles, we drove for another half hour or so before arriving at an active **Bearded Vulture** nest. We immediately found the adult perched up on a cliff. This was a particularly lovely individual and the reddest one any of our group had ever seen, including the guides. Climbing up a hillside across and a good distance from the nest, we were able to see that there was a sleeping nestling tucked inside. Thanks to Tenan's expertise with this species, we estimated the young to be approximately 70 days old.



A stunning Bearded Vulture, astounding our group with its bright rust-colored feathers. Photo by Angel Muela

We then enjoyed a lovely packed lunch in the field, with the vulture and the incredible cliffs and canyons as a backdrop to a delicious meal. After lunch, we went in search of Pallas' Cat. Unfortunately, we didn't spot any of the elusive felines, but the scenery was stunning. We also got to observe our first herd of **Siberian Ibex** climbing up a mountain. We also sighted some nice birds including **Green Sandpiper**, **Chukar**, **Red-throated Thrush**, and **Eurasian Hoopoe**. We made it back to camp around 6:45 p.m. We enjoyed a delicious dinner of steamed dumplings and then hiked up a small hill behind our host family's house to watch the sun go down. Though it wasn't the most colorful sunset, the view was lovely.



## Day 6: May 7 — Govi Gurvan Saikhan to Khongor Sand Dunes National Park

We got an early start this morning. After saying goodbye to our wonderful host family, we began the drive to Khongor Sand Dunes National Park. Normally a four hour drive, it took us about twice that time, as we traveled the back roads through the park, searching for wildlife and enjoying some of the most spectacular scenery so far on our trip. Throughout the morning, we continued to pick up some new bird species, or get improved views of ones we had already seen during our journey. Nara spotted a beautiful **Saker Falcon** perched on a high cliff, we saw soaring **Bearded Vulture**, and we also spotted a herd of female and young **Siberian Ibex**, and at least one **Red Fox**. When we were about 50 km from the dunes, we stopped the vehicles and took the opportunity to walk a kilometer or so through an incredibly stunning canyon with a small stream meandering through.

After exiting the canyon on foot, we could see the rising sand dunes in the distance. We piled back into the vehicles and in no time, we found ourselves in **Mongolian Ground-Jay** habitat. After some searching, our entire group got great looks at at least one individual running around on the ground not far from our cars. We also got nice views of several small groups of **Pallas's Sandgrouse** flying and walking along the ground.



Pallas's Sandgrouse. Photo by Jose Vargas

Around 1 p.m. we stopped for a picnic lunch at a tree grove planted by a nomad family. The trees and our cars helped shield us from the strong wind. After lunch, we spent some time exploring the small pond and stream nearby. We got fabulous looks at two **Ruddy Shelducks** as they lifted up from the pond and banked in front us, before landing several yards away. We also got two new species for the trip, **Little Ringed Plover**, and **Common Greenshank**. After a nice lunch, we continued toward the dunes, when Jose spotted a large mammal ambling through the open steppe. It was a **Mongolian Wild Ass**. We were able to watch it for several minutes as it slowly meandered away.



**Khongoryn Els (Khongor Sand Dunes NP). Photo by Michael Roy**

We eventually reached the Khongor Sand Dunes later in the afternoon. After parking our vehicles, we walked past a small wetland, where we spotted **Northern Lapwings** in the distance. We left our shoes behind and began the slow and steady climb up the “singing sands.” Apart from a small group of tourists, we had this lovely area all to ourselves. We enjoyed the stunning views from the top of the dunes, and after several minutes, ran down the sandy slopes. It took us about 20 minutes to climb to the top and perhaps 5 to make it down! Afterwards, most of the group returned to camp to rest. A few stayed back to search for the localized **Saxaul Sparrow**. We got great looks at several of them, as well as **Greater Short-toed Lark** and **Red-tailed Shrike**, to boot.



