

Mammals of the Roof of the World

A Greentours Tour Report

1st – 22nd October 2014

Led by Jesper Hornskov & Ian Green

Day 1 October 1st Departure

We departed UK from various points, meeting up in Amsterdam ready for our flight to Chengdu which departed at nine.

Day 2 October 2nd To Xining

We arrived in Chengdu's gleaming modern airport a few minutes early and were soon upstairs checking-in for our onward Sichuan Air flight. We arrived in Xining with just enough daylight left to see the surprisingly massive modern development along a corridor between mountains. Xining is already a big city! That is not to say we couldn't see the enticing looking rocky slopes either side of the expressway as we drove from the airport. It took us about half an hour, some of it in a traffic jam, to reach the very swish hotel where we settled in. Jesper bade us meet him in room 405 for dinner! This was a private dining area just for us. Most were already handy with chopsticks and we soon learnt Jesper's preferred rotational direction of the lazy susan! The meal was rather superb and so we retired to attempt some much needed shut-eye

Day 3 October 3rd Huzhu

sadly many of us hadn't managed the necessary quota of shuteye, the time zone difference having wakened a few! So it was a slightly bleary eyed bunch who met at five-thirty at the front door, though we were all keen to get out and see the landscapes and the wildlife of Qinghai. We drove northeast for an hour and a half, cresting a 3500m pass just as dawn was lighting the skies to reveal an autumnal landscape of green spruce and juniper mixed with the vibrant yellows of birches and aspens and the reds of *Berberis*. We enjoyed a very substantial roadside breakfast with lots of good things to eat and tea and coffee. Then it was a short walk – uphill, so good for our acclimatisation – to a spot overlooking a clearing in a very pretty mountain valley. The sun rose above the horizon as we stood there, the frost soon disappearing at our feet! This is a spot that usually yields Siberian Roe Deer, but not today, they remained hidden. We spent a couple of

hours waiting, and in the meantime were entertained by a succession of good birds. The Elliot's Laughingthrushes who chuntered away during the whole of our stay never showed themselves, however we soon had great views of Blue-fronted Redstarts as a flock of these lovely birds flew into a Sea Buckthorn tree laden with orange berries. In the same tree was a Tickell's Leaf Warbler and fantastic male White-throated Redstart. A Kessler's Thrush flew over and so too did a Sparrowhawk and some Large-billed Crows. There was a lovely Rufous-browed Accentor.

Eventually we descended and headed downhill some kilometres to another valley. Several Himalayan Griffons glided overhead as we stopped. This one proved highly productive for birds as we walked up through the woodland. Great Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers were seen, and lots of the absolutely gorgeous little Chinese Nuthatches. There were Grey-crested Tits, Rufous-vented Tits, and lots of Songar Tits. Some of the local race of Jay impressed us with their rich colouration. There were leaf warblers. Lots of them! The vast majority were Gansu Leaf Warblers, though there were a few Buff-barred Warblers amongst them too. The Hume's Leaf Warbler Jesper heard never showed itself. There was a great flock of Chestnut Thrushes too. Surprisingly there were a few flowers still out, a pretty aster, a pyramidal *Ligularia* and two gentians, a four petalled *Cynanchum* and a five petalled *Gentiana*. We spent a while studying a road cutting waiting for pikas to appear which they didn't. However on returning down the road one Tsingling Pika showed itself briefly.

We took a noodle lunch in a basic roadside eatery – very tasty. Oriental Turtle Doves behind the building. Then it was back up slope for a while to a quiet track into the forest. Quiet it was indeed, late afternoon not being the best time for bird or mammal activity. We found a beautiful pale blue *Lomatogonium* growing amongst all the seeding iris and higher up *Viola biflora* was surprisingly in flower. We did get great views of Grey-crested Tit and some more leaf warblers, but couldn't find any grouse until on the way down when at least two Severtzov's Grouse were seen. A flock of White-winged Grosbeaks was a nice bonus.

Then it was back to Xining and another excellent meal in the hotel restaurant.

Day 4 October 4th Koko Nor & the Southern Koko Nor Range

We awoke to grey skies, or at least, at this time of morning, starless skies. We drove out of Xining and headed for the Tibetan Plateau, a drive that took us steadily uphill for almost two hours along superb smooth roads. As we arrived at Koko Nor the skies were looking very threatening and we soon entered a hail/sleet/snow shower that left the ground around us white. We parked up by a wetland that abutted onto the huge Koko Nor a great inland lake almost as big as Yorkshire! We stayed in the vehicles for a short while as the shower clear and then ventured forth. There was a slight wind and it felt very chilly though the temperature was probably just above zero. Quicker out of their holes than we were out of the vehicles were the Black-lipped Pikas. We were parked next to a colony of them. There were loads – perhaps fifty – of them looking so cute as they came out and scurried around in the snow or sitting looking at us. Amongst them hopped a scallywag band of Hume's Groundpeckers. These strange little birds were thought to be relatives of the crows and in particular the ground jays but recent DNA evidence suggests that they are more closely related to Tits. This made sense to us as we watched their crazy hopping,

legs rather splayed, so like a Blue Tit manoeuvring round a bush. They were very tame and we photographed them either side of another excellent back of the vehicle breakfast.

