

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

7th to 22nd August 2026 (16 days)

MONGOLIA: Steppe and Altai

Snow Leopards, Pallas's Cat, Przewalski's Horses & so much more

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 all our previous visits), wild Przewalski's Horses at a remote reintroduction site amongst stunning sand dunes, shy Siberian Ibex and Argali up in the mountains, 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, Koslov's Accentor, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Mongolian Ground Jay, Mongolian Finch, Güldenstädt's Redstart, Azure Tit and Long-tailed Rosefinch. 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.

"phenomenal... such special memories"

Mongolia 2023



Price

£7,280

**Single Room
Supplement**
£320

Full board

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Day 1 | depart UK |
| Day 2/3 | Gun Galuut |
| Day 4 | Bogd Khan |
| Day 5 | transfer to Khovd |
| Day 6-10 | Altai Mountains Altan Teel, Tugrug River |
| Day 11 | Khomyn Tal |
| Day 12/13 | Margaz Mountains |
| Day 14 | Ulaangom & Uvs Lake |
| Day 15 | Ulaanbaatar |
| Day 16 | return to UK |

Leaders

Dr Phil Saunders,
with local guides

Group size

min 6, max 12

Snow Leopard, Pallas's Cat
Przewalski's Horse, Saiga
exciting birding
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, Fri 7th 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 Sat 8th August. From the airport, we travel 130km south east, to the river-side nature reserve at Gun Galuut, pausing along the way to admire the giant roadside statue of Genghis Khan. o/n Steppe Nomads Ger Camp.

Days 2-3, Sat 8th/Sun 9th August. The wetlands here are a breeding site for both White-naped and Demoiselle Cranes, and are as good a spot as any to look for a great variety of migrating waders and wildfowl, on occasion including the globally rare Asiatic Dowitcher, while the nearby hills are home to Gobi Argali, the big-horned wild sheep of Central Asia. o/n Steppe Nomads Ger Camp.

Day 4, Mon 10th August. After one last morning spent exploring the wetlands of Gun Galuut, we will head back west, to the forested slopes of Bogd Khan, in the outskirts of UB. Protected since the 12th century, this is reputed to be one of the oldest nature reserves in the world. Amongst the trees, we will look for Siberian Chipmunk and Red Squirrel, along with forest birds. o/n Bogd Khan.

Day 5, Tue 11th August. This morning we head back to the airport, for our domestic flight west, to the city of Khovd, the 'gateway to the Altai'. Flight time is around two hours, and there is a time difference of one hour.

From Khovd we head 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**, situated on a flat 'shoulder' on the lower slopes of the Jargalant mountain, on the eastern edge of the Altai, at an altitude of 1,600m asl, with stunning views across the valley between two mountain massifs. 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 Pied Wheatear and Horned Lark flit about.

Days 6-9, Wed 12th to Sat 15th 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 cats' prey, and we will keep our eyes peeled for Siberian Ibex, Argali and Tarbagan Marmots on the same mountainsides.

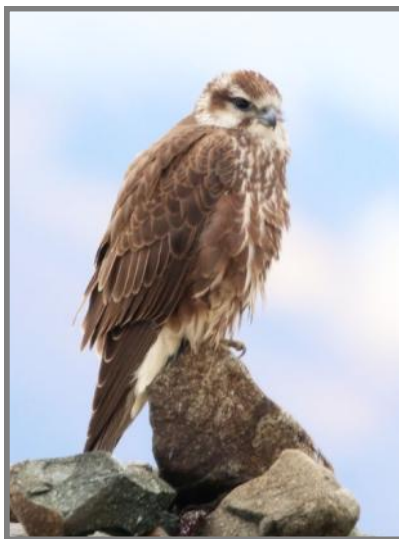
The birdlife up at this altitude (up to 3,100m asl) will hopefully include the handsome Güldenstädt's Redstart and displaying Altai Snowcock, along with the chance to look for Brown and Altai Accentor, White-winged Snowfinch and Asian Water Pipit. Soaring overhead, often at surprisingly close range, 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'.

Alongside 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, Rock Sparrow and Eastern Black Redstart.

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 Steppe Grey Shrike, Asian Desert Warbler



Photos: (page 2) Przewalski's Horses and Pallas's Cat (page 3, from top) Pallas's Sandgrouse, *Clematis tangutica*, Saker Falcon, Jargalant scenery.

and the lovely Tuva Toad-headed Agama, an endearing little lizard. The area is also home to the Black-tailed Gazelle, one of two endangered antelopes of the region.

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.

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 some of their recent catch 'in the hand', likely to include Dusky Warbler and Daurian Shrike amongst other migrants.

Great Lakes Depression. From our mountain camp, we will also find time to head down into the 'Great Lakes Depression', where we will explore the shores of Khar Us Nuur. Various migrating waders visit the shorelines of this enormous water body, while 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.

Day 10 Mon 16th August. Bidding a sad farewell to the team at the Snow Leopard Camp, we head down onto the plains and set off eastwards.