**Saxaul Sparrow. Photo by Jose Vargas**

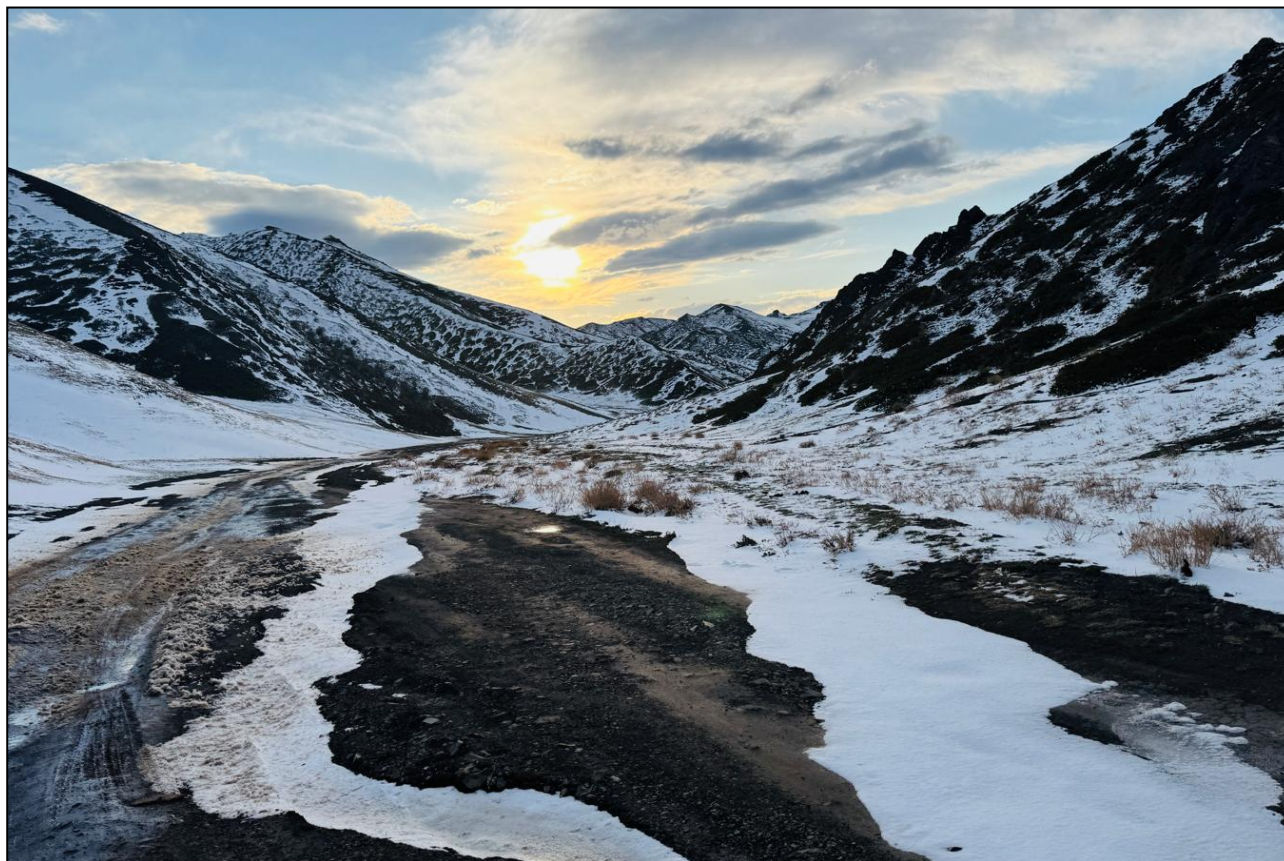


After dinner, a few of enjoyed a night drive. Though it was cold and windy, some of each group picked up a few mammals, though they were hard to identify as we only caught quick glimpses. We saw **Tolai Hare**, as well as **Mongolian Five-toed (Siberian) Jerboa** and one unidentified dwarf hamster.

### Day 7: May 8 — Gobi to Yol Valley

This morning, we left the sand dunes early and once again headed off the beaten path through riverbeds, country roads, and beautiful canyons. We spotted a beautiful herd of male **Argali** which was quickly disappearing over the mountain. We parked the cars and climbed a small hill to watch them for a while. We then continued on to an area where Ganaa had discovered a Eurasian Eagle-Owl roost a few weeks ago. We didn't see the owl, but continued to be awed by the incredible scenery. We found wolf and snow leopard scat, and got our fabulous views of **Himalayan Griffon**, the first for the trip. After exploring the area for a bit, we piled back into the vehicles, eventually making our to the main highway. Though being back on a paved road was a bit anti-climactic after our incredible drives in the desert, we still got to see some new and amazing wildlife, including two **Black-tailed (Goitered) Gazelle** grazing in the distance and **Greater Sand-Plover**.

