

# WILDLIFE TRAVEL

17th August-1st September 2024 (16 days)

## MONGOLIA: Steppe and Altai

Snow Leopards, Przewalski's Horses and so much more

"phenomenal... such special memories"

Mongolia 2023

**We are very excited to offer an adventurous tour of this little-known but wildlife-rich country, in search of some iconic mammals amongst jaw-dropping scenery.**

The undoubted highlight of this trip is the very realistic chance to see **Snow Leopards**, without needing to climb to uncomfortable altitudes or camp out in deep snow. We will spend much of our time up in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, where sharp-eyed local trackers help to increase the chances of a sighting, and where the presence of eco-tourists makes a positive contribution to the conservation of the mountains' wildlife.

Other exciting mammals we will be looking for during our time in Mongolia include the famously 'grumpy' **Pallas's Cat** (present throughout the country, with sightings during both our previous visits), wild Przewalski's Horses at their original reintroduction site not far from Ulaanbaatar, shy Siberian Ibex and Argali up in the mountains, large herds of grazing Mongolian Gazelle perhaps attracting the attention of the elusive Grey Wolf, the bizarre **Mongolian Saiga** in its last refuge in the flat, arid plains of western Mongolia, the inquisitive Corsac Fox, and a plethora of pikas and voles, jirds and jerboas.

Along the way we are sure to find some exciting bird life, including such **mouth-watering specialities** as Pallas's Sandgrouse, Mongolian Ground Jay, Mongolian Finch, Gldenstdt's Redstart and White-naped Crane. The short Mongolian summer is already ending in August, and the south-bound migration of birds from across Siberia could bring almost anything our way.

For those with a **spirit of adventure**, Mongolia is a destination that promises some fantastic wildlife rewards.



**Price**  
£6995

**Single Room Supplement**  
£350

**Full board**

<b>Day 1</b>	depart UK
<b>Day 2</b>	arrive Mongolia
<b>Day 3</b>	Tuul River Valley
<b>Day 4</b>	transfer to Khovd
<b>Day 5/6</b>	Altai Mountains
<b>Day 7/8</b>	Altai Teel, Tugrug River
<b>Day 9</b>	Altai Mountains
<b>Day 10</b>	Khar Us Lake
<b>Day 11</b>	transfer to UB
<b>Day 12/13</b>	Hustai NP
<b>Day 14</b>	Hustai NP/Lake Lun
<b>Day 15</b>	transfer to UB
<b>Day 16</b>	return to UK

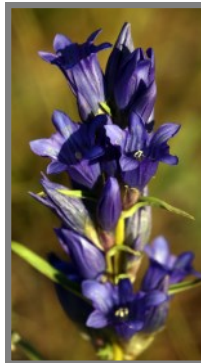
**Leaders**

Philip Precey,  
with local guides

**Group size**

min 6, max 12

Snow Leopards,  
mammals and birds,  
stunning scenery



## ITINERARY

**Please note that we may change the itinerary to suit local weather and road conditions or for other practical reasons, at the leader's discretion.**

**Day 1, Sat 17th August.** A morning flight takes us from London to Istanbul and then on to Ulaanbaatar (UB, Mongolia's capital city), arriving early morning of **Day 2 Sun 18th August.** From the airport, we will head 120km west to Khustain Nuruu (or Hustai) National Park.

**Days 2-3, Sun 18th/Mon 19th August.** Khustain Nuruu National Park protects a large area of extensive grasslands and rolling hills. The Park is most famous as the original reintroduction site for the last of the world's wild horses, the Takhi or Przewalski's Horse. Once found across the grassland of Eurasia, Przewalski's Horse was restricted to the Mongolian steppe by the start of the 20th century, and was lost from the wild by the start of the 1960s.

Brought back to Mongolia in the 1990s from European zoos, there are now more than 220 wild Przewalski's Horses in Hustai, grazing the grasslands alongside large herds of Mongolian Gazelles and groups of Wapiti, a real conservation success story. The grazing herds also attract predators, and there is always the chance of finding a watchful Grey Wolf.

Smaller mammals include Long-tailed Squirrel, Siberian Jerboa, Mongolian Jird and Brandt's Vole, which in turn attract the attentions of smaller predators. Pallas's Cat and Marbled Polecat are both present in the Park, although as always, seeing them requires a LOT of luck.

