



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Mongolia

### Birds and Snow Leopards

*20<sup>th</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2021 (12 days)*



**Snow Leopard**

*The vast and virtually uninhabited lands of Mongolia have captivated the minds of explorers for as long as people have known of it. The landscapes and wildlife have had a draw on naturalists looking for something different. Long recognized for its scenic beauty, wonderful birdlife and plentiful mammalian fauna, it is now set to possibly become the premiere place to encounter the enigmatic Snow Leopard.*

*During this tour, we venture into the Altai Mountains. A stay of nearly a week will allow us to properly explore this remote locale. Based in a relatively comfortable ger camp, we stand a very reasonable chance of encountering the once near-mythical Snow Leopard. Compared with the other places in the Himalayas where one might now seek out the 'Gray Ghost', this site is at low elevation, and one needs to walk minimal distances to access the very best areas for seeing the big cat! Other mammals abound in this region, including Argali, Siberian Ibex, the fast-declining Saiga and Goitered Gazelle (Black-tailed Gazelle).*

*We will also visit Hustai National Park for Przewalski's Horse and Himalayan Gazelle (White-tailed Gazelle), before making our way into the Manul Mountains for the near threatened Pallas's Cat, large*

herds of Argali, perhaps a Corsac Fox or two and hopefully a few Grey Wolf on the hunt.

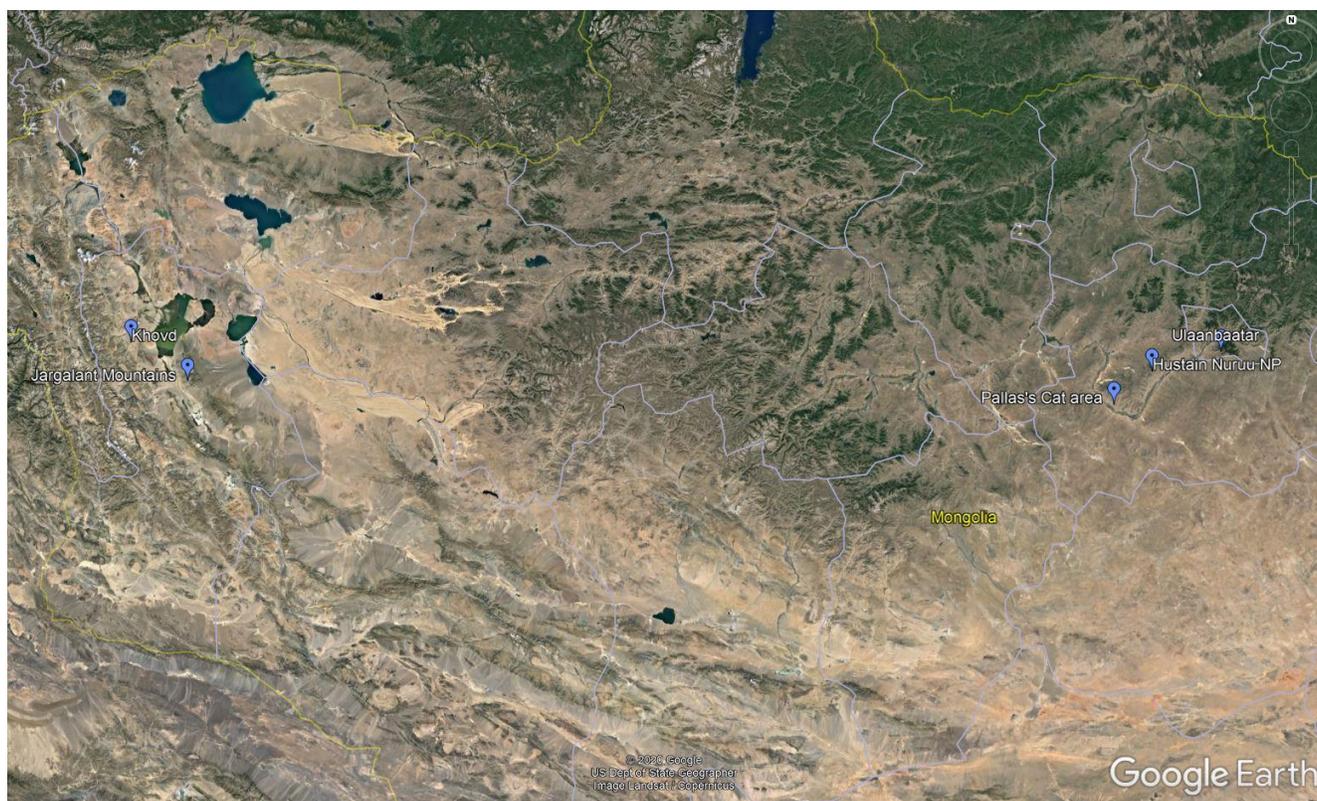
Many other smaller mammals and some excellent birds are all on offer in this truly wild and remote setting!