After stopping for a nice lunch at local restaurant, we picked up some snacks at a local store and continued on our way. Along the drive, the weather changed dramatically. Clouds began to build and eventually it began to snow, with drifts piling up along the roadsides! Due to this abrupt change in weather, which also came with heavy fog, we decided to head to our camp instead of visiting Yol Valley. However, before that, we made a very important stop. Because Jose had never had a snowball fight, we decided to get out of our cars and have one! This turned out to be quite lucky. By the time we finished tossing snow balls at each other, the sky was beginning to clear and we decided to head to Yol Valley after all. And we were so glad we did. When we arrived, the entire



The snow-blanketed landscape at Yol Valley. Photo by Michael Roy



place was covered in a beautiful blanket of snow. We saw a herd of male **Siberian Ibex**, as well as **Pallas's Pikas** and **Mongolian Gerbil** running around in the snow in front of us. We left the cars behind and hiked about 4 km round trip, once again marveling at the stunning views from deep inside this canyon. We also enjoyed some light birding along the way, seeing **Red-billed Chough**, **Golden Eagle**, **Brown Accentor**, **White-winged Snowfinch**, and a **Bearded Vulture** soaring just overhead. Reluctantly, we returned to the vehicles and made our way to our camp for the night. We arrived at around 8 p.m. Unfortunately, they weren't quite ready for us and we ended up having to switch camps. But it all worked out and ended up spending the night in some warm, cozy yurts.

#### Day 8: May 9 — Flaming Cliffs and Ongi River

After breakfast, we made our way towards the Flaming Cliffs (Bayanzag, Bayn Dzak), one of the most important paleontological sites in the world, famous for its bright red cliffs and for being the site of the very first known discovery of dinosaur eggs. Along the way, we made a short stop at a wetland and saw **Gray Heron**, **Horned Lark**, **Isabelline Shrike**, and **Blythe's Warbler**. We made another stop to photograph the beautiful, purple irises growing in small patches throughout the desert. By late morning, we finally arrived at the Flaming Cliffs. We toured the small museum and watched the 17-minute documentary on the expedition which led to the uncovering of the world's first known fossilized dinosaur eggs to be seen by humans. Afterwards, we walked a lovely trail that meandered on the top of the cliffs. Along the way, we spotted **Demoiselle Cranes** flying in the distance, a **Saker Falcon** and a **Carrion Crow** nest, the latter which had 5 nearly grown nestlings in what appeared to be a very crowded nest. We also saw a new reptile for the trip, a **Gobi Racerunner**.

We continued on our way towards the Ongi River, making a stop at a lovely wetland area for lunch. Here, we picked up some more species for the trip including, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Graylag Goose**, **Black-winged Stilt**, and **Common Crane**. We also saw **Demoiselle Cranes**, **Northern Shovelers**, **Northern Lapwings**, and **Black-headed Gulls**. Along the way, we also spotted a