The sun soon came out and full of good food and tea and coffee we set out, packed lunches in our bags. The wetland birds over the next few hours were brilliant starting right at the breakfast spot where there were both Brown-hooded and Black-headed Gulls as well as a group of Goosander and some Great Crested Grebes. Thereafter was a stream of birds. There were ducks, lots of them. A large flock of Red Crested Pochard were first up, and then a mixture of Pintail, Shoveler, Common Teal, Gadwall, Mallard and Chinese Spot-billed Ducks filled the skies every time a raptor went past. There were also a few Ferruginous Ducks and a Falcated Duck too. Ruddy Shelduck kept the place purring with their evocative calls. Greylag Geese were here and there and we saw a few Bar-headed Geese too. Speaking of raptors, there was a Saker Falcon that flew low over the marsh, tilting its wings at some Lapwings as it flew past, and later we were to see two more of these impressive falcons. As we watched from a raised mound distant Himalayan Griffons circled over while nearer at hand were a few Hen Harriers and a Western Marsh Harrier. From the same mound we watched two groups of four Black-necked Cranes as they fed near herds of sheep coming down to the water. We had decent views of two European Bitterns and later heard one booming. Great Black-headed Gulls sailed past from time to time and down on the marsh we could see various waders including Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Black-tailed Godwits, Avocets and Asian Golden Plover. There were plenty of small birds too, especially larks. Shorelarks were common throughout as were Oriental Skylarks and we also found a few Skylarks, and the impressively large Tibetan or Long-billed Larks which eventually allowed us great views. There were Citrine Wagtails, a Water Pipit, a tail-less Tree Sparrow, and two pairs of Mongolian Trumpeter Finch. We spent some time looking for the Asian Badger that Jesper had seen two days previously but only found signs – holes and tracks. There were two lovely Woolly Hares and also Roger spotted a Kam Dwarf Hamster. There were dragonflies that looked like Black Darters and a few butterflies even – a clouded yellow that looked like *aurorina* and two species of blue, one very small and looking like Osiris. Botanically there was little in flower, one plant of the *Lomatogonium* and also a very fine yellow sea lavender, however the salt-tolerant and wetland vegetation did allow us to note a number of familiar species including *Glaux*, *Triglochin maritima* and *Hippurus*. There was a fine short-fruited *Typha* forming dense stands in the wetland and in this we spotted Bearded Tit.

In the afternoon we headed along the shore of Koko Nor for a while, allowing us to appreciate its size and its colour, before we headed off south through the Koko Nor range to Gonghe. This took us rapidly uphill into the kind of very short-turf alpine grasslands that we should become familiar with over the next ten days or so. We stopped to scan a valley at around 3650m. The turf here was covered in small holes and out of said holes popped Black-lipped Pikas. In abundance. Everywhere one looked there were Pikas. We could see hundreds of them! And this was our first introduction to snowfinches. Right by us were Rufous-necked Snowfinches and White-rumped Snowfinches. The latter were amazing. Quite large, when they flew they reminded me more of a shrike, and on the ground, amongst their beloved pikas, they were so obstreperous, willing to take each other on at the drop of a hat, and barely concerned about us at all. We watched Upland Buzzards soar overhead and continued to scan below in search of mammals. Jane it was who spotted the first. A distant but well-lit fox heading our way. We watched it for a while soon discerning that it was the charismatic Tibetan Fox. We relocated to try and get closer but it had

our number and was already heading away when we alighted from the vehicles. However over the next hour we saw the same one and at least two possibly three more Tibetan Foxes. All were distant though one appeared over a reasonably nearby hill and showed us its creeping up on pika moves. We think the pikas must have been watching because it stopped, waited for a while, then got up and stretched and swore (OK, we didn't hear anything...) then left in the opposite direction.

Then it was on to Gonghe where we checked into a decent hotel and went out for a great restaurant experience with Jesper who showed us the local 'hot pots' where you add your own uncooked ingredients to a boiling broth and then haul them out to eat as and when.

Day 5 October 5th Er La

We convened at five thirty for our trip to Er La. It was cold outside but not too cold we decided. The drive took us an hour and a half and took us up over a high pass before descending into a wide valley with a river cutting a gorge through it and surrounded on all sides by snow-capped mountains. We breakfasted off the road at the foot of a valley that rose to ridges some 400m above us. It was cold here – but clear and beautiful and no wind! As we ate our breakfast White-rumped Snowfinches came to chase the perfectly innocent Robin Accentor away. Both birds coming to within two metres of us. Looking up the valley we could see the tundra was littered with the holes of Black-lipped Pikas and these endearing animals were popping out and taking a look at us.

We packed our snacks and warm clothes and headed up the valley with the aim of searching for Pallas's Cat. Jesper had recently seen a mother with kittens here. We searched diligently but could not find the cat. After a while the sun rose above the ridges and we enjoyed the warmth. There were groups of White-rumped Snowfinches and Rufous-necked Snowfinches coming by at regular intervals. Shorelarks too. As the sun rose several gentians opened their bright blue flowers, the petals backed by white and green stripes. A fox disappeared over the hill top and other than that and the pikas the only mammals we found were four Himalayan Marmots. As the day warmed we started to see Himalayan Griffon Vultures and an adult Lammergeier descended into the valley beyond and landed.

