

MONGOLIA

Saturday 29th May – Saturday 12th June 2010

Mongolia is an unbelievable country, where the vast open landscape defies belief. It is a mysterious land where wild horsemen tend their herds and still live in yurts. The birds are equally beguiling as we travel across the desert steppe and into the Gobi desert and the high Altai Mountains. Spring in Mongolia is an awesome experience as many eastern Palearctic migrants are passing through, augmenting an already mouth-watering selection of breeding birds. Most of the desert life is concentrated around the numerous lakes that are surprisingly abundant amidst the vastness of the Gobi desert. In true local style we will be camping or staying in tourist ger camps throughout the tour, which gives us a huge degree of flexibility and will allow our hosts to look after us in a most comfortable manner. Wherever we stay there will be birds, whether the sight of hundreds of Pallas's Sandgrouse wheeling overhead, or inquisitive Mongolian Larks there will always be something of interest on our doorstep. Beginning close to Ulaanbaatar we'll see Azure Tit and White-cheeked Starling before heading out into the wilderness. Thousands of birds are present around the surprisingly numerous lakes in the desert steppe, species such as Swan Goose and Stejneger's Scoters are numerous and we'll hopefully pick up such delicacies as Asiatic Dowitcher, Long-toed Stint, Pallas's Reed Bunting or Thick-billed Warbler, along with more exotic fare like Oriental Plover, Demoiselle or even the rare White-naped Crane, before reaching the mountains. Here we'll look for Altai Snowcock, Kozlov's Accentor, Hodgson's Bushchat and Guldenstadt's Redstart, whilst lower down Daurian Partridge, Eversmann's Redstart and Red-throated Thrush dwell. Our journey ends amidst the totally contrasting Taiga forest in search of typical boreal breeding species like Northern Red-flanked Bluetail, Siberian Blue Robin, White's Thrush, Siberian Jay, and possibly Black-billed Capercaillie.

Our Tour Itinerary

Days 1 - 2 We will meet at London Heathrow for the overnight scheduled flight to Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. On arrival we will transfer to a hotel where we can freshen up before heading out for our first taste of birding in this fascinating country. Our primary goal will be the delightful Azure Tit, and other species we may see include Japanese Quail, Black-eared Kite, Booted Eagle, Amur Falcon, Grey-headed Woodpecker, Pacific Swift, Isabelline Wheatear, Brown Shrike, Hawfinch, Siberian Rubythroat, Olive-backed and Blyth's Pipits, Thick-billed Warbler, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Pine Bunting, Red-billed Chough, Oriental Crow and Daurian Jackdaw. Night in Ulaanbaatar.

Day 3 After breakfast we will drive to Khustai Nuruu National Park, which is famous for the herds of re-introduced Przewalski's Wild Horse. On the way to the park we will walk along cultivated areas and steppe where Mongolian Lark, Greater Short-toed Lark and Pere David's Snow Finch can be found. Over the nearby hillsides raptors can be much in evidence and species such as Upland Buzzard, Saker Falcon and Steppe Eagles are often seen. We will have a lunch in the park restaurant before going to the Park Research Centre whose surrounding area has proved worthwhile for Amur Falcon, Golden Eagles, Black Vulture, Lesser Kestrel, Daurian Jackdaw, Rock Sparrow, and the surprisingly common Siberian Meadow Bunting. Later on we will visit a small spring where the horses gather to drink and which often proves attractive to birds as well. In the evening we'll have dinner in the National Park restaurant and toast our day's success with some Mongolian cold beer! Tonight we will stay in a Ger Camp nearby.

Days 4 - 7 Over these next few days we will head in a roughly western direction and out into the vast steppe wilderness before heading south towards the Gobi Altai Mountains and the Gobi Desert. We will spend our time thoroughly exploring the Gobi wetlands, a series of lakes that are surprisingly numerous despite this being a 'desert' region! Water levels vary each year and one of the advantages of this tour is we can adjust our route and set up camp as the birding demands. One fact about birding in Mongolia is that every site can be productive and