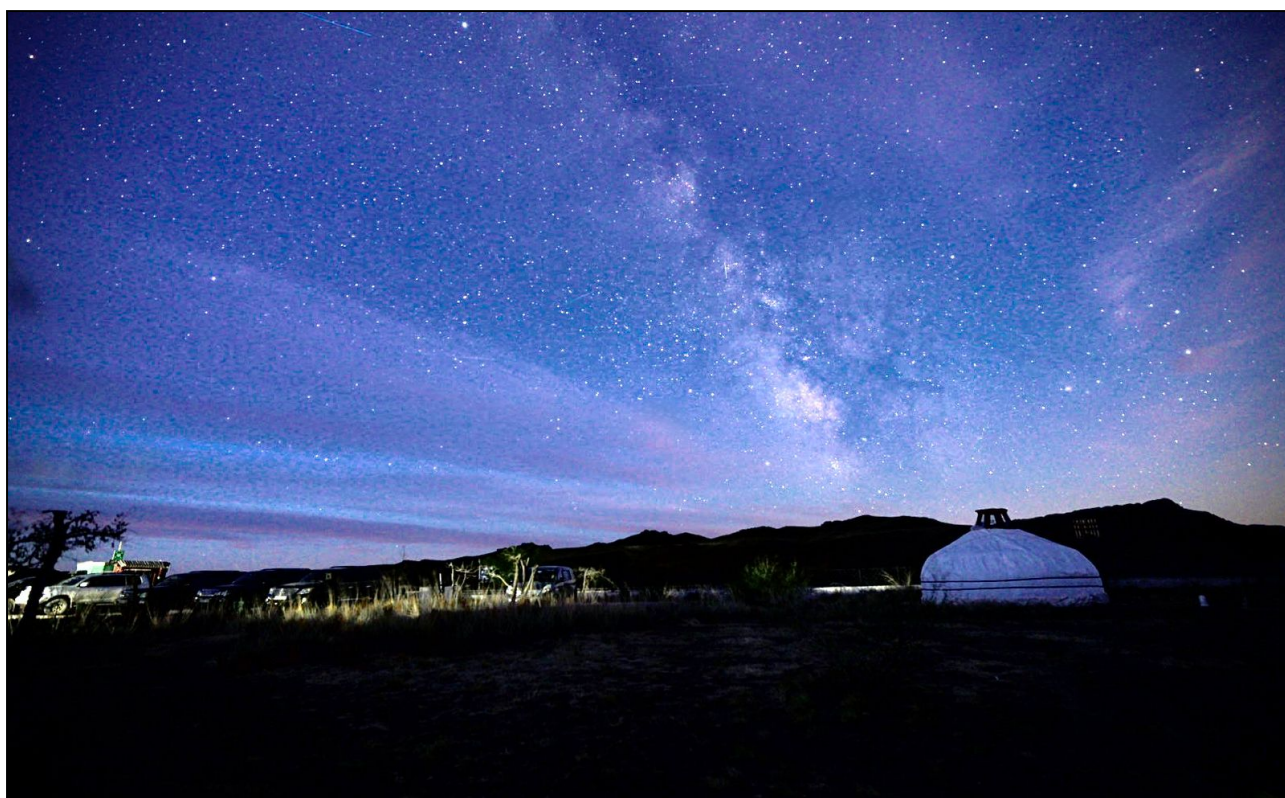


Hairy-footed Jerboa seen at Ongi River. Photo by Michael Roy



plethora of domestic camels, about 15 **Cinereous Vultures** feeding on a carcass, and some in the group spotted a **Corsac Fox** running along the steppe.

We arrived at the Ongi River by the late afternoon. Our first stop was a visit to the museum and ruins of a once-large and complex monastery that was destroyed in the 1930s. Our wonderful guide, Nara, explained a lot about the history of the site as we all tried to imagine what it must have looked like as an active monastery with thousands of monks practicing their faith on these grounds. After settling into our camp, the group took a walk along the beautiful Ongi River. We picked up our first and only amphibian for the trip, the **Mongolian Toad**, which we heard croaking in the river. We were able to spot several of them poking their heads out of the water. Annaic also showed us another reptile she had found, the **Toad-headed Agama**. Additionally, we added some new bird species for the trip including **Pallas's Leaf Warbler** and **Eyebrowed Thrush**. After our walk, we enjoyed a nice dinner together, and a cake for Annaic's belated birthday. After dark, a few of us took a short night walk and were soon rewarded with terrific sightings of a **Hairy-Footed Jerboa** feeding among the shrubs, and a **Desert** or **Roborovski Hamster** peaking out from a low, stone wall. The sky was also very clear this evening and the stars were lovely.



The night sky at Ongi River. Photo by Angel Muela

### Day 9: May 10 — Ongi River to Karakorum (Global Big Day)

We celebrated Global Big Day on what was mostly a travel day for us. After a nice breakfast and packing up our luggage, we began the long drive to Karakorum. Along the way, we passed nomad families, large herds of livestock (goats, sheep, horses, and camels), open steppe, and dry desert. We made a stop for lunch on the steppe and enjoyed the warm weather and stunning scenery. Along the way, we spotted several birds, including some new ones for our trip: **Whooper Swan**, **Mongolian Lark**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, and **Richard's Pipit**. We got some nice looks at some of Mongolia's wonderful raptors including **Saker Falcon**, **Upland Buzzard**, and **Golden Eagle**. We also came across a large group of **Cinereous Vultures** feeding on a carcass in the distance.

After arriving in Karakorum we visited the historical and archaeological museum. We watched a short documentary on the region and its importance to the Mongol Empire, and enjoyed touring through the fascinating exhibits. We then headed to our camp. After a short rest, we split up into a few groups. Some went into town to do a bit more shopping, others enjoyed a hike up the mountain with stunning views of the river and the town below. A few others went birding and picked up still more species for our list, **Great Cormorant**, **Little Bunting**, and **Northern Wheatear**. We then enjoyed a nice dinner together and an early night.

#### **Day 10: May 11 — Karakorum to Takhilt Lake (Mini Gobi)**

We had a leisurely start this morning. Our first stop was a visit to the beautiful Erdene Zuu Monastery, which is believed to be the oldest surviving Buddhist monastery in Mongolia. We visited the temples, were amazed at the stunning architecture, observed a morning Buddhist ritual, and had some time to purchase souvenirs before our departure. We left the area around 11:30, stopping for lunch at local restaurant, before continuing on to Takhilt Lake, a beautiful wetland area right at the edge of some sand dunes. While several of the group decided to continue on to do some hiking in the nearby mountains, a few of us stayed behind to bird the wetlands. We got several new species for the trip including **Swan Goose**, **Arctic Loon**, **Eared** and **Great-crested grebes**, **Eurasian Coot**, **Oriental Turtle-Dove**, and **White-naped Crane**. Then we all met up and explored the beautiful granite cliffs behind the sand dunes. They were dotted with yellow and green lichens and surrounded by beautiful Mongolian Almond trees in bloom.