We drove south now reaching the impressive Er La Pass early enough to have (a second?) lunch. This pass is at 4500m so even though the sun was out it was chilly and a strengthening wind was a problem. Guldenstadt's Redstart and Rock Sparrow were seen. As we walked up to a saddle 150m above the road we noticed a regular passage of raptors south. Most were Himalayan Griffon Vultures, these passing at around one a minute. There were also Lammergeiers, three went past, and a few Himalayan Buzzards. Pikas were everywhere and so we huddled in the lee of the saddle (which wasn't much of a lee at all!) and searched the slopes for one of their predators, the elusive Pallas's Cat. Again none doing – this is not an easy animal to see! We spent a deal of time searching, but though we found little we enjoyed the beautiful scenery – we were at 4650m and we could see many peaks that just topped 5000m around us. Valleys descended to wide plains that were dotted with yaks. Some of the group went back to the vehicle seeing a Tibetan Fox en route. The rest of us moved around the hillsides a bit trying to find somewhere

out of the wind. We only sort of managed this but suddenly we were in luck with the mammals. Steve spotted three Tibetan Gazelle down in the valley below us. They were all staring intently down the valley and Steve soon spotted why. Two Tibetan Wolves were nonchalantly making their way down the valley. We watched them for a few minutes before they disappeared – wonderful. At the same moment a Saker did an incredible close fly by right below us. The Saker reappeared regularly over the next hour but never so close. Jesper spotted four more Tibetan Gazelle high on a ridge.

We walked back to the vehicles the wind now very strong and cold! The drive downhill to Wemquan took only 20 minutes and so we were soon meeting our rather primitive guesthouse. Collared Doves and Guldenstadt's Redstarts were in the grounds. Then it was into a little local restaurant that provided a very good evening meal. Time to catch up on checklists now!

Day 6 October 6th Wemquan Pass

We awoke to a cold and starry sky and drove straight up to the pass barely ten minutes from town. We got out with daylight barely lighting the mountains, the ground hard with frost. Mr Pang and Mr Ao soon had a breakfast set up, the hot teas and coffees very much appreciated, and so to the huge round bread cooked by the lady at the restaurant for us. It was great with jam. And so, by seven-thirty we'd packed our lunches and were off from the 4500m pass into the sublime mountain scenery beyond. In all we spend nine hours amid this mountain wilderness though I doubt we covered six kilometres in the that time, nonetheless the altitude made it a taxing day. Though temperatures stayed below or around zero all day there was in the morning at least, not much wind so in the sun it felt quite pleasant by mid-morning.

Our target here was a Pallas's Cat, and it didn't take long to find it! We spotted it on a quite distant hilltop initially creeping along in typical cat fashion, presumably intent upon a tasty pika in front. Then it sat up on a rock before wandering the slopes a little, standing perfectly poised for a while on a snow patch and generally wowing its audience! It was too far away to photograph but we were able to see this gorgeous furry cat really quite well through the 'scopes. After general high fives and the like we continued with the aim of getting onto the cat's ridge. This we did but we could find no sign of the animal and though we searched hard for the rest of the day we didn't find another. But hey, one Pallas's Cat is pretty exceptional! We started to pick up other mammals. Black-lipped Pikas were abundant everywhere, the mountainsides practically honey-combed with their holes. We found a few Himalayan Marmots. Foxes soon appeared and during the day we saw four Tibetan Foxes and three Red Foxes. Two Tibetan Foxes gave us decent views, one actually lay down, but just out of sight, not far below our vantage point. Later we found a herd of seven Blue Sheep feeding quietly on a sharp ridge before climbing onto a knife-edge ridge and posing well.

We were surprised to find a little *Lomatogonium* to be in good flower and really quite common – October must be its flowering season! From first to last we saw Sakers. There may have been only two of them, or possibly three, but we saw them on and off through the day. There were two really good fly-bys from Lammergeiers, and a few Himalayan Griffons and Upland Buzzards. As usual both Rufous-necked and White-rumped Snowfinches were common and this time we saw a

flock of thirty or so Henri's Snowfinches. There were also Twite, Tibetan Larks and a few Guldenstadt's Redstarts.

Back in Wemquan Jesper and Roger went on a walk along the river seeing Citrine Wagtails, Guldenstadt's Redstarts and Robin Accentor whilst a surprise inside the compound was a Hume's Warbler!

Day 7 October 7th to Maduo via Huashixia

The overnight snow flurries had disappeared to leave a clear sky over Wemquan and as a consequence it was decidedly chilly as we left our hotel at six-thirty. It soon started to get light as we headed over the Wemquan Pass and it revealed a white landscape with just a little snow lying everywhere. There were also belts of freezing fog giving the whole magnificent landscape a wintry feel. We drove south for about an hour marvelling at the landscape. It was what we all imagined the Tibetan plateau to be, wild and untouched (except for the inevitable roadworks!), and very very high. The valley we drove along was always above 4000m. We passed many Tibetan Gazelles, several of them right by the road.

We stopped by a most unusual habitat just south of a small Tibetan town. Here was a very low belt of old sand dunes, now lightly covered with a low (metre high) willow scrub. We spent all morning wandering through this casting a regular eye out on to the flat plains to check for mammals. These stood out so well this morning as everywhere was white, but even as we started our walk the sun was melting the light snow. There were few mammals it turned out here with only a couple of Tibetan Gazelle visible though Saker Falcons were rather common and we must have seen four or so during this session. Black-lipped Pikas had turned the soil into a soft honeycomb all the way over to the willow dunes and we saw many, but once inside the willow dunes it was another pika we wanted to see. The rather drab looking Gansu Pika is here found only under the willow scrub and Jesper soon spotted one and during the next half an hour we saw several, one of them very well. Mind you that one had a bit of competition for our attention with a pair of Przevalski's Pinktails. This pretty little rosefinch has now been placed under its own family and so therefore is a bit of an ornithological oddity. Certainly it is beautiful with the male having a pink wash across the breast and a stunningly pink tail. We went on to see perhaps three pairs of this lovely bird and had great views of them. The birdwatching was very good with some choice species. White-browed Tit-Warblers, the males little balls of lilac-purple, were common, less so were the strikingly patterned White-browed Tits, a species endemic to the Tibetan Plateau. There were at least a couple of Tibetan Grey Shrikes, one of them chasing and very nearly catching the tit-warbler, and we enjoyed good views of Robin Accentor and a flock of five Guldenstadt's Redstarts. A Woolly Hare disappeared soon after we found it. Every day we were finding new species of gentian and so again it happened here – a largish white gentian in the dunes – and a *Saussurea* was also in flower. It was clear it would be a great site for flowers in the summer, the dunes were dotted with the seedheads of *Incarvilleas*, *Delphiniums* and many others we didn't know.

