Mongolia

Birds & Snow Leopards



Snow Leopards by Holger Teichmann

The vast and sparsely inhabited land of Mongolia has captivated the minds of explorers for centuries. The landscapes, wildlife and culture have had a draw for those looking for something different; something beyond the "beaten path", where the sky stretches as far as the eye can see, the wildlife abounds, and the people practice a culture molded by centuries of tradition. Long recognised for its scenic beauty, wonderful birdlife and plentiful mammalian fauna, Mongolia is now set to become the premier place to encounter the enigmatic Snow Leopard and a variety of central Asian specialty birds – without the crowds of some other hotspots!

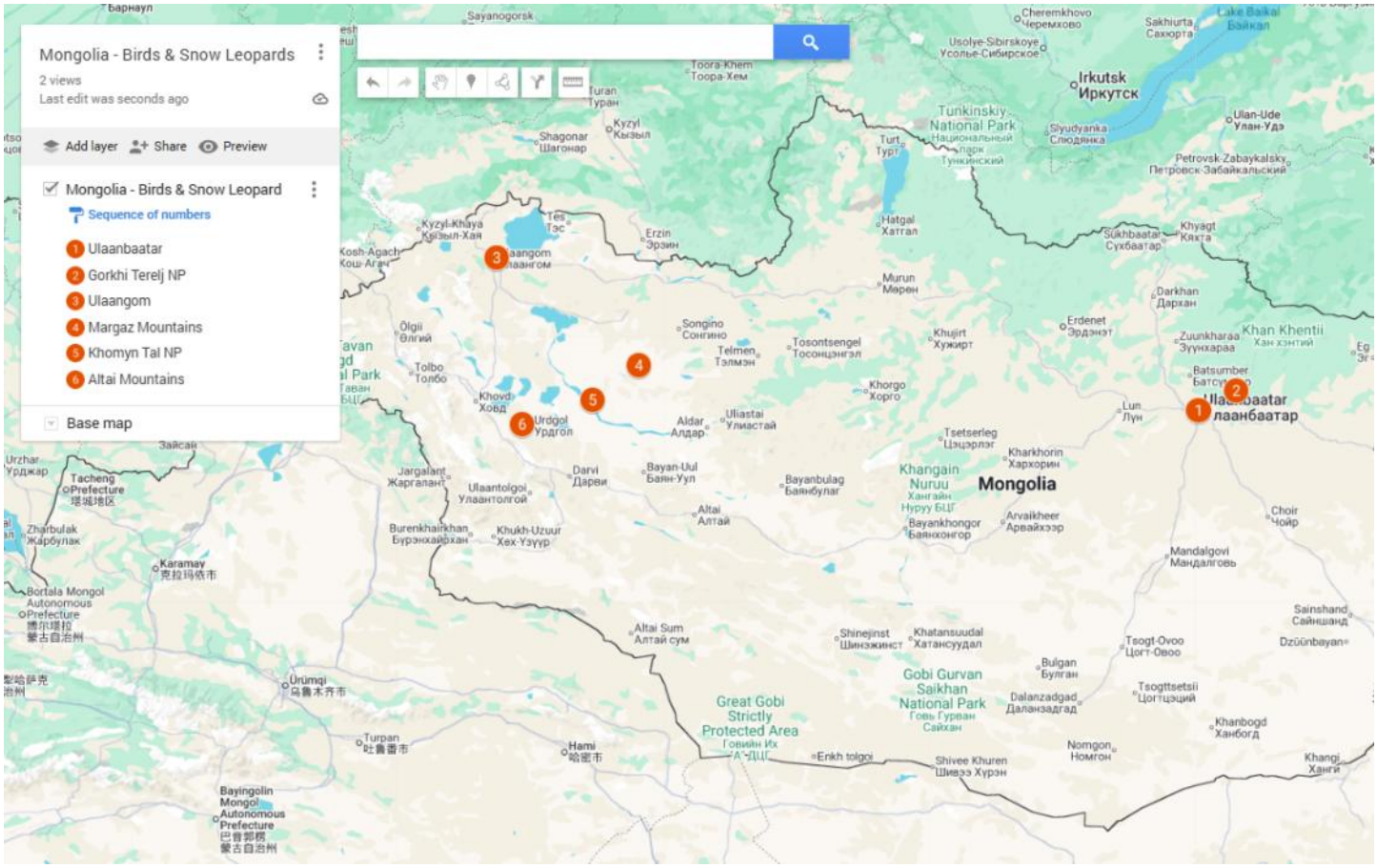
We begin near the capital of Ulaanbaatar, tallying mouthwatering species such as Azure Tit, Amur Falcon, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Azure-winged Magpie and Mandarin Duck. We continue with a visit to Gorkji Terelj National Park to search for the elusive and rare Black-billed Capercaillie, and some excellent breeding birds such as Spotted Redshank, White-winged Terns, even White-naped Crane, Siberian Tit, Bearded Vulture, Two-barred Warbler, and perhaps Daurian Pika or Argali, an impressive wild sheep. From here, we'll make our way to the far west of the country. Based in relatively comfortable ger camps, we'll spend time visiting the stunning Margaz and Altai Mountains, as well as Khomyn Tal National Park and several lakes. With time to properly explore this remote area, we stand a very good chance of encountering the once near-mythical Snow Leopard. Compared with the other places in the Himalayas where one might seek out the 'Grey Ghost', this site is at low elevation, and you only need to walk small distances to access the very best areas for seeing this big cat! While dedicating time to the Snow Leopard, there are also many special birds to look at including White-winged Snowfinch, Altai Snowcock, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Hill Pigeon and perhaps the star bird of the tour, Mongolian Ground-Jay! Other