**Mongolian Almond in bloom. Photo by Jose Vargas**

At our camp that evening, Ganaa had asked the local staff if they had seen any hedgehogs in the area. This was one of the top mammals we had hoped to see on our trip, but hadn't been able to



so far. As luck would have it, though, the staff knew the exact hole where one slept, just in between our yurts. We were able to catch glimpses of it as it rested underground. That evening, we returned to the small mound where the **Daurian Hedgehog** slept, in the hopes we would see it emerge from its den. As we were waiting, Jose spotted one walking beside the yurts. We watched it for a while and soon began to notice that there were hedgehogs everywhere! We saw about 4 or 5 that evening without ever having to leave our camp.

### Day 11: May 12 — Takhilt Lake (Mini Gobi) to Hustai National Park

Today we woke up to warm and sunny day. We left our hotel after breakfast, and drove into the steppe to search for Eurasian Eagle-Owl. Even though we didn't find any, we enjoyed the stunning landscapes of wind worn rocks, the bright pink flowers of Mongolian Almond trees in bloom, and found a few raptor nests to boot! We also added a new species to our list, **Meadow Bunting**. After lunch at a nearby restaurant, we continued into Hustai National Park. Our main target here was the Przewalski's Horse. At the park entrance, we immediately began to see **Tarbagan (Siberian) Marmots** running around the fields. **Rooks** and **Eurasian Magpies** flitted about near the visitor center. After paying our entrance fees, we piled back into the vehicle. We had driven no more than about 10 minutes, when we spotted a herd of beautiful, male **Wapiti** milling about in the open fields. After enjoying watching them for a few minutes, we continued on to search for the horses. After several more minutes, we arrived at a lookout point where a park ranger had a scope set up, which was pointed at a far off herd of **Przewalski's Horses**, and some more **Wapiti** grazing along the edge of the hills. After we watched the horses for a few moments, the park ranger pointed out another group of horses much closer. We drove a bit down the road and were able to watch a small herd (1 stallion, 7 mares, and two colts) of these beautiful animals as they foraged along a small slope.

After we had taken lots of photos, for about 20 minutes or so, we decided to move on. Our plan was to search for other wildlife and perhaps take a short walk. However, after a few minutes, the temperature suddenly dropped considerably and a dust storm kicked up and soon it began to rain. Though we didn't have great luck with the weather, we were all thrilled with our time spent observing the Przewalski's Horses and the Siberian Marmots, and enjoying the beautiful scenery of the vast, open spaces! After touring the visitor center and watching a short documentary, we headed to our camp and enjoyed a nice dinner together. The evening took an unexpected turn when the camp host turned on the Karaoke machine and sang us a song. Little Ganaa (one of our drivers) then took a turn at singing. Soon, many of the group were singing and dancing to such



Watching Przewalski's Horses in Hustai National Park. Photo (left) by Angel Muela, Photo (right) by Jose Vargas

tunes as *Sweet Dreams* by the Eurythmics, *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen, and *How Deep is Your Love*, by the Bee Gees. It was a fun way to end a fabulous day.

## Day 12: May 13 — Gorkhi Terelj National Park

Today we left our hotel around 8 a.m., after a nice breakfast. We drove through Ulaanbaatar to arrive at Gorkhi Terelj National Park. Our first stop was at the famous Turtle Rock. Here, many of the group climbed the granite rocks to enjoy a bit of a view from above. We then drove another 20 minutes or so and parked at the entrance to the Aryabal Meditation Temple. Here, we climbed up the a series of stairs marked by signs with over 140 Buddhist teachings, and the final 108 steps to reach the meditation temple. On the walk up, we observed a new mammal from the trip, **Siberian Chipmunk**.



On the trail to the Aryabal Meditation Temple. Photo by Michael Roy

After a lovely morning, we returned to our camp for lunch. Some of the group decided to climb the granite rocks behind our camp. Once on top, we heard the tell tale *cacking* of a falcon. Looking up, we saw three **Amur Falcons** flying swiftly overhead, quickly disappearing out of sight. After a short afternoon break, the group took a hike in the park amidst beautiful forest and granite rock formations. We expected to see some woodpeckers here, but the forest was a bit quiet. Even so, we saw some nice birds on the hike including **Great Tit**, **Red-throated Thrush**, **Black Kites**, and **Gray Wagtail**. Though we didn't pick up any new birds for the tour, we did manage to see two new mammals **Eurasian Red Squirrel** and **Mongolian Vole**. We returned to our camp around 6:30 p.m. - just in time for dinner.