We popped into a nearby town for lunch. Here Steve discovered yak meat. He may never be the same again and we can assume that an import business into the UK will thrive! Freshly boiled

yak meat was placed on the table – we all enjoyed this very much, It was rather like a cross between lamb and beef. Then we had yak soup – superb.

After lunch we headed south. The landscape was undulating and always above 4000m with wide open spaces backed by high snowy peaks. In many areas there were small lakes or pools. We stopped on a wide flat plain and could see our quarry, the Kiang, dotted across the landscape. There were around thirty of them. They seemed little bothered by us as we walked across the plain towards them. I would guess we got to within a hundred and fifty metres before they sidled off to one side. In the meantime we'd been photographing merrily away. In the front was a group of three young stallions who posed beautifully for us. We took control of the small mound which they had recently vacated and scanned from there. The Kiang, a type of wild ass, were scattered all about. The landscape was huge and it was sunny and though the temperature was hardly above freezing it felt quite warm to us! Saker Falcons (at least four again), Upland Buzzards and a Steppe Eagle cruised overhead. Snowfinches dawdled around the landscape covering pika colonies. Jesper found a colony of the cute little Przelwalski's Steppe Vole. There were a few Tibetan Gazelles around too and more appeared as the afternoon waned. We watched a couple of Tibetan Foxes going about their business.

We made the rest of the journey to Maduo as dusk approached. There seemed to be endless Kiang along the valley we drove along. We counted around 260 altogether! We stopped by one group which were right by the roadside and didn't wander off too quickly when we got out to photograph them.

Then it was into Maduo where we were pleased to see a very nice hotel with hot showers! The little restaurant next door produced a knockout meal too.

Day 8 October 8th Bayankala Pass

It had snowed a little in the night and conditions didn't look too bright as we packed our bags in the Toyota Landcruisers in the darkness. As we drove up again over the Wemquan Pass the sky started to lighten and as we dropped to the saline lake beyond the landscape became more visible. It was certainly all white! The snow in the night hadn't amounted to much but it made for an amazing landscape and with temperatures below -5°C our drivers took things easy. The dryness of the roads though made ice not so much of a problem, what was difficult though was the extensive belts of freezing fog we entered this morning. They rather played havoc with our plans as a couple of favoured spots had visibility down to 10m! We stopped briefly not long after dawn by a small lake where there was no fog. Bar-headed Geese and other waterfowl sat atop the ice and two Black-necked Cranes sauntered about. Scattered about the slopes we could see around fifty Kiang, one group keeping the snow melting by standing together in a group. There were also a couple of foxes, Tibetan Foxes, hunting in the valley the opposite side of the road. Moving on we saw masses of Kiang along the roadside, and quite a decent number of Tibetan Gazelles too, often right by the road!

We moved on stopping after a never-ending belt of fog cleared as we reached an immense wetland that stretched along a wide valley. We took our breakfast overlooking this wild and beautiful scene, still everywhere lightly dusted with snow. We had hoped to see Wolf here but no

luck, only a single Kiang represented mammal-kind. There were two more pairs of Black-necked Cranes and a scattering of wildfowl that included around seventy Goosander. Nearer at hand a pair of Sakers gave great views, the fifth and sixth of the morning, indeed we would see well into double figures by the end of the day.

We headed up to the 4825m Bayankala Pass at the end of this valley but sadly the top and for many miles down the other side were covered in thick cloud/fog. We deduced that it would not clear soon so continued on southwards. We saw a few more gazelle, Kiang and foxes but only had brief breaks before stopping for our picnic on some more high ground. The afternoon was spent wandering along a track which went very slightly downhill and then walking uphill to the ridgetop and coming back along that before dropping back down to the vehicles, a circuit of perhaps three kilometres. Of particular interest here was the extensive patches of low willow scrub that clothed some of the slopes. Roe Deer and Musk Deer both inhabit this niche, but we could find neither, both are shy and not easy to see. We did find Gansu Pika again and enjoyed watching a Red Fox about its business. Best animals were the two Tibetan Wolves that Martin spotted just before they crested the rise and were away – only a few seconds in view! There were also a few distant groups of Tibetan Gazelle though nearer the end of the walk we found two nice groups that gave good views. Eastern Great Rosefinches were the commonest birds in the scrub. There was also a pair of Przevalski's Pinktails, a Robin Accentor or two, and a covey of five Tibetan Partridges. Himalayan Griffons cruised overhead and we saw three Lammergeiers, two juveniles and an adult, squabbling over a bone!

There were some great flowers here. We saw no less than six members of the *Gentianaceae* in bloom; a tiny *Lomatogonium* and five *Gentiana*, the pick a large white species and a sky-blue one with neat stripes on the backs of the petals. There were also a *Caltha* in bloom, also a *Pedicularis* and Roger even found an *Alectris* in full flower.

Around five-thirty we headed downhill to the Yangtze River where we stopped for photographs. Jesper spotted an Ibisbill and on the bank behind were Godlewski's Buntings. Another Ibisbill marked our progress up a tributary to Yushu, at 3600m considerably lower than we had been!