mammals abound in this region, including Siberian Ibex, Pallas's Cat (Manul), Przewalski's Horse, the fast-declining prehistoric Saiga and Goitered Gazelles, Asian Wapiti (Elk), Corsac Fox, Grey Wolf and even Steppe Polecat - not to mention a wide variety of funky jerboas and pikas!

A combination of spectacular scenery, fascinating culture, a good chance at one of the world's most beautiful and elusive big cats, and exciting Mongolian specialty birds you won't see anywhere else makes this classic itinerary a "must-do" for any birder and mammal-watcher!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Ulaanbaatar, transfer to Gorkhi-Terelj National Park**
Day 2	**Gorki-Terelj National Park**
Day 3	**Gorkhi-Terelj National Park to Ulaanbaatar, flight to Ulaangom & Uvs Lake**
Day 4	**Ulaangom to Margaz Mountains**
Days 5 & 6	**Margaz Mountains - Pallas's Cat search**
Day 7	**Margaz Mountains to Khomyn Tal National Park**
Day 8	**Khomyn Tal National Park to Altai Mountains**
Days 9 to 11	**Altai Mountains - Snow Leopard search**
Day 12	**Ulaangom; flight to Ulaanbaatar**
Day 13	**Final departure**


Mongolia - Birds & Snow Leopards
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Mongolia - Birds & Snow Leopard
Sequence of numbers
1 Ulaanbaatar
2 Gorkhi Terelj NP
3 Ulaangom
4 Margaz Mountains
5 Khomyn Tal NP
6 Altai Mountains
Base map
Mongolia
Great Gobi Strictly Protected Area
Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park
Tunkinskiy National Park
Khangain Nuruu
Irkutsk
Иркутск

Wildlife sites in detail



Mongolian Lark by Glen Valentine

Gorkhi-Terelj National Park. This park is characterised by striking scenery of Siberian boreal forest and remnant taiga, representing the southernmost edge of the taiga biome.

Our primary target here is the elusive Black-billed Capercaillie, which typically requires both effort and luck. Other species characteristic of northern Mongolia include Daurian Partridge, Oriental Cuckoo, Black and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Ortolan, Pine and Black-faced Buntings, numerous warblers, Siberian Rubythroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Taiga Flycatcher and Daurian Redstart. Mammals may include Daurian Pika and Long-tailed Ground Squirrel.

Margaz Mountains. A relatively new wildlife destination, the Margaz Mountains offer an appealing mixture of sand dunes, open steppe, lakes and rugged foothills. Our remote ger camp sits at the base of the mountains and provides an excellent base from which to conduct extended searches for Pallas's Cat and Snow Leopard.

The 'Grey Ghost' remains one of the most elusive predators on Earth, but the terrain here offers good potential for sightings, aided by our dedicated tracking team, who will scan promising areas each day while we explore key vantage points nearby.

Unlike many Snow Leopard regions in Asia, the Margaz Mountains lie at a relatively modest elevation, with our highest points around 3,000m. Accommodation is comfortable, and the landscape can be covered largely with 4x4 vehicles rather than strenuous hikes, making the search much more accessible.

This region is also among Mongolia's more promising landscapes for encountering Pallas's Cat. The species prefers rocky steppe, sparse



Mongolian Gazelles by Nigel Redman



Mongolian Saiga by Glen Valentine

shrubland and low, broken slopes, all of which occur throughout the surrounding foothills. Abundant pikas, ground squirrels and small rodents provide a rich prey base.

Although Pallas's Cat is never easy or predictable, the combination of ideal terrain, low disturbance and local knowledge creates better-than-average chances for a sighting. Scanning early and late in the day will be especially important. Our overall strategy is likely to combine long-range scanning from vehicles, short walks to productive ridges and close coordination with both trackers and local herders. Patience is essential, but both of our target cats are genuinely possible here.