**Day 13: May 14 — Gorkhi Terelj National Park to Ulaanbaatar**

On the last morning of our tour, we were treated to the sight of two **Corsac Foxes** running through our camp, just before breakfast. We left our camp around 6 a.m. and headed to the **Black-billed Capercaillie** site. Once again, we had amazing views of these incredible birds. We estimated that there were around 7 males, calling over and over at the lek, in their attempt to attract a female. We were able to watch them for a good while before returning to our vehicles. It was an amazing sighting and a great way to start our last day in Mongolia. On the way out, a few of our group spotted a female **Red-flanked Bluetail**.

Because we hadn't had any luck spotting woodpeckers the day before, we decided to make a final stop at a nice forest just outside of Ulaanbaatar. Here, we picked up three new species for the trip **Taiga Flycatcher**, **Willow Tit**, and **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, bringing our total of bird species observed to 108! After a nice lunch in Ulaanbaatar, most of the group headed to the Black Market to do some last minute shopping. The traffic returning to our hotel was typically heavy, but we made it in time for a hot shower and some rest before our final dinner together.



One of many Golden Eagles seen during the tour. Photo by Angel Muela

**Day 14: May 15 — Departure**

This morning, the group had an early morning flight back home. We said our goodbyes, then everyone boarded the bus at 6 a.m. for the 50 minute drive to the airport. Overall, the trip was amazing with so many highlights and wonderful memories made. We, at Whitehawk, are already looking forward to our next trip with this amazing group of people.



## Thanks!

As always, we want to thank all the participants for being part of this tour. Your good humor, passion for nature, and kindness really made this trip special. We also thank our fantastic local guides - Nara Urtnasan and Gantumur Khumbaa - as well as the drivers who accompanied us throughout the tour, Batsaikhan Tsegmid and Ganzorig Dendev. We also want to extend a warm thanks to the nomad family that hosted us for 4 nights, Ulambayar Khas and Byambaakhuu Namjiltseren, and our wonderful chef during this homestay, Tuul Khumbaa. Everyone went above and beyond to make this an amazing experience for everyone. Our gratitude goes as well to Martin Gilbert for helping us make this wonderful Mongolia connection. This trip would never have happened without you!



Our amazing group wildlife watching in the Gobi Desert.

## Wildlife Observation List

### Birds

*Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2018.*

Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1 Bar-headed Goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>	12 total seen during the tour in various small lakes during the tour, including at Takhilt Lake.
2 Graylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	12 total seen during the tour in various small lakes during the tour, including at Takhilt Lake and near Ongi Monastery.
3 Swan Goose	<i>Anser cygnoides</i>	2 seen at Takhilt Lake
4 Tundra Swan	<i>Cygnus columbines</i>	2 seen at Takhilt Lake
5 Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus Cygnus</i>	2 seen en route from Ongi River to Kharakhorum



Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
6 Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Very common, seen nearly every day throughout the trip
7 Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	5 seen at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
8 Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	6 seen during the tour, at Takhilt Lake and at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
9 Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	26 seen during the tour, at most waterways, including at Takhilt Lake and at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
10 Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca Penelope</i>	20 seen during the tour, at Takhilt Lake and at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
11 Eastern Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>	Two seen at Takhilt Lake
12 Northern Pintail	<i>Anus acuta</i>	3 seen at Takhilt Lake
13 Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas crezca</i>	Several seen at Takhilt Lake
14 Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta Rufina</i>	3 seen at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
15 Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	7 seen during the tour, at Takhilt Lake and at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
16 Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	A total of 34 seen at Takhilt Lake and a small pond en route from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi
17 Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	3 seen on the tour, just outside of 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
18 Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	2 seen near Marshal Bridge, Tuul River
19 Black-billed Capercaillie	<i>Tetrao urogalloides</i>	A total of 9 seen on the tour at a site near the Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex
20 Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	Several seen in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
21 Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Seen in Zaison Valley and 3 Beauties of the Gobi
22 Hill Pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>	4 seen in 3 Beauties of Gobi NP
23 Oriental Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	2 seen at Takhilt Lake
24 Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>	A total of 35 seen during the tour, en Gobi and en route to Khongor Sand Dunes
25 Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Dozens seen at Takhilt Lake
26 Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	Commonly seen throughout the tour
27 White-naped Crane	<i>Antigone vipio</i>	2 seen at Takhilt Lake
28 Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	2 seen in a small wetland en route from Flaming Cliffs to Ongi River
29 Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	A total of 12 seen on this trip at a small lake en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
30	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	A total of 3 seen on this trip at a small lake en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
31	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Thinornis dubius</i>	2 seen at our lunch stop en route to Khongor Sand Dunes
32	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	2 seen at Khongor Sand Dunes, and seen far off at Takhilt Lake
33	Greater Sand-Plover	<i>Anarhynchus leschenaultii</i>	2 seen en route to Yol Valley
34	Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>	1 seen at a rain-fed lake en route from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi, near Luus
35	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Several seen at a rain-fed lake en route from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi, near Luus
36	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	2 seen in the Gobi Desert
37	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1 seen at our lunch stop in the Gobi Desert
38	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	20 seen during the tour, at rain-fed lake near Luus, en route to Gobi from Ulaanbaatar
39	Mongolia Gull	<i>Larus mongolicus</i>	4 total seen during tour, at Takhilt Lake, in Kharakhorum, and near Luus
40	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Many seen at Takhilt Lake
41	Eared Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Many seen at Takhilt Lake
42	Arctic Loon	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	1 seen at Takhilt Lake
43	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1 seen along river at Kharakhorum
44	Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Several nesting individuals seen at Takhilt Lake; and seen en route from Ulaanbaatar to Gobi
45	Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Seen frequently throughout our trip
46	Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Very common, seen nearly every day throughout the trip
47	Himalayan Griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	3 total seen in Yol Valley and in the Gobi Desert
48	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Several seen during our drive from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi
49	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	2 seen well in Yol Valley
50	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	1 seen at Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex
51	Eastern Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus spilonotus</i>	1 seen en route from Flaming Cliffs to Ongi River
52	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Very common, seen nearly every day throughout the trip
53	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	2 seen near Khongor Sand Dunes
54	Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	Common throughout the tour
55	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	At least 2 seen during the tour, en route to and in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
56	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	1 seen at Zaisan Valley



Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
57 Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	Several seen nesting and flying over abandoned buildings in the Gobi Desert
58 Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	3 total seen during the tour, in Yol Valley and at Marshal Bridge, Tuul River
59 Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>	3 seen flying overhead at Guru Tourist Camp, Gorkhi Terelj National Park
60 Saker Falcon	<i>Falco cherub</i>	A total of 7 seen during the trip, including in the Gobi and at Flaming Cliffs
61 Red-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>	1 seen near Khongor Sand Dunes
62 Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>	Seen occasionally in the 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
63 Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	Relatively common and seen throughout tour
64 Mongolian Ground-Jay	<i>Poodles hendersoni</i>	4 seen total, mainly en route to Khongor Sand Dunes from 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
65 Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	Seen frequently throughout our trip
66 Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>	Several seen near the Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex
67 Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	3 seen in Hustai National Park
68 Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Common throughout the tour in most locations
69 Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	3 seen on tour including in Zaisan Valley and in the Gobi
70 Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	1 seen at Zaisan Valley
71 Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus</i>	1 seen near Marshal Bridge, along the Tuul River
72 Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	2 seen near Marshal Bridge, along the Tuul River, and 1 seen at Zaisan Valley
73 Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Seen in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
74 Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Common, seen most days throughout the tour
75 Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calendrella brachydactyla</i>	A few seen near Khongor Sand Dunes
76 Mongolian Lark	<i>Melanocorypha mongolica</i>	A total of 5 seen during the tour, mostly around Sangiin Dalai Lake
77 Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	1 Seen along the Ongi River
78 Eurasian Crag-Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	20 seen during the tour in the 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
79 Western House-Martin	<i>Delichon urbium</i>	24 seen along a bridge by the road en route from Takhilt Lake to Hustai NP
80 Pallas's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>	1 Seen along the Ongi River
81 Eyebrowed Thrush	<i>Turdus obscurus</i>	1 Seen along the Ongi River
82 Red-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	17 seen, commonly observed in most areas visited throughout tour

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
83	Red-flanked Bluetail	<i>Tarsier cyanurus</i>	1 female seen near the Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex (Tuul River)
84	Taiga Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>	1 seen at Zaisan Valley
85	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>	4 seen during the tour, mainly in 3 Beauties of Gobi NP
86	Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	Fairly common throughout tour. Seen at Ongi River, in the Gobi Desert, and along the Tuul River, among other places.
87	Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	3 seen well during the tour including in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP and at Erdenesant Mt
88	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Seen at Erdenesant Mt, Kharakhorim, and around the Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex
89	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Cenanthe isabellina</i>	Several seen during the tour, mainly in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
90	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	7 seen during the tour, including in Flaming Cliffs and the Gobi Desert
91	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	9 seen on the trip including in Erdenesant Mt, Ongi Monastery, and 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
92	Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	1 seen at Yol Valley
93	Saxaul Sparrow	<i>Passer ammondendri</i>	Several seen near Khongor Sand Dunes
94	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Common throughout the tour in most locations
95	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Several seen among stone walls built by nomad families in the Gobi Desert
96	White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>	Around 5 seen at Yol Valley
97	Pere David's Snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda davidiana</i>	4 total seen at Sangiin Dalai Lake and Erdenesant Mt.
98	Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	7 total seen during the tour including in Zaisan Valley, Gorkhi Terelj National Park, Yol Valley, and Gobi
99	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	6 total seen on the tour, 2 at Chinggis Khaan Statue Complex, 3 in Kharkhorin, and 1 in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
100	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	1 seen in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
101	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	1 seen at a small lake en route from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi
102	Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	3 total seen on the tour in a city park in Dalanzadgad
103	Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	A small flock seen at a small lake en route from Ulaanbaatar to the Gobi
104	Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>	6 total seen on the tour, mainly in the 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
105	Godlewski's Bunting	<i>Emberiza godlewskii</i>	1 seen in 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
106	Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	1 seen at Erdenesant Mt.
107	Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	3 seen near Tuul River site