our specifically chosen itinerary visits some more remote wetlands than other tours currently available. So, early on our first morning we will head west to Tsegeen Lake, situated deep within the vast steppe where we can see good numbers of stately Demoiselle Cranes. Wildfowl are much in evidence and include Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, and numerous Whooper Swans. It is also another good place for raptors and gives us further chances of Steppe Eagle, Saker Falcon and Upland Buzzard. A thorough exploration of the surrounding reedbed can be worthwhile with Citrine, White and Yellow Wagtails, Great Reed Warblers, and sometimes Pallas's Reed Bunting. Many birds come to drink in the afternoons here and provide a good opportunity to get close to the huge Mongolian Lark, which is often joined here by flocks of Greater and Asian Short-toed Larks. Another nearby lake holds more wildfowl, but this time also Swan Goose and flocks of Bar-headed Geese. There is also a good chance of finding Asiatic Dowitcher, as well as Whiskered and White-winged Terns, and if we are very lucky, we can see a breeding pair of White-naped Crane here. Continuing further west this morning as we drive out into the wilderness, where the large fresh water Ugi Lake holds thousands of Swan Geese, as well as numerous wildfowl including Common Goldeneye, Dalmatian Pelican, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Tern of the *longipennis* race, Mongolian Gull, and around the edges we can find Rock Sparrows. The rare and range-restricted Relict Gull can be found here and we'll spend the majority of our time searching for this enigmatic species. Both Pallas's Fish-eagle and White-tailed Eagle should hopefully be more conspicuous here. We will then visit Aimag where internet and telephone facilities are available before reaching some granite mountains nearby where Chukar, Duarian Partridge, Twite, Northern Wheatear and Ortolan Bunting reside. Yet another lake we intend to visit gives us another opportunity for Relict Gull and there is also Mongolian and Pallas's Gulls here and Bearded Reedlings haunt the reedbeds. Most of the time we will be camping, which our ground agents will set up in their usual professional manner, normally out in the middle of the open steppe providing one of the highlights of any Mongolian tour. To be in this wilderness is something of an unique experience as you literally feel dwarfed in this vast landscape, coupled with amazing starlit nights will be something that lives with you forever. One night we will also camp in a picturesque mountain valley and another night will be spent in a Ger Camp.

Day 8 If we haven't seen them already, we will search the Orog Lake Valley thoroughly today for the strange-looking and sought-after Henderson's Ground Jay. The scattered bushes here make this a particularly good area for this species and during our search we should also come across Asian Desert Warbler and Mongolian Finches both of which breed here, and other species include Long-legged Buzzard, Little Owl, Desert Wheatear and Horned Lark. If the lake is full of water then it is a good place to find waders on migration such as Long-toed and Temminck's Stints, Spotted Redshank, and both Mongolian and Pacific Golden Plovers, whilst other species include Black-necked Grebe, Common Crane, Red-crested and Ferruginous Pochards, sometimes Falcated Duck, Stejneger's Scoter, Baillon's Crake, Marsh Sandpiper, Brown-headed Gull, Gull-billed, Caspian and Black Terns, Citrine Wagtail, Pale Martin, and a fine trio of Pallas's Grasshopper, Paddyfield and Oriental Reed Warblers. Nights in camp.

Days 9 - 10 The great mountain massif of Ikh Bogd Uul will provide a stark contrast to our birding so far and is an excellent place to see high mountain species such as Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Hill Pigeon, Eurasian Crag Martin, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Black and Guldenstadt's Redstarts, Wallcreeper, Water Pipit, Godlewski's Bunting, Mongolian Finch, White-winged Snow-finch, Altai, Brown, Alpine and Koslov's Accentors, both Chinese Beautiful and Great Rosefinches and Brandt's Rosy Finch. At midday, we will station ourselves beside a stream where many birds come down to drink and can often provide very good photographic opportunities. In order to stand a chance of seeing the rare Altai Snowcock we will have to hike up into the mountains but it would be well worth the effort involved if we could find this highly sought-after species. The higher areas are also home to the equally rare White-throated or Hodgson's Bushchat. Lower down we can search for Chukar, the *vittata* form of Pied Wheatear, Eversmann's Redstart, Red-throated Thrush, Sulphur-bellied and migrating Barred Warblers, and both Long-tailed and Common Rosefinch. We can spend the following morning catching up on any species we may still need before checking out Taatsyn Tsagaan Lake, Arguutyn Gol River and a special area of steppe where Pallas's Sandgrouse is especially numerous and can be counted in the hundreds. It is also a fairly reliable site for Oriental Plover and we can also see Greater Sand Plover, Crested and Mongolian Larks and Desert Wheatear. Nights in superbly located camp sites.

Days 11 – 12 We will drive north across mountain steppe to Sangiin Dalai where we can see Black-throated Driver, Eurasian Spoonbill, Bar-headed Goose, Pied Avocet, Mongolian Larks, Citrine Wagtail, Blyth's Pipit, and often some migratory waders. We'll camp near the lake and leave the following day for Ulaanbaatar, crossing the remote steppe where we have more chances of Pallas's Sandgrouse, Steppe Grey Shrike and Pere David's Snow Finches. It will feel rather claustrophobic to spend the night in a hotel after being in the wilderness for so long.

