

# Mongolia's Snow Leopards

Naturetrek Tour Report

17th – 28th August 2022



Amur Falcon



Pallas's Sandgrouse



Pallas's Pika



Przewalski's Horses

Tour report and images Mark van Beirs



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Tour participants: Mark Van Beirs (leader), Terbish (local guide) with nine Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Wednesday 17th August**

The group was in flight to Ulaanbaatar (UB) via Istanbul.

## Day 2

**Thursday 18th August**

We arrived in the early morning and were warmly welcomed by local guide Terbish and his crew, but also by some persistent rain and low cloud cover. As we had a few hours to kill before our domestic flight, we opted to go birding in the nearby Bogd National Park. The Fir and Larch forest gave us a nice introduction to Mongolia's birdlife. There were lots of Black Kites overhead and Red-billed Chough, Eurasian Nuthatch, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Northern Wheatear and Common Crossbill were noted, as well as Tarbagan Marmot, Eurasian Red Squirrel (attractive black morphs) and Siberian Chipmunk. A family of cracking Demoiselle Cranes was very much appreciated. In the early afternoon we boarded the flight to the town of Ulgii, located in the far west of this enormous country.

## Day 3

**Friday 19th August**

This morning we started to make our way towards the Jargalant range. A stop at an interesting lake gave us a fabulous selection of widespread waterbirds which also included goodies like Whooper Swan, Black-throated Diver, Eurasian Spoonbill and Vega and Pallas's Gulls. We obtained excellent looks at several Pallas's Sandgrouse and flushed a Tolai Hare. We had lunch in the town of Hovd and before driving towards our base we stopped at another lake where more waterbirds and waders were noted. A Wryneck showed brilliantly. In the early evening we arrived at our camp, which offered a magnificent view over the surrounding mountain ranges.

## Day 4

**Saturday 20th August**

It rained quite heavily overnight and in the morning we found the Jargalant range totally covered in snow and cloud. We choose to explore a couple of nearby lakes, where we found a nice variety of waders and ducks. Black-tailed Godwits, Spotted Redshanks (in exquisite breeding attire) and Red-necked Phalaropes were much admired. After lunch we made our way into one of the valleys, when suddenly we received word from our spotters that they had located three Snow Leopards. It took a long two hours to reach the spot, but upon arrival the cats were still in place and although they were quite distant (1,5 km) we were able to admire these fabulous creatures for more than 90 minutes. The clear mountain air helped to get really nice views. The mother and her two large cubs were loafing about, sleeping on and off and just relaxing. Much cherished moments. A fabulous and very successful start to our stay. A Bearded Vulture and a beautiful Gldenstdt's Redstart were also seen.

## Day 5

**Sunday 21st August**

We decided to explore the surrounding endless steppe at the base of the mountains and in the course of the day had great encounters with more than 100 Saiga Antelope. They were quite shy and usually kept their distance, but several times we were able to observe these swift and unusual looking creatures at closer range. A good variety of birds of prey included Cinereous Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Upland Buzzard and Saker Falcon, while

Long-tailed Ground Squirrel represented the mammal department. A brackish steppe lake held Red-crested Pochards (still in non-breeding plumage) and lots of Kentish Plovers.

## Day 6

**Monday 22nd August**

We spent most of the day high up in the mountains, scanning the rocky slopes of the wide valley where we had seen the Snow Leopard family two days before. Not a sniff was had of the beautiful cats, but two male Siberian Ibex and great birds of prey like Saker Falcon, Cinereous Vulture, Bearded Vulture, Upland Buzzard and Golden Eagle entertained us at length. Gorgeous Gldenstdt's Redstarts offered good looks as they hopped about on the crags. In late afternoon we walked down through a bushy valley full of salvias and asters where Brown Accentor, Mongolian Finch, Twite and Common Rock Thrush showed. An after dinner night drive produced marvelous Siberian and Northern Three-toed Jerboas.

## Day 7

**Tuesday 23rd August**

We started the day by exploring a bushy valley in the foothills, where after a bit of intense scanning, we connected with the much-wanted Henderson's (or Mongolian) Ground Jay. This enigmatic speciality gave pretty good views as it perched up in a low bush. The obvious white wing patches flashed brightly as it flew about. A great bird!! We also found several Pied Wheatears here. A stop in the wide open plains gave us several Goitred (or Black-tailed) Gazelles. Our sturdy 4x4 vehicles then took us high up in the mountains to viewpoint N0. 2 where we spent most of the rest of the day scanning the magnificent scenery. No cats were found, but eight Altai Snowcock feeding together was a real bonus. The usual birds of prey performed very nicely too. In late afternoon we returned to our base, picking up several well-behaved Chukar Partridges on the way.