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
108	Little Bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	1 seen at Khara Khorum; and in Faisal Valley
109	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	3 seen at Marshal Bridge, along the Tuul River
110	Snipe sp.	<i>Gallinago sp.</i>	2 seen at Takhilt Lake

## Mammals

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Snow Leopard	<i>Panthera unica</i>	Three seen (mother and 2 cubs) in Gobi Desert
2	Mongolian Wild Ass	<i>Equus hemionus hemionus</i>	1 seen en route from Gobi to Khongor Sand Dunes
3	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	At least 2 seen in the Gobi Desert
4	Long-tailed Ground Squirrel	<i>Urocitellus undulatus</i>	Seen at Black Billed Capercaillie site, near Tuul River
5	Alashan Ground Squirrel	<i>Spermophilus alashanicus</i>	Several seen during our time in the 3 Beauties of the Gobi NP
6	Pallas's Pika	<i>Ochotona pallasii</i>	Many seen at Yol Valley
7	Siberian Ibex	<i>Capra sibirica</i>	Several herds seen In Gobi Desert and Yol Valley
8	Mongolian Gazelle	<i>Procapra gutturosa</i>	On our drive from Ulaanbaatar to Gobi
9	Argali	<i>Ovis Ammon</i>	Several herds seen during our drives in the 3 Beauties of the Gobi National Park
10	Unidentified bat	<i>Chiroptera sp</i>	Many seen flying in front of the snow leopard cave in the Gobi Desert
11	Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>	1 seen during our night drive at Khongor Sand Dunes, and 1 at the Flaming Cliffs
12	Goitered (Black-tailed) Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa</i>	Two observed on our way to Yol Valley
13	Mongolian Gerbil	<i>Meriones unguiculatus</i>	Seen in Yol Valley and throughout our time in and around the Gobi
14	Mongolian Five-toed (Siberian) Jerboa	<i>Allactaga sibirica</i>	Seen on the night drive near Khongor Sand Dunes
15	Hairy-Footed Jerboa	<i>Dipus sagitta</i>	1 seen very well during our night walk around the Ongi River
16	Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>	1 seen between Yol Valley and Ongi, and 2 at our camp in Gorkhi Terelj National Park
17	Desert or Roborovski's Hamster	<i>Phodopus roborovskii</i>	1 seen well on our night walk at the Ongi River camp
18	Duarian Hedgehog	<i>Mesechinus dauuricus</i>	At least 4 seen at night at the Anja Tourist Camp near Khara Khorum
19	Tarbagan (Siberian) Marmot	<i>Marmota sibirica</i>	Several seen in Hustai National Park

	Common Name	Scientific Name	Notes
20	Wapiti	<i>Cervus elapses</i>	Several herds seen in Hustai National Park
21	Przewalski's Horse	<i>Equus przewalkii</i>	Seen in Hustai National Park, one herd of 1 mustang, 7 females and 2 foals; and another far off herd
22	Brandt's Vole	<i>Lasiopodomys brandtii</i>	Several seen during our drives in and around the Three Beauties of the Gobi National Park
23	Siberian Chipmunk	<i>Eutamias sibiricus</i>	1 seen on the walk to Aryapal Meditation Monastery in Gorkhi Terelj National Park
24	Mongolian Vole	<i>Alexandromys mongolicus</i>	1 seen well during our hike in Gorkhi Terelj National Park
25	Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	1 seen during our hike in Gorkhi Terelj National Park

## Reptiles & Amphibians

	Common Name		Notes
1	Toad-headed Agama	<i>Phrynocephalus versicolor</i>	1 seen at our camp near the Ongi River
2	Gobi Racrunner	<i>Eremias przewalskii</i>	1 seen at Flaming Cliffs
3	Mongolian Toad	<i>Strauchbufo raddei</i>	Several seen in the Ongi River



Pallas's Pika at Yol Valley. Photo by Marta Curti





**Daurian Hedgehog. Photo by Jose Vargas**



**One last group photo, minus the photographer. Photo by Angeles Anton**