

Mongolia

Birds, Snow Leopards & Pallas's Cat

30th July to 10th August 2024 (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.

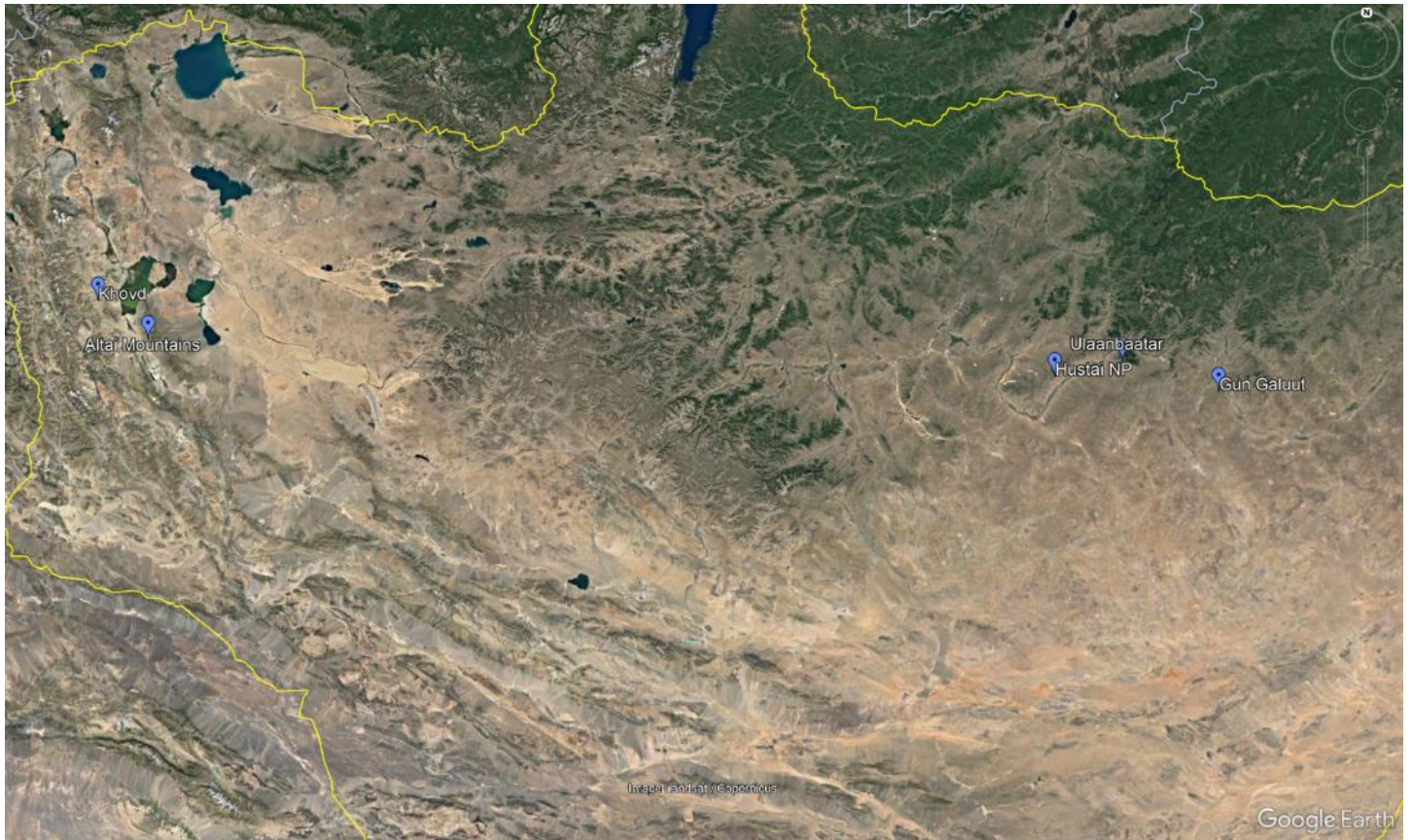
During this tour, we venture into the Altai Mountains. A stay of nearly a week will allow us to properly explore this remote locale. Based in a relatively comfortable ger camp, we stand a very reasonable chance of encountering the once near-mythical Snow Leopard. Compared with the other places in the Himalayas where one might now seek out the 'Grey 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.

We will also visit Hustai National Park for Przewalski's Horse and Goitered Gazelle (White-tailed race), before making our way to Gun Galuut for the near threatened Pallas's Cat, large herds of Argali, perhaps a Corsac Fox or two, Mongolian Gazelle 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!

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	Arrival in Ulaanbaatar
Day 2	Ulaanbaatar to Altai Mountains via Khovd
Days 3 to 7	Altai Mountains
Day 8	Altai Mountains to Ulaanbaatar
Day 9	Ulaanbaatar to Hustai National Park
Day 10	Hustai National Park to Gun Galuut
Day 11	Gun Galuut
Day 12	Gun Galuut to Ulaanbaatr & depart



Birding sites in detail

Tuul River. Time permitting, we'll visit this sacred river running through Ulaanbaatar for such exciting possibilities as 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.