Day 9 October 9th Nancheng

I stayed with Martin and Jane in Yushu today as Martin needed treatment on his infected tooth. I gather the rest of the group who travelled south to Nancheng for a one night stay saw lots to keep them going! McNeill's Deer was seen after much searching and other highlights included lots of Blue Sheep and several White-eared Pheasants as well as various smaller birds including Giant Laughingthrushes, Kozlov's Babaxes and Wallcreeper.

Day 10 October 10th South of Yushu

Martin's odyssey of penicillin drip continued into its second day at the hospital in Yushu. All went well, the dentist had a check and drained a little more and then it was on the drip which worked more efficiently than the day before and so by eleven fifteen we were done and Martin

was positively raring to go. After a short break and lunch we headed south of Yushu passing the impressive monasteries of Princess Wengtum a few miles up the valley. Soon we pulled up by a roadside cliff where a small shrine was festooned in prayer flags and where numerous inscriptions had been carved into the rock and painted. We looked for Glover's Pika but couldn't find it. There was plenty of compensation in the plant and bird life though. Vultures sailed overhead most of the time, up to ten Himalayan Griffons in the air at once, also a Lammergeier or two, and Upland Buzzard, Kestrel, Saker and Imperial Eagle all sailed passed. Hill Pigeons flew around a lot, landing sometimes in the little caves and there was a single Snow Pigeon too. There were several Godlewski's Buntings about. Eurasian Crag Martins sped across the cliff face.

We took a walk across the flat valley floor to the braided stoney river. The meadows were flat and crossed by meandering little streams. These were lined with an extraordinary show of *Gentiana arethusae*. The sky-blue blooms, often centred white, and with stripes on the outside, sometimes numbered three hundred per square metre and there must have been millions over the acres we could see. They made for some dramatic flower photographs. Among them was a tiny *Lomatogonium* and a clear blue *Swertia*. An aster was still in flower too. The riverside scrub had a flock of around twenty mixed Accentors, about seven Robin Accentors, and the remainder Brown Accentors. There was a single Guldenstadt's Redstart too.

Returning to town we stopped to watch an Ibisbill picking its way along the bouldery bank.

Day 11 October 11th The Roof of the World – to Qumalai

We left Yushu at six-thirty and were soon driving uphill in the dark. Red Fox and Woolly Hare passed us by and soon enough dawn was lighting a mountainous scene. We stopped by a large wetland (Longbaotan) where we ate breakfast as we scanned the marshy valley floor. The light on the surrounding mountains was stunning, some snowy slopes were turned a brilliant orange-red by the dawn light. Nearer at hand we found around twenty-five Black-necked Cranes, though none of them really close. Thus is the most important breeding site for this beautiful bird. There was little else out there with just a few Upland Buzzards, a Saker or two, a Hen Harrier and a few Ferruginous Ducks. Right by our breakfast were Rufous-necked Snowfinches and lots of the ubiquitous Black-lipped Pikas.

Just a few kilometres further on it started to snow. At times it was quite heavy and approached white-out, at others it was just quiet and steady. This went on for the rest of the morning and made spotting anything difficult. We did manage two Tibetan Foxes and one Red Fox. We stopped for an early lunch in Zhiduo and waited a bit but still the snow didn't stop so we drove on reaching one of Jesper's mammal sites with visibility severely compromised. Jesper counselled us to wait and after a spot of rest or napping suddenly the snow stopped. We got out of the vehicles and immediately spotted one of our target species on the snowy hill opposite. Four White-lipped Deer munched grass from under the snow, one of them a very impressive stag. This species has magnificent antlers long and pale with up to five tines, but it is the sideways sweep of them that takes the biscuit. They wouldn't be able to get through most human front doors! We watched them for a while then spotted a much larger group off to one side – more than thirty stood on the corner of a ridge. We watched for a while, admired two more Woolly Hares and then

decided to walk to get a look at overall numbers as this is an endangered species. Just after we started to walk Martin spotted something new on the hillside behind us. Three young Argali rams were moving across the snow to a gully where they remained for the rest of our visit. They were not so distant and certainly the 'scope views were excellent. Now these are very rare. The Tibetan form of Argali is down to the hundreds in overall population. We watched them for a while then continued down past the buckthorn-lined river. The buckthorn was populated by so many Guldenstadt's Redstarts – at least eighty – and there were plenty more good birds too. There were half a dozen Eastern Great Rosefinches, a male White-browed Tit-Warbler, a Twite, and a Henri's Snowfinch. We reached a point where we could see the deer on both sides of the ridge and found that we had around 80 White-lipped Deer in front of us. We spent an hour watching them, and listening to the stags roar (they were not so close, but when the wind was right we could hear them) and watch the various happenings on the ridge above us.

Walking back across the field a number of larger stones were found to have many inscriptions carved on them!

The weather was beautifully sunny now and the landscape looked amazing. We continued on to a spot where our river joined a larger tributary of the Yangtze. This was again a beautiful spot and we again found White-lipped Deer, this time in the riverside scrub, much closer than those earlier. One superb stag tried to go hide in one area of scrub but couldn't find the right spot so came back out into the open – whilst in the scrub we'd been able to see his progress by the antlers which stuck up above the buckthorn, when they weren't getting caught in it! Also here was a Kessler's Thrush.

And then it was on to Qumalai where we found that both our first and second choice hotels were undergoing renovation. Luckily the third choice was pretty decent too. As we ate another excellent dinner the snow started to fall again....

Day 12 October 12th Roof of the World – the Chang Tang

The snow that had fallen at dinner the night before was the last of the night and we awoke to find a white landscape with a light cloud cover that kept temperatures just a few degrees below zero. We set off at seven, just as the first light was showing what this part of the Roof of the World looked like. Snowy was the main thing.