## Day 8

**Wednesday 24th August**

On our final day in the Jargalant range we explored another part of the wide valley where, thanks to our spotters, we were able to observe the female Snow Leopard with her two large cubs again. Amazing!! We admired the mostly sleeping cats for at least seven hours, but now and then they got up, yawned, stretched, licked their paws, walked about and slept again. They were rather distant, but the views were definitely much appreciated. A marvelous last day in the mountains.

## Day 9

**Thursday 25th August**

Today was a travel day with hiccups, as we first drove via Hovd to the town of Ulgii, where we were told that bad weather was disrupting flights. Eventually we had to return to the town of Hovd where we took off in the late evening, after a six hour delay.

## Day 10

**Friday 26th August**

After a short night in a hotel at the edge of Ulaanbaatar, we headed west to the famous Hustai National Park. Several impressive flocks of Demoiselle Cranes enlivened our journey. Upon arrival, we settled in and in the afternoon the local biologist took us on a tour of the rolling hills. We found several families of beautiful Przewalski's Horses and quite a few Red Deer. Tarbagan Marmots were literally everywhere and smart Amur

Falcons and both Black and White-backed Woodpeckers showed very well. An after dinner night drive produced an amazing six Corsac Foxes, several White-tailed (or Mongolian) Gazelle and a cute Siberian Jerboa.

## Day 11

**Saturday 27th August**

In the morning we visited another area of the Hustai National Park, where we found a large herd (200+) of White-tailed (or Mongolian) Gazelle running about in the wide open steppe, giving us the impression of being in East Africa. We made an effort to get a bit closer to the lovely Przewalski's Horses and added Brown Shrike to the tally. Different kinds of birds of prey showed all the time. After a scrumptious lunch we waved goodbye to this attractive National Park and returned to the hubbub of Ulaanbataar.

## Day 12

**Sunday 28th August**

An early check in at the international airport and off we went to different parts of Europe.



Lammergeier

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## Species lists

### Mammals

Tarbagan Marmot *Marmota sibirica*  
Long-tailed Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus undulatus*  
Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*  
Siberian Chipmunk *Tamias sibiricus*  
Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*  
Mongolian Three-toed Jerboa *Dipus sagitta*  
Midday Jird *Meriones meridianus*  
Mongolian Jird *Meriones unguiculatus*  
Musk Rat *Ondatra zibethicus*  
Pallas's Pika *Ochotona pallasii*  
Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*  
Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia*  
Wolf *Canis lupus*  
Corsac Fox *Vulpes corsac*  
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*  
Przewalski's Horse *Equus ferus przewalskii*  
Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*  
Goitred Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*  
Mongolian Gazelle *Procapra gutturosa*  
Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica*  
Siberian Ibex *Capra sibirica*  
Stoat *Mustela erminea*

### Birds

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*  
Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*  
Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*  
Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*  
Gadwall *Mareca strepera*  
Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*  
Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*  
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*  
Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*  
Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*  
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*  
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*  
Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*  
Altai Snowcock *Tetraogallus altaicus*  
Chukar Partridge *Alectoris chukar*

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*  
Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*  
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*  
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*  
Great Egret *Ardea alba*  
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*  
Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*  
Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*  
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*  
Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*  
Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*  
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*  
Black Kite *Mihus migrans lineatus*  
Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*  
Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*  
Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*  
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*  
Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*  
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*  
Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*  
Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*  
Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*  
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*  
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*  
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*  
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*  
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*  
Ruff *Calidris pugnax*  
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*  
Little Stint *Calidris minuta*  
Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*  
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*  
Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus*  
Vega Gull *Larus vegae mongolicus*  
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*  
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*  
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*  
Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*  
Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus*  
Rock Dove *Columba livia*  
Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*  
Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*  
Little Owl *Athene noctua*

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*  
Common Swift *Apus apus*  
Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*  
Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*  
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*  
White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*  
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*  
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*  
Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*  
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*  
Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*  
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*  
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*  
Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius pallidirostris*  
Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*  
Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*  
Common Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*  
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*  
Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*  
Rook *Corvus frugilegus pastinator*  
Carrion Crow *Corvus corone orientalis*  
Northern Raven *Corvus corax*  
Great Tit *Parus major*  
Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*  
Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*  
Asian Short-toed Lark *Alaudala cheleensis*  
Sand/Pale Martin *Riparia riparia/ diluta*  
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*  
Eurasian Crag Martin *Phyonoprogne rupestris*  
Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*  
Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*  
Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*  
Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*  
Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca curruca*  
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea asiatica*  
Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*  
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*  
Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*  
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*  
Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*  
Güldenstädt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogasterus*  
Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*  
Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*  
Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*



Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*  
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*  
Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*  
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*  
Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*  
White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*  
Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*  
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*  
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba baicalensis*  
Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*  
Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*  
Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*  
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*  
Mongolian Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*  
Twite *Linaria flavirostris*  
Common Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*  
Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*

## Other taxa

Toad-headed Agama *Phrynocephalus helioscopus*  
Grasshopper sp.  
Bush Cricket  
Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*  
Small White *Pieris rapae*  
Copper butterfly sp.  
Clouded Yellow sp.