Birds of the steppe include Mongolian Lark, Isabelline Wheatear and Blyth's Pipit and we will keep our eyes peeled in the rocky foothills for Daurian Partridge and Meadow Bunting, while groups of Amur Falcons hunt from trackside wires. If we have time, we also hope to visit Lun Lake, a nearby wetland, where we will look for migrating waders and waterfowl. o/n Hustai Ger Camp

**Day 4-5, Tue 20th/Wed 21st August. Gun Galuut Nature Reserve.** After a last morning drive through Hustai, we will travel east again, heading around UB and then 130km south east, to the river-side nature reserve at Gun Galuut. The wetlands here are a breeding site for both White-naped and Demoiselle Cranes, and are as good a spot as any for the globally rare Asiatic Dowitcher, while the the nearby hills are home to Gobi Argali, the big-horned wild sheep of Central Asia. o/n Steppe Nomads Ger Camp.



**Day 6, Thu 22nd August.** After one last morning spent exploring the wetlands of Gun Galuut, we will head back to UB, pausing along the way to admire the giant roadside statue of Genghis Khan. o/n Ulaanbaatar



**Day 7, Fri 23rd August.** An early start will see us head back to the airport, for our domestic flight west, to the city of Khovd, the 'gateway to the Altai'. Flight time is around 2 hours, and there is a time difference of 1 hour. From Khovd we head south and away from the city, soon bidding farewell to the tarmacked highway as we make our way up into the foothills of the eastern Altai Mountains.



Our home for the next few days is the community-run **Snow Leopard Camp**, tucked into the southern slopes of Jargalant Mountain, at around 1600m asl. Our camp assistants, cooks and local trackers are all friendly local people who grew up in these mountains, and know the area and the vagueries of the local weather intimately. The camp is home to some of the characteristic small mammals of these mountains: Pallas's Pika, Midday Jird and (over night) Gobi Jerboa can all be seen around the tents, while groups of Steppe Horned Lark and Pere David's Snowfinch flit about.



**Days 8-12, Sat 24th to Wed 28th August. Mongolian Altai.** At least initially, our primary focus of attention will be the 'grey ghost' of the mountains, the secretive Snow Leopard. The mountain massif where we are based is home to a population of more than 30 individuals, and the trackers know their habits well. Using the local knowledge of our hosts, we will spend our time in the mountains methodically scanning the slopes for a sign of the leopards.

The mountain is also home to the wild prey species of the big cats, and we will keep our eyes peeled for Siberian Ibex, Argali and Tarbagan Marmots on the same mountainsides.



All photos taken by Philip Precey on our 2022 and 2023 visits to Mongolia.

**Photos:** (page 2) Przewalski's Horses and Pallas's Cat (page 3, from top) Pallas's Sandpiper, *Clematis tangutica*, Saker Falcon, *Lycaena violacea*.

The birdlife up at this altitude (up to 3,100m asl) will include the handsome Gldenstdt's Redstart and displaying Altai Snowcock, along with the chance to look for Brown Accentor, Altai Accentor and Plain Mountain-Finch. Soaring overhead, often at surprisingly close range, Lammergeier, Golden Eagle and Saker Falcon will all do their best to distract us from the search for the cats.

Snow Leopards are famously elusive animals, and we will spend as much time as we need up in their mountain domain, to have a chance of seeing them. Our days in the mountains are likely to involve long periods of sitting and scanning the mountainsides from high viewpoints. We may well get cold, bored and frustrated... although all will be forgotten if and when we do catch a sight of the 'grey ghost'.

Once we succeed in our cat quest, we will have time to explore more of the area's wildlife.

**Altai Foothills and Altan Teel plains.** We will travel down the mountain where springs provide some of the only permanent water sources in the area, attracting some of the birds of the arid foothills to drink, including Mongolian Finch, Grey-necked Bunting, Asian Water Pipit and Pied Wheatear.

In rocky areas, we will look for the characterful Mongolian Ground Jay, alongside Pallid Ground Squirrels, while down on the semi-desert plains of Altan Teel we hope to find flocks of Pallas's Sandgrouse, Asian Desert Warbler and the lovely Tuva Toad-headed Agama, an endearing little lizard. The area is also home to two endangered antelopes: the Black-tailed Gazelle and the critically endangered Mongolian Saiga, an iconic species of these dusty plains.