We started the day around 4150m and finished it at 4400m (the highest night of the tour) and in between ranged between about 4100m and 4700m for the entire day.

And what a magical day it was. Perhaps we were lucky with the conditions. More or less everywhere had a light snow covering making animal finding easy and for much of the day we had light cloud so it wasn't at all bright. A perfect way to experience some of the most remote and challenging scenery on earth!

We started having barely left Qumalai when the presumed roadside herd of Yak turned into a herd of White-lipped Deer. They were just yards off the roadside. Another smaller herd was nearby and there were scattered individuals across the hills too.

We continued through the majestic scenery, stopping to photograph Tibetan Foxes or Tibetan Gazelles or perhaps a lady milking her Yaks. The numbers of Tibetan Foxes were amazing. We saw no less than thirty-five individuals during the day. The numbers of Tibetan Gazelles were simply mind-boggling. We kept a running tally and came up with around 750 seen by the end of the day! Many of them were very close to the road too.

The road across the Roof of the World was barely more than the roughest of tracks until just a few years ago and is now a well graded dirt road, in many places already asphalt and apparently almost all of it will be by next year.

Jesper kept a running tally of Sakers (44) and Upland Buzzards (183) during the day. Amazing numbers of these impressive raptors. However the prime stop of the morning happened when Jane spotted a pack of Wolves. These were maybe four hundred metres off the road up a little hill. There were six of them, all looking in fabulous condition, their winter coats looking a picture. They spotted some gazelle and proceeded to hunt them, sending out flanking wolves and generally giving us a little insight into the process which this time was not successful. Shortly after this the Wolves grouped together and started to howl. Now that must have been an amazing sight and sound! I say that as I was in the first landcruiser and Jane in the second so it was only after fifteen minutes or so that we came back to join them. The Wolves now started to move. They moved purposefully across the mountainside and then played a little around some rocks. Then they moved around the hill, the front ones looking ahead at whatever interested them, the back three often studying the landscape behind them. Then Jane spotted why. A seventh Wolf was on its way to catch them up. We watching an enthusiastic and playful greeting ceremony. Maybe that was why they had been howling as Jane, Martin and Steve had said they had heard replying howling from round the mountain. It had been an amazing encounter but the Wolves were departing and so must we, for snacks had only kept us going for so long and we eventually made 'brunch' at eleven.

The afternoon continued in the same vein. We stopped for even better Tibetan Fox photographs and generally logged the high numbers of various species. Then we crested yet another rise and found an extraordinary scene in front of us – the landscape opened out into a high plain 4300m above sea level and stretching as far as the eye could see – the Chang Tang. We would traverse this for another hundred kilometres! To the south rose a long line of mountains, fully snow covered, and also the same to the north. We made various stops to scan this immense high altitude plateau. The first revealed an Asian Badger which we watched as it scuttled over the landscape eventually busying itself digging a hole. The second allowed us to watch a goodly number of Kiang... the third... Some of us were counting Gazelle on one side of the road, others were looking at more Kiang, when Jesper said 'I've got some Tibetan Antelope'. So he had, so very distant, but there they were. But over the next ten minutes he found more and more, the main group much closer. We could see there were many males with their pale coats and long pointed black horns amongst them. There was nothing for it but to start off across the stunningly open landscape and see if we could get close to them. We knew that with such landscapes it was always further than one thought but I think we all enjoyed the two kilometre walk across the alpine tundra. The air was so clear and the sky seemed something we could touch above us and later the giant 6178m Yuzhu Mountain appeared to the north as the sun came out for a while. We reached a small river and not far the other side were those fabulous Chiru or Tibetan Antelopes.

What a sight. There were around 130 of them with at least ten males – and at this season their coats are in perfect condition awaiting the vicissitudes of winter which here are extreme. George Schaller wrote of the blizzards he encountered here on a winter visit where temperatures dropped to -40°C and when many of the antelope die simply because they can't break through the frozen surface to get to some food. Today though it was a balmy 'about freezing' and the antelope looked happy and wandered slowly away from us. A marvellous scene that none of us had ever imagined we'd be able to witness.

We returned to the road and continued our journey westwards covering the remaining hundred km of the Chang Tang as dusk rolled in. This was a beautiful time and it was hard not to stop for the hundred and fifty Tibetan Gazelle we saw in short order shortly after we left the Chiru, or for the many Upland Buzzards including fourteen in one spot. We did manage a brief stop for some beautifully lit Kiang right by the road, but thereafter it was heads down to the junction with the Lhasa to Golmud road, as the sun set in a fiery blaze.

At the junction we met the local Hilton. OK, not quite.... it was a very rustic accommodation, with no water, dodgy outside toilets, etc. However the already lit coal stoves were warming the rooms and I think we found this very simple accommodation quite bearable given the overnight temperatures falling to decidedly sub-zero. The meal was very good.