**THE TOUR AT A GLANCE...**

**MAIN TOUR ITINERARY**

<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Arrival in Ulaanbaatar</b>
<b>Day 2</b>	<b>Ulaanbaatar to Altai Mountains via Khovd</b>
<b>Days 3 to 7</b>	<b>Altai Mountains</b>
<b>Day 8</b>	<b>Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park via Ulaanbaatar</b>
<b>Day 9</b>	<b>Hustai National Park</b>
<b>Day 10</b>	<b>Hustai National Park to Pallas’s Cat area</b>
<b>Day 11</b>	<b>Pallas’s Cat area</b>
<b>Day 12</b>	<b>Pallas’s Cat area to Ulaanbaatar and depart</b>

**TOUR MAP...**



## THE TOUR IN DETAIL...

**Day 1: Arrival in Ulaanbaatar.** Upon arrival in Mongolia's capital, we will check into our comfortable hotel for the night. If time permits, we may be able to do some birding along the Tuul River today, where exciting possibilities could include Daurian Jackdaw, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Mandarin Duck, Steppe Eagle, Saker Falcon, Azure-winged Magpie, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Siberian Rubythroat and Pine Bunting.



**Steppe Eagle by Adam Riley**

**Day 2: Ulaanbaatar to Altai Mountains via Khovd.** We will take a flight to the town of Khovd today. Situated in the far west of the country, it is at the base of the Altai Mountains. A drive will take us to our ger camp, located in the foothills of the Altai.

This is as remote a wilderness as one can find. It is unlikely we will see any other people here apart from our team. The hauntingly beautiful scenery of these arid mountains and deserts will be our home for the next 6 nights. The camp is basic but, given the remoteness of the area, surprisingly comfortable!

Once we are set up, we will begin our search for the Snow Leopard and many other exciting mammals and birds that call this area home.

**Days 3 to 7: Altai Mountains.** Our clear focus over these exhilarating days is going to be searching for the Snow Leopard. The 'Gray Ghost' needs little introduction... One of the most elusive and evocative species on our planet, only in very recent years has it become a possibility to have a realistic chance at seeing one. Here, we have just that – a realistic chance of seeing a Snow Leopard! Working with our local tracking team, we will head out to the best areas to find one each day.



**Altai ger camp**

In comparison to some of the other areas that have recently opened up for Snow Leopard viewing, this site has a few advantages. Firstly, it is at a much lower elevation, with the maximum elevation visited during this trip being about 2,500 meters above sea level. Secondly, the accommodation is more comfortable. And, thirdly, much of the terrain can be covered by 4x4 vehicle rather than hiking!

Our search will be done through a mixture of driving and short hikes with lots of scanning. We will also be tuned in for any sightings from our trackers and even local



shepherds. It will probably take patience and persistence to get a sighting, but our chances are quite high given the amount of time we have devoted here!

Of course, there is much more besides the Snow Leopard to be excited about. Their prey base in this area is formed largely of nimble Siberian Ibex and Argali. Rams of both species sport impressive horns and the latter species is the world's largest sheep. Grey Wolf is a very rare possibility in this area (better in the Manul Mountains on our Pallas's Cat Extension); while additional mammals to be on the lookout for include Tarbagan Marmot and Pallas' Pika.



Siberian Ibex

We will also spend some time in the flatter areas looking for the incredible Saiga. The once vast herds of this truly unique and remarkably speedy antelope are sadly fast disappearing, but this area still offers a great chance at seeing them. Goitered Gazelle is another fantastic antelope species that we should encounter in this area. We will also head out at night for some spotlighting, when several species of interesting rodents come out – the mini-kangaroo-like Northern Three-toed Jerboa being most notable!

As one might expect, the birding in this area is also fabulous! This is a particularly good area for two special species, the localized Altai Snowcock and the wonderful Henderson's Ground Jay. Other highlights could include Chukar Partridge, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Red-billed Chough, Black-throated and Red-throated Thrushes, Bluethroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Guldenstadt's Redstart, Desert and Pied Wheatears, Isabelline Shrike, White-winged Snowfinch, Brown Accentor, Mongolian Finch and Pine Bunting. Overhead, we will keep a watchful eye for soaring Bearded Vulture, massive Cinereous Vultures, Steppe and Golden Eagles, Northern Goshawk and Saker Falcon.