Days 13 - 14 After breakfast, we will drive to the Khentiy Mountains deep into the Siberian Taiga forest and our camp for the night set beside a river. We will look for a whole host of Siberian breeding species that turn up in the UK only as vagrants and will provide an extra 'edge' to our birding here. We will look for Hazel Grouse, Swinhoe's Snipe, Japanese Buzzard, Oriental Cuckoo, White-backed, Lesser Spotted, Three-toed and Black Woodpeckers, Taiga and Dark-sided Flycatchers, Brown Shrike, Daurian Redstart, Eye-browed and White's Thrushes, Northern Red-flanked Bluetail, Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Rubythroat, Olive backed Pipit, Pallas's, Dusky, Two-barred Greenish and Yellow-browed Warblers, White-cheeked Starling, Black-faced, Yellow-breasted and Pine Buntings, Siberian Jay, Daurian Jackdaw, Spotted Nutcracker and Oriental Rook. Chinese Bush-warbler is a local speciality that we will concentrate on finding, but a strenuous uphill hike will be required in order to be in the right habitat for Black-billed Capercaillie. The following morning we will continue our search for these much wanted species in another river valley beyond the mountains, returning to Ulaanbaatar in the afternoon where we may have some time for sightseeing and shopping before our final dinner together.

Days 15 Transfer to the Chingis Khaan International Airport for the return flight to the UK, arriving later this afternoon.

Leaders: Nick Bray and local guides

TOUR PRICE Ulaanbaatar/Ulaanbaatar **£2350.00** per person
London/London flights £900 (provisional)

Single supplement: £300.00 **Deposit:** £500.00

Maximum group size: 12 Excluding leaders

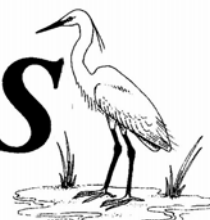
Included in cost: All meals, accommodation in twin rooms/tents en-suite where available, all ground transport in 4WD, all reserve entrance fees, and services of the leaders.

Not included: International flight, insurance, drinks, tips and items of a personal nature, Visa (currently £40), airport departure tax and optional tips for the local guides.

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BOOKING FORM

PLEASE USE BLOCK LETTERS THROUGHOUT

Tour name..... Dates.....

Surname	Initials	Mr/Mrs/Miss	First Name (That by which you wish to be known on trip)	Are you joining the tour in the UK? Yes/No	Are you over 65

Address for Correspondence:	
Postcode:	
Telephone: (Home)	(Work)
E-mail Address:	
Contact Number: (in case of accident or emergency - this must be filled in)	
Doctors Number:	

Passport Details: * (Please fill in forenames as they appear on your passport)					
Surname	*Forename(s)	Passport No.	Place of Issue	Date of issue	Expiry date

Please make the above reservations

I/We enclose £..... **Deposit** (Please see tour description for amount)

I/We enclose £..... **Flight booking fee £30**

(If you request Birdseekers to arrange your flight add £30 per person)

TOTAL £.....

I confirm that I have read the current terms and conditions as set out in the 2010 brochure and agree and accept them on behalf of all persons named above. Terms and conditions are also available on our website www.birdseekers.co.uk

SIGNATURE DATE

Please make your cheque payable to 'BIRDSEEKERS' and return, together with completed booking form to the address overleaf.

PLEASE TURN TO BACK OF FORM AND COMPLETE ALL RELEVANT SECTIONS

Other Details:

Accommodation required (please tick) single twin double

Couples please specify if Double or Twin beds required although we cannot guarantee availability:

I am a single traveller and would be prepared to share twin-bedded accommodation yes no

What type of passport do you hold? This must have at least six months to run after the return date of your holiday. British Citizen Other (please state)

Do you have any special dietary requirements (vegetarian, diabetic, other?) yes no

If yes give details.....

Do you have any medical conditions we should know about? Or is there anything else which may prohibit full participation of the tour? Yes no

If yes give details

Flights: please tick as appropriate

You wish to book your own flight. NOTE: Please wait for confirmation from us before you book your flight. When you have booked your flight please notify us of times, number and dates

You wish Birdseekers to book your flight. NOTE: If Birdseekers books your flight there is a booking fee of £30 per person to our agent due with this form and your initial tour deposit.

For office use only:	Conf.	D & C	ATR
Outward Flight No:	Arrival time:	Return Flight:	Departure time:

(Wish List!)

Please fill-in if there are any particular species of bird or other form of wildlife that you would like to see on this tour. We cannot guarantee anything, but it helps to let us know if you have any target species.

Birds:	Other Wildlife: / Sites etc:
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

Other countries you would like to visit?.....

Other interests, Butterflies, Mammals, Flowers, Whales, Photography etc
.....

Please return this form with enclosed cheque to:
BIRDSEEKERS, 2a Plymouth Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon, PL7 4JR
Tel/Fax: 01752 342001 e-mail: info@birdseekers.com
www.birdseekers.co.uk ATOL No. 6156

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.
Bookings are welcome right up to the last minute, please ring for details of any vacancies.
Steve Bird trading as BIRDSEEKERS