Day 13 October 13th A Remote Valley

We awoke to a staggeringly cold morning. The snow outside our rooms was frozen hard and glistened in the moonlight as we loaded up the vehicles and set off. The journey was slow as the main road was very icy but our drivers were very experienced in these conditions and drove along it easily. We drove downhill a little and then turned up a wide side valley just as the day was dawning. This is an extraordinarily beautiful valley. Very arid. Either side rose high mountains, covered in snow, but the valley floor was dry with sparse vegetation. We trundled about 40km up the excellent dirt road. Then we stopped, magnificent views all round. We could see large sand dunes across the river rising directly into snowy mountains. Also we could see on the side of low hills next to them a group of ponies and with them, a group of Argali. They were across the river and we could see a bunch of truly wild (and mean-looking) Wild Yaks. We drove some way up the road and then down towards the river and took breakfast as we watched the impressive bison-like heads of these Wild Yaks. After breakfast we tried to get closer to the yaks, the river soon stopping us, nevertheless we were pretty close to them and could photograph them or just watch them and be impressed! As we ate Jesper suddenly became very animated and drew our attention to the calls of the Tibetan Sandgrouse. We could certainly hear the Canada goose-like calls but couldn't locate the bird until Mr Ao spotted it flying along the ridge in front of us. This bird is on the 'hardest bird in the World to see' list alongside Emperor Penguin. Certainly it lives in the highest most inhospitable terrain and by its nature is also very hard to see.

The Wild Yaks were indeed impressive. They looked so much more butch than their domestic counterparts, some of which we could see further along the valley – a disturbing development that could mean that the wild yaks here will in the future be hybridised out of existence. No doubting the wild lineage of these magnificent specimens in the meantime though. We could also

see a wild herd high on a ridge above us with the males this time having lots of females in tow.

Further up the valley we could see groups of Wild Yaks grazing with large groups of Kiang and Tibetan Gazelle. In some ways it resembled the Serengeti! There was a fox or two as well, both Tibetan Foxes, and a Woolly Hare. Though it was very cold the sun soon warmed the south-facing banks, enough to tempt out a Toad-Headed Agama or two! We walked down to the river to try and find the original Argali group and eventually relocated them. They too had come down to the river, but as the river ran a braided course here we couldn't get close to them, however it was enjoyable to watch them – the group of 34 being a significant percentage of the known Chinese population!

Later as we descended we saw another group, this time twenty-four. Then it was on down the hill and the comforts of Golmud. We checked into our comfortable hotel and some of us went for an evening walk around the 'children's park' a park in which Jesper has recorded so many species during the time he lived here. Nothing doing tonight though, not even the urban Wolf our group managed last time!

Day 14 October 14th The Qaidam Basin

We started the day at six-thirty which as we were now quite far west of Xining meant that it was an hour before daylight. This hour was spent journeying to the an area of sand dunes in the Qaidam Basin. It was light as we arrived and as Mr Pang and Mr Ao were putting out breakfast the sun rose. It was chilly but nothing like the cold we had experienced in the past week.

The Qaidam Basin is of tectonic origin. Though three thousand metres above sea level it is actually a graben-like structure, so a large area of land that has dropped between mountain ranges. It is an arid area, a cold desert, with an internal drainage and in the distant past an uninhabitable area. Now water can be pumped from below and we saw at least one large cultivated area – growing Wolfberries – the latest fad in superfoods.

Our walk was just into the edge of it (the basin is 800km long!) in a series of old sand dunes now dotted with a healthy range of shrubs all of which seemed to be members of the chenopodiaceae. It was a superb habitat and the weather was great and we were all ready to see what we could see. Only we could find hardly a thing! One or two of us had an early view of two Goitred Gazelle at quite close range but thereafter though we walked quite a way through the dunes, we could find nothing. There were gazelle tracks everywhere, and fox and jerboa and jird and lizard, but none of them would come out to play. It also looked superb for birds but after finding the wing feather of a Mongolian (Henderson's) Ground Jay we saw almost nothing. In the end we did encounter one of the ground jays and watched it run from cover to cover...

Back on the road one or two more close range Mongolian Ground Jays were seen. We rolled up at a more vegetated area in search of the gazelles. We found one, at a great distance, and so drove round through some rough tracks. Here we found the rarely seen Tarim Hill Warbler, a bird as yet seen by few westerners, and then, just as we were leaving, we spotted an agitated Goitred Gazelle. She was at some distance still but we could see her going back and forth across this area of land, her tail wagging continuously. We also found three more distant Goitred Gazelle.

We drove thirty km up the road for a noodle lunch possibly the very best of the trip and then spent the afternoon covering the remaining 150km to Dulan. This took us along a more or less level road with wide open basin on one side and snowy craggy mountains on the other. Eventually we reached the westernmost 'old' settlements in China where the desertic landscape changed to pleasant fields and aspen-lined roads. Then the road would through some more hilly terrain for a while. Amid this we stopped by a large group of poplars and had a break. Jesper found a superb Eagle Owl perched in the trees and we all had a good look. There were a number of bird kills from either the owl or a raptor in the trees - Red-throated Thrush and Shorelark among them.

Day 15 October 15th Dulan Hills and the Przevalski's Gazelle site

We met up at the usual pre-dawn time and headed west out of Dulan taking thirty minutes to reach some hills that we would spend the morning in. It would be rather unfair to call them hills as they rose to over 4000m but as the track that took us to their base stopped at 3600m they seemed not so huge. The views across to the Kunlun Shan to the south were memorable.

No sun this morning, just thin cloud, it was cold, well below freezing, but not as cold as the last couple of days over the roof of the world. We took breakfast as Tibetan Magpies gathered to eat food out of the dog's bowl – he had left it to come and bark in monotonous fashion at us! Jesper soon spotted the day's first mammals - a few Blue Sheep high on the ridge above us. Next was a Gansu Red Deer or two. Easy stuff, mammals seen.... But we wanted to see more and better, so off we marched aiming for some higher ridges 300m above us. These we attained though the permafrosted thin grassy surface proved tricky on the steep bits and we had to move to a snowier gully on one occasion to make the going easier.