Scattered across the plain are several small plantations of poplar trees and Sea Buckthorn (grown for its berries), where birds heading south from Siberia to their wintering grounds in both southern Asia and Africa pause to feed up: depending on the conditions, we could find various warblers and flycatchers, buntings and shrikes, wagtails and pipits. One morning, we will visit a ringing station based in one of these migrant traps along the Tugrug River, where local ornithologists will explain their work and show us some of their recent findings 'in the hand'.

**Day 13, Thu 29th August. Khar Us Nuur National Park.** Bidding farewell to Jargalant, we will head down into the 'Great Lakes Depression', where we will explore the wetlands of Khar Us Nuur, a waterbody covering more than 1500 km<sup>2</sup>. We will stop at various spots along the lake shore, where thousands of



ducks gather on the water, including White-headed Duck and Red-crested Pochard, while groups of grazing geese could include both Bar-headed and Swan Goose alongside the more familiar Greylags.

As the day comes to an end, we will return to Khovd, where we will spend the night in a hotel before our flights next day. o/n Khovd.

**Day 14, Fri 30th August.** Our morning flight takes us back to Ulaanbaatar, where we will transfer to our hotel, on the banks of the Tuul river, east of the city. After settling in and freshening up, we will head out for some introductory birding in the vicinity of the hotel. o/n Ulaanbaatar.

**Day 15, Sat 31st August. Ulaanbaatar.** We travel the short distance to a local nature reserve. We will walk around the gravel pits, where various ducks and grebes can be found, and then amble slowly back to the hotel along the Tuul river, birding as we go, with Azure Tit, Azure-winged Magpie and Long-tailed Rosefinch amongst our targets for the day. o/n Ulaanbaatar

**Day 16, Sun 1st September.** One last early start, and we will bid farewell to Yumchin and set off for our flights home.

### Health and Fitness

No strenuous walking is involved in this holiday, but you need to have a **reasonable level of general fitness**, and be happy to 'rough it' a little, including sleeping in ger camps, travelling for extended periods by 4WD vehicle over rocky and bumpy ground, and spending days without access to 'facilities'. The longest walk is likely to be about 4km: you may sometimes need to walk on **rough or rocky ground** or up/down hill.

We will be visiting moderately **high altitudes** during our time in the Altai, perhaps reaching up to 3000m on our excursions, although our accommodation is below 2000m.

General travel inoculations are recommended: for details, visit **[fitfortravel.nhs.uk](http://fitfortravel.nhs.uk)**

**Photos** (page 4) Mongolian Ground Jay, Mongolian Saiga (page 5, from top) Tuva Toad-headed Agama, Pallas's Pika, Jargalant scenery, Genghis Khan statue, Hustai scenery.



## Accommodation

Mongolia is not a destination for those who like their luxury. But for those with a spirit of adventure who are prepared to forego some home comforts for a while, it's a destination that promises some fantastic rewards.

Our accommodation in Ulaanbaatar and (if needed) Khovd will be at 3 star hotels: these may be of a lower standard than we may be used to in Western Europe, but will be clean and comfortable, with private en-suite bathrooms, plenty of hot running water and mains electricity.

Elsewhere, we will be staying in local 'ger' camps. The ger is the traditional 'yurt' of Mongolian nomads, a tent/hut consisting of a single round room made up of wooden columns with walls and roof of felt and plastic tarpaulins. Each ger is furnished with two twin beds, with plenty of extra blankets available, a wash basin and heated with a wood stove.

At Hustai National Park, our camp on the edge of the park has electricity, shared shower and toilet facilities, with running water. Meals will be taken in the nearby camp restaurant.

The community-run Snow Leopard camp is situated on a flat 'shoulder' on the lower slopes of the Jargalant mountain, on the eastern edge of the Altai, at an altitude of 1600m asl, with stunning views across the valley between two mountain massifs. Electricity is provided by a generator for a few hours each evening. The camp has four 'long drop' toilets set in a secluded area on the edge of the camp, and there are four shower rooms, with hot water available when needed. Meals are taken in the 'restaurant' ger.

Depending on how our time in the mountains goes, we may spend one night at a more simple ger camp on the shores of Khar Us lake, where there may be no running hot water and no electricity.