We also plan to visit a huge lake and bordering grasslands, where prime specialties include White-headed Duck, Dalmatian Pelican and Pallas's Sandgrouse. Other highlights could include Whooper Swan, Red-crested Pochard, Pallas's Gull, Asian Short-toed Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, Citrine Wagtail and Pallas' Reed Bunting.



Red-flanked Bluetail by Markus Lilje

**Day 8: Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park via Ulaanbaatar.** This morning, we will pack up and leave camp, driving back to Khovd. Here, we will catch a flight back to Ulaanbaatar and take a relatively short drive to Hustai National Park, where we will spend two nights in another ger camp. We will have



time for some initial exploration in this area, which is also rich in mammals and birds.

**Day 9: Hustai National Park.** We have a full day for wildlife watching here. The rolling hillsides are most well-known for their population of Przewalski's Horse. The taxonomy of this species is still debated, but it is generally considered to be the last truly wild horse. Although it sadly went extinct in the wild, a captive breeding population was successful, and they have now been reintroduced into a handful of reserves within their historic range. Hustai is surely the best place to encounter them, and it will be one of the highlights of our visit here.



**Przewalski's Horses**

Two packs of Wolf also live within Hustai and sometimes prey on the endangered horse!

We will certainly be scanning hard for a sighting of this top predator. Other mammals that we hope to see include the wonderful Mongolian Gazelle, Siberian Wapiti (Red Deer), Tarbagan Marmot and Long-tailed and Daurian Sousliks. If we can arrange a spotlighting trip, we could see Red Fox, Corsac Fox, some interesting gerbil and hamster species and possibly even Steppe Polecat.

Birds we hope to encounter here include Lammergeier, Golden and Steppe Eagles, Mongolian Lark, Daurian Partridge, Upland Buzzard, Amur Falcon and Demoiselle Crane.

**Day 10: Hustai National Park to Pallas's Cat area.** After breakfast this morning, we shall transfer from to the Pallas's Cat site in the Manul Mountains. The site is exclusive to our local operators, and maintaining the integrity of its location is critical to keep disturbance of the cats to a minimum.



**Pallas's Cat by Milan Vogrin**

The terrain of the area is very similar to that which we would have experienced in Hustai National Park. Whilst the birding is equally similar – the mammals are not! Today will give us our first opportunity to search for the desirable Pallas's Cat. This evening we will retire to our purpose built ger camp.

**Day 11: Pallas's Cat area.** We have a full day to explore the area for our prime quarry, Pallas's Cat. Other prominent mammals to keep an eye out for are herds of Argali and Mongolian Gazelle, Corsac Fox and Grey Wolf. Our chances for Grey Wolf are improved here due to the numbers of Argali, a species that has all but gone extinct in the Western Altai.

With time on our hands, we'll enjoy a number of raptors that should have taken to the skies during the



heat of the day such as Golden and Steppe Eagles, Cinereous Vulture, Upland Buzzard, Amur and Saker Falcons, possibly flocks of Demoiselle Cranes, whilst terrestrial species may include the likes of Mongolian and Asian Short-toed Lark, and numerous migratory passerines moving through the elm trees.



Argali by Askar Davletbakov

**Day 12: Pallas's Cat area to Ulaanbaatar and depart.** After breakfast this morning, we shall make our way to Ulaanbaatar International Airport where the tour will conclude.

### **FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

**Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.**

#### **The main tour includes:**

- All accommodation as per the itinerary on a shared basis;
- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12 of the tour;
- All ground transfers;
- Internal flights (Ulaanbaatar – Khovd return);
- All reserve entrance fees;
- Gratuities for local staff; and
- Services of a specialized Rockjumper guide and a local English speaking guide/naturalist;

#### **The main tour excludes:**

- All airfares (International);
- Visa fees;
- Camera fees;
- All beverages other than water; and
- Phone calls, laundry, personal purchases, 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.

### **IMPORTANT NOTES:**

**a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however 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 (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

### **SPECIAL NOTES:**

- 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 check in luggage and 5kg per person hand/cabin luggage. Excess baggage is charged at US\$1 per kg to be paid in Mongolian tögrög.
- 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.
- Although it will be summer in Mongolia, the temperatures can vary greatly, from warm day temperatures of 25 to 30 degrees Celsius in the deserts (but cool 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.
- 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 and are generally tasty and appetizing. If you have any dietary requirements, please notify us in advance of departure.

**TIPPING:** As noted above, gratuities for local guides, drivers, porters, camp staff and hotels are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

### **ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:**

This tour **does not** include **any** airfares (except those specifically noted above). The main tour will depart from Ulaanbaatar on Day 1 of the tour and will conclude in Ulaanbaatar on day 12.

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.

### **FLIGHTS:**

Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar (IATA: ULN) is the main port of entry into Mongolia



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and is serviced by several major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**