Birdlife in the Margaz region is diverse and includes species such as Bar-headed, Greylag and Swan Geese, Falcated Duck and White-winged Scoter, along with Chukar Partridge and a strong assemblage of raptors including Bearded, Himalayan and Cinereous Vultures, various eagles, Upland and Long-legged Buzzards, Lesser Kestrel and Saker Falcon. Wader and waterbird highlights include Demoiselle and Common Cranes, Oriental Plover, Asian Dowitcher and several species of gull, including Relict, Pallas's and Vega (or Mongolian) Gulls. Steppe and semi-desert birding is excellent, with Pallas's Sandgrouse, Isabelline and Great Grey Shrikes, Mongolian Ground Jay, several larks including Crested, Horned, Mongolian and Asian Short-toed Larks, Asian Desert Warbler, Black Redstart, Common Rock Thrush and a selection of wheatears. Snowfinches, accentors and Mongolian Finch round out the region's impressive bird list.



Mongolian Ground Jay by Glen Valentine

A wide range of mammals occurs here, including Long-eared Hedgehog, Pallas's Pika, Tolai Hare, Steppe Polecat, Tarbagan Marmot, Long-tailed and Pallid Ground Squirrels, and several hamsters and jerboas. Larger mammals may include Corsac Fox, Grey Wolf, Siberian Ibex, Argali, Mongolian Gazelle and Wapiti.

Khomyn Tal National Park. The park is home to a thriving



Wild Horses by Nigel Redman

population of reintroduced Wild Horse (Przewalski's Horse), now numbering around 150 animals, that roam freely across the reserve.

The surrounding steppe and dune systems support the critically endangered Mongolian Saiga, once widespread but now restricted to a few pockets, making this area one of the subspecies' most reliable strongholds. Goitered Gazelle is also common. Night drives offer the chance to observe jerboas and other nocturnal rodents in open terrain.

In the Great Lakes region we search for species such as White-headed Duck, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Mongolian Ground Jay, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler and the white-headed form of Western Yellow Wagtail, along with Saker Falcon, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Crested Lark and Mongolian Finch.

Altai Mountains. The Altai Mountains provide another excellent opportunity to search for Snow Leopard. The region's rugged slopes and valleys support healthy populations of Siberian Ibex and Tarbagan Marmots, which form the primary prey base for the cats. While Grey Wolf is possible here, it is seldom seen. Other mammals include Tolai Hare, Long-tailed and Pallid Ground Squirrels, and Pallas's Pika.

Birding in the Altai is outstanding. This region is particularly good for Altai Snowcock and Mongolian Ground Jay, and may also produce Chukar Partridge, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Red-billed Chough, Güldenstädt's Redstart, Desert and Pied Wheatears, Isabelline Shrike, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, Rock Sparrow, White-winged Snowfinch, Brown Accentor, Mongolian Finch and Twite. Overhead, we keep watch for Bearded, Himalayan and Cinereous Vultures, as well as Steppe and Golden Eagles, and Saker Falcon.



Kozlov's Accentor by Glen Valentine

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Mostly comfortable. Variable weather & some long field days offset by relatively easy birding/wildlife watching.
Birding Ease		Mostly easy, in very open conditions.
Accommodation		Different, but mostly comfortable. Both traditional & 'tourist' gers.
Walking / Trails		Mostly easy to moderate walks.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 vehicles, on both sealed and unsealed roads. Road conditions are variable, including windy, mountainous tracks and some off-road driving.
Photography		Can be good. Close-up photography of Snow Leopard is highly unlikely, other species may be at distance.
Annoyances		Variable weather conditions from dry & sunny to overcast with rain or snow. Moderate to strong winds are common.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 13;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- Internal return flight (Ulaanbaatar – Ulaangom);
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights (except as noted above);
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour-related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Internal flights have tight weight restrictions of 10kg per person for check-in luggage and 5kg per person for hand/cabin luggage.
- Most of the tour will be in remote areas with no medical facilities or hospitals. Please ensure that you have all the necessary medication that you require for the duration of the tour. If you have any medical concerns, please contact the Rockjumper office as soon as possible.
- Accommodation in some areas have shared facilities located away from the lodging.
- Although it will be summer in Mongolia, the temperatures can vary greatly, from warm day temperatures of 25–30°C in the deserts (but cooler in the mornings), to cold with rain and even snow possible at any time in the mountains.
- Warm clothes, including gloves, woollen hat, raingear, hiking boots and thermals will come in handy for the cooler nights and mornings, especially at higher altitudes.
- Fitness: In general, this tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health.
- Mongolia is not known for having a large variety of foods and often fresh food can be difficult to come by. We do, however, make a special effort to organize fresh fruit and vegetables where possible and these are regularly included in our meals on tour. In general meals consist of a variety of dishes that are generally tasty and appetizing. If you have any dietary requirements, please notify us in advance of departure.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Ulaanbaatar around midday on day 1 and concludes after breakfast on day 13.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar (IATA: UBN) is the main port of entry into Mongolia and is serviced by several major airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.