We will drive across the saline steppe, cloaked in flowering Alliums, while looking out for Pallas's Sandgrouse, Greater Sand-plover and the endangered Mongolian Saiga, an iconic species of these dusty plains.

We will stop on the shores of Durgun Lake, where we look for Pallas's Gull and Caspian Tern, and where we will need to check the harriers closely, as both Eastern and Western Marsh Harrier may be present.

Beyond the lake, we will reach an area of mobile sand dunes, beyond which lies **Khomyn Tal National Park**. The Park is now famous as a 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 lost from the wild by the start of the 1960s.

Brought back to Mongolia in the 1990s from European zoos, Khomyn Tal was the third site chosen for reintroductions, where 22 animals were brought from their 'rewilding' site in the Cevennes, France in 2004. Four more horses followed, from



Prague Zoo in 2011, and there are now more than 150 wild Przewalski's Horses in Khomyn Tal, grazing the panoramic steppe and dunes, a real conservation success story.

Grazing alongside the horses we may find Mongolian Gazelle, while smaller mammals include Tolai Hare, Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, Mongolian Jird and Brandt's Vole, in turn attracting Corsac Fox and Steppe Polecat, along with Steppe Eagle. o/n Khomyn Tal Tourist Camp

Day 11 Mon 17th August. After a morning spent exploring the Park and (hopefully) admiring the horses, we will continue our drive north-eastwards, headed towards the low mountains of Margaz, part of the Hangay Range. o/n Margaz Community Ger Camp.

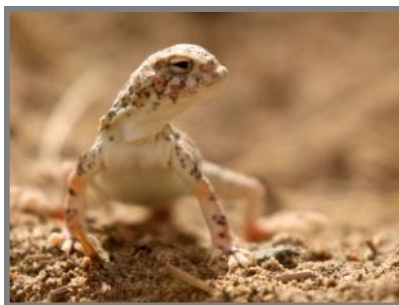
Day 12/13 Tue 18th/Wed 19th August. We will spend our time in the granite hills and steppe of the Margaz in search of the charismatically 'grumpy' Pallas's Cat, with the help of the sharp eyes and expert knowledge of the local rangers. The remote countryside here offers us the best chance of encountering this wonderful wild cat, and the mountains are also home to both of Mongolia's other cats: Snow Leopard and Eurasian Lynx.

As well as the cats, the area is home to some wonderful birdlife, with Mongolia's only endemic, Koslov's Accentor sure to be high on our wish list, along with a very good chance of spotting Pallas's Fish Eagle.

Day 14, Thu 20th August. Time to leave the mountains, and the drive to Ulaangom, the capital ofUvs province, from where we fly back to UB. o/n Ulaanbaatar.

Day 15, Fri 21st August. From our hotel, we will explore the banks of 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, Sat 22nd August. An early start sees us head back to the airport, for our flights back home.



Photos (page 4) Mongolian Ground Jay, Mongolian Saiga (page 5, from top) Tuva Toad-headed Agama, Pallas's Pika, *Lycaena violacea*, Jargalant scenery, Pallas's Fish Eagle.

Leaders and guides

Our local guides will be Bino Dashnyam and/or Yumchin Batkhoo, co-founders of **Soaring Expeditions**, who have organised our previous three tours of Mongolia for us.

The Wildlife Travel leader for this trip will be **Dr Phil Saunders** an excellent birder and all-round naturalist who has been part of the Wildlife Travel team since 2018. Phil has worked as an ecologist for over fifteen years within both the corporate and academic sectors, and is currently based in Dorset.

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 will be at a comfortable 3 star hotel, 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.

Electricity is often provided by a generator, with shared toilet/shower facilities, with hot water available when needed. Meals are taken in the 'restaurant' ger.

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.

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.



Travel

We will be travelling by 4WD vehicles, with three people per vehicle: the vehicles will stay in contact by 'walky talky' radio. 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, and Ulaangom back to UB, with Aero Mongolia.

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.

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



International Flights

Group flights are with Turkish Airlines via Istanbul as follows:

7th August **depart London Heathrow 06.30**, arrive Istanbul 12.25
 depart Istanbul 18.15, arrive Ulaanbaatar 07.20 (8th August)
22nd August depart Ulaanbaatar 08.50, arrive Istanbul 13.00
 depart Istanbul 14.45, **arrive London Heathrow 16.40**

It is also possible to fly from Gatwick, Stansted, Edinburgh, Manchester 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**. Holders of other passports should check with the relevant embassy.

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 £2,000, SECOND INSTALMENT ON
CONFIRMATION OF HOLIDAY £2,000 (to cover committed costs)
BALANCE DUE BY 08/05/2026**

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.

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

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Photos (front): Altai scenery, Güldenstädt's Redstart, *Gentiana decumbens*, Snow Leopards.

A trip report from our previous holidays to Mongolia can be found on our website, along with a gallery of photos on our flickr pages.