## Meals

Meals will be a mixture of international and Mongolian dishes. Traditional Mongolian cuisine includes a lot of lamb, noodles and dumplings. Requests for special diets may be accommodated.

There will be plentiful supplies of hot drinks (tea and instant coffee), sweets and snacks during the days, as well as three good meals a day.



## Travel

We will be travelling by 4WD vehicles, with three people per vehicle. This may prove frustrating at times, but is the only way of accessing the remote areas we want to visit. Away from the immediate surroundings of the cities, there are very few paved roads in Mongolia. We will be 'off-roading' for much of our time, especially in the west of the country, where the drivers take us over bumpy ground and up/down rocky slopes to get us to where we need to be, to have the best chances of finding the wildlife.

We will take domestic flights between Ulaanbaatar and Khovd (return) with Aero Mongolia. Domestic flight schedules in Mongolia are generally not released until a couple of months in advance, and flights have a tendency to be delayed with some regularity: we have given ourselves extra time in the itinerary, should we need to change our plans at short notice, to fit in with the flights.

## Weather

Mongolia is the 'Land of Blue Sky', with clear skies for two-thirds of the year.

Under clear skies, the days can get warm, up to 25°C with strong sunshine. Overnight, and up in the mountains, temperatures can drop down to freezing. Rain storms may pass through, turning to snow high in the mountains.

## Leaders and guides

Our local guides will be Bino Dashnyam and/or Yumchin Batkhuu, co-founders of **Soaring Expeditions**, who have organised this first tour of Mongolia for us.

The Wildlife Travel leader for this trip will be **Philip Precey** an excellent all-round naturalist who will be familiar to our travellers as an experienced Wildlife Travel leader and Director. This will be Philip's third visit to Mongolia.



**Photos** (page 6): Snow Leopard Camp (page 7): Azure Tit, Lammergeier, *Delphinium grandiflorum*, Corsac Fox

## International Flights

Group flights are with Turkish Airlines via Istanbul as follows:

17th August	depart London Gatwick 10.55, arrive Istanbul 16.45 depart Istanbul 18.10, arrive Ulaanbaatar 07.10 (18th August)
1st September	depart Ulaanbaatar 08.40, arrive Istanbul 13.05 depart Istanbul 14.05, arrive London Gatwick 16.10

It is also possible to fly from London Heathrow or Birmingham International, connecting to the same group flight in Istanbul: contact us for details.

Istanbul is 2 hours ahead of the UK; Ulaanbaatar is 7 hours ahead of the UK, Hovd is 6 hours ahead of the UK.

### Entry Requirements: Passports and Visas

If you are a British passport holder, visitors wanting to stay for less than 30 days do not need a visa to enter Mongolia.

Your passport must be valid for six months from the date you arrive in Mongolia.

There are not currently any covid-related entry requirements for travel to/in Mongolia.

For up to date information, please check [www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mongolia](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/mongolia). Holders of other passports should check with the relevant embassy.

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**TO BOOK:** Contact us to check availability and reserve a place. Then complete the Booking Form and send to Sunvil Holidays (CAA-ATOL Licence 808, ABTA V6218), our tour operator, with your deposit. All details about booking are given in the Booking Pack.

**DEPOSIT PER PERSON £2,500, SECOND INSTALMENT ON  
CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £1,500 (to cover committed costs)  
BALANCE DUE BY 18/05/2024**

**INCLUDED:** Return flights from the UK, including airport taxes. Local transport as specified in itinerary including domestic flights within Mongolia. 14 night's accommodation (1 extra night on overnight outbound flight), full board basis (from lunch day 2 to breakfast day 16). Payments to local conservation projects. Services of leader and local guides.

**NOT INCLUDED:** Visa costs. Drinks with evening meals, refreshments. Gratuities. Travel insurance. Covid tests and associated costs.

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### WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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*Directors: Brian Eversham, Philip Precey, Michael Russell, Dr Tim Upson  
Wildlife Travel Ltd. Reg. No 2237697; (for Registered Charity numbers, please contact us)*

**Photos** (front): Altai scenery, Güldenstädt's Redstart, *Gentiana decumbens*, Snow Leopard cubs  
A trip report from our 2023 holiday to Mongolia can be found on our website, along with a gallery of photos on our flickr pages.