Altai Mountains. Our Ger camp is situated in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, it is as remote a wilderness as one can find. It is unlikely we will see any other people here apart from our own group.



Altai ger camp

The hauntingly beautiful scenery of these arid mountains and deserts will be our home for the next week. The camp is basic but, given the remoteness of the area, surprisingly comfortable!

Our clear focus during our time here is dedicated to searching for the Snow Leopard. The 'Grey 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.

In comparison to some of the other areas that have recently opened 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!



Siberian Ibex

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, while additional mammals to be on the lookout for include Tarbagan Marmot and Pallas' Pika.

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!



Przewalski's Horses

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 Mongolian Ground Jay. Other highlights could include Chukar Partridge, Eurasian Eagle-Owl, Red-billed Cough, 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.



Argali by Askar Davletbakov

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.

Khar-Us Lake. This wetland site has a number of potentially interesting species such as the endangered Dalmatian Pelican, Swan Goose, Pallas's Reed

Bunting and Pallas's Sandgrouse. We may also find Mongolian Gull, Citrine Wagtail and Isabelline Wheatear.

Hustai National Park. The rolling hillsides here 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.



Pallas's Cat by Milan Vogrin

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 White-tailed Eagles and Mongolian Lark, Daurian Partridge, Upland Buzzard, Amur Falcon and Demoiselle Crane.

Gun Galuut. Gun Galuut protects a range of mountain and steppe habitats along with some varied and exciting wetlands. The rocky hills are home to a strong population of Pallas's Cat and Argali Sheep. We will scan the rocky outcrops in the mornings and late afternoons for the cats hunting for Brandt's Voles, their favourite prey. Argalis are usually seen in small groups grazing on the mountainside and with some driving and scanning we

should be able to find them. Other mammals in the area include Corsac Fox, Daurian Pika, Mongolian Jird and the nocturnal Siberian Jerboa.



White-naped Crane by David Hoddinott

The birdlife of Gun Galuut is very rich. We will explore the vegetation along the river near our campsite for migratory songbirds. In the past, these have been quite rewarding, rendering a variety of warblers including Pallas's Grasshopper, Greenish, Two-barred, Dusky and Thick-billed, as well as Olive-backed Pipit, Taiga Flycatcher, and Black-faced and Pine buntings. Between the main road and our ger camp lakes that dot the vast steppe are situated in a beautiful river valley. These lakes have yielded many surprises in the past including Baikal Teal,



Tarbagan Marmot

Falcated Duck, Grey-headed Lapwing, Asian Dowitcher and Gray-tailed Tattler. We may also encounter suites of common shorebirds including Eurasian Curlew, Long-toed and Red-necked stints, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden Plover and Marsh Sandpiper.

White-naped Cranes nest in the marshes of this region and we should find this magnificent bird in family groups along with other crane species including Common and the daintier Demoiselles. The lakes also attract numerous water birds including loons, grebes, swans, ducks, scoters, gulls and as many as five species of terns. We may see Bar-headed and Swan geese, Whooper Swan, Common and Ruddy shelducks, Eurasian Wigeon, Garganey, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and Stejneger's Scoter. Eared and Horned grebes and Arctic (Black-throated) Loon are often spotted in these waters. As we drive across the shortgrass steppe, we may find several species of larks including Asian Short-toed, Horned and Mongolian Larks, Isabelline and Northern Wheatears, both Richard's and Blyth's Pipits, as well as the sandy coloured Pere David's Snowfinch that inhabits the steppes. Raptors will be represented by Upland Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Saker and Amur Falcons, Cinereous Vulture, Black-eared Kite and Eastern Marsh Harrier. The rocky slopes are home to Rock Sparrow and Twite, while Pallas's Sandgrouse could be found skulking anywhere in the area.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mostly comfortable. Variable weather & some long field days offset by relatively easy birding/wildlife watching.
Birding Ease	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mostly easy, in very open conditions.
Accommodation	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Different, but mostly comfortable. From traditional gers in the Altai mountains to 'tourist gers' at Hustai and Gun Galuut.
Walking / Trails	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Mostly easy to moderate walks.
Vehicles / Roads	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	4x4 vehicles, both sealed and unsealed roads. Road conditions are variable.
Photography	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Can be good. Close-up photography of Snow Leopard is highly unlikely, other species may be at distance.
Annoyances	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	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 12;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour
- Internal return flight (Ulaanbaatar – Khovd);
- 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.

Tippling: 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.
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- 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 °C to 30 °C 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.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour departs from Ulaanbaatar on day 1 and conclude after breakfast 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.

Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar (IATA: ULN) 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. The following website provides detailed information about visa eligibility and assistance with online applications options where viable: [Visa HQ for Travel](#)

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