During the morning, and particularly from the final ridge that Jesper took us to we saw lots of these two species. Blue Sheep sat or grazed on the ridge top. There was the memorable sight of 5 well-horned rams sitting in a line on the ridge. Later a large bunch were spooked by something and ran along the higher slopes to join some of their brethren where we could see no less than 83 lined up waiting to cross a scree slope. The Gansu Red Deer (thought by many to a form of the Canadian Red Deer, i.e. Elk or Wapiti) were also quite numerous with perhaps 35 seen during the morning. Steve spotted three stags, one with decent antlers heading over the ridge. We watched eleven hinds make their way along one slope and watched a group on the same ridge we sat on but below us, a Golden Eagle perched in the tree above them. Best though was the group of Gansu Red Deer that stood on a ridge to our east. There were two good looking young stags and a fantastic old stag with giant antlers that had at least sixteen points. He roared loudly from time to time, the sound arriving with us well after he had closed his mouth. There were a number of attentive females around him. At one point we could see two of the Blue Sheep in the same 'scope views as the Gansu Red Deer. There were some good birds too. A Steppe Eagle glided over us before circling round with the snowy Kunlun Shan for a background. Two Himalayan Griffon Vultures say much of the morning on a ridge above us. White-winged Grosbeaks were seen on the way up and down, and several times we saw both Kessler's Thrushes and Red-throated Thrushes. We saw White-browed Tit and White-browed Tit-Warbler, and there were Pine Buntings, Red-billed Chough, a Tibetan Shrike, and a flock of 6 Daurian Partridges. All of this

was in the lovely surrounding of open juniper woodland, the junipers, some of them at least, over a thousand years old.

We moved to the Przevalski's Gazelle site and enjoyed some more lunch by the roadside there but scan as hard as we might we couldn't find the gazelles. We tried further spots along the road and after an hour and a half of this finally located them when Martin spotted a group grazing right next to a hobbled pony from aside track that had lorries full of road ballast driving along it. It turned out there were seventeen of these beautiful animals when we walked out there. We approached steadily and eventually got within 250m of them. Though they did get up they settled down again and so we were able to leave without disturbing them. Amazingly they were all males – a bachelor herd. The adult males looked superb with their fishhook-twisted horns and short stub-nosed faces with a strong pattern on it. The adult males also had a dark area below their necks and down to their front legs. It was a fabulous experience being out there with these rare animal. Official figures put the world population at 300-400 but Jesper knew of this extra population and so the total might be less than 500 animals. And we'd seen 3-4% of them here. There was little else to see only Shorelark and Lammergeier!

Day 16 October 16th Chaka and to Xining

Today we were mainly just journeying to Xining. However there were a few distractions en route. First we pulled up close to the large salt lake of Chaka not so far out of town. Here we explored the steppe that surrounded the lake. It was a habitat different from anything we'd yet seen. Some areas were covered in a thick tussock grass, others were just open stony plains with small stones, and there was a third type somewhere between the two but with a ground cover mostly of liverworts, most odd! In some places we found fungi, notably some very small earth stars. The only live mammal was a Woolly Hare, though we did find half a rodent (Gray Dwarf Hamster?) that a Little Owl had been eating. Birds were another matter. Flocks of Pallas's Sandgrouse sped around the steppe, some coming quite close especially one lot that whizzed right over our heads. We also found a group of gorgeous Blanford's Snowfinches whilst a flock of Small Snowfinches (Pierre David's) were rather less easy to get on to.

Our lunch stop involved the usual noodle or beef soup choice, however this time we tried the dried fruit tea, various dried fruits mixed with some zest and big lumps of jaggery-type sugar – superb!

That was pretty much it for wildlife entertainment as the necessity of returning to Xining set in. We did manage a few brief roadsides stops for the likes of Chinese Grey Shrike, White-cheeked Starling, Naumann's Thrush, Red-throated Thrush, Hen Harrier and a flock of Lesser Kestrels. Then it was into the big city and the very comfortable hotel. We met again in room 405 for a superb last evening meal.

Day 17 October 17th to Chengdu

We had a lie-in this morning! OK, not a long one, but an eight o'clock departure meant we could

enjoy breakfast in the hotel and then travel to the airport in good time for our ten-thirty flight to Chengdu. Here Steve, being the only one not on the extension, headed into town and Hollies Hostel in the Tibetan Quarter. Once settled in he took an afternoon trip to the panda research centre to see the captive populations of both Red Panda and Giant Panda and generally explore the very pleasant environment there.

Day 18 October 18th return to UK

Steve caught a lunchtime flight back to Amsterdam arriving back in the UK in the evening.

or

Tangjiahe Extension

Day 17 October 17th Chengdu to Tangjiahe

We stopped for dinner in the small and pretty 'old' town below the entrance to Tangjiahe. A very good meal. Then as it was now well and truly dark we decided to spotlight our way into the park. We'd hardly started when a big furry ball landed on the road in front of us and waddled off ahead of us. Hog Badger! It was a good large one and we followed it for a minute or two getting great views before it veered off into the undergrowth. Then it was on uphill, the next eyeshine being a Reeve's Muntjac. Then we came to some low terraced meadows next to the road and two very large creatures indeed stood there just fifty metres from the vehicle – Golden Takin. They were indeed very golden, the subspecies here being *bedfordii*, the same as the animals in the Qingling Mountains. We were pretty excited to find these! And so onwards towards the hotel, nearly there....more eyeshine. This time, stood just above the road was a superb Long-tailed Goral! We are definitely going to enjoy Tangjiahe.

We settled into the rather luxurious hotel. The rooms are in little blocks either side of a landscaped stream and surrounded by superb natural forest. A large fast-flowing river runs down past the hotel. Roland came by the rooms to let us know that there were Takin on the lawns. We went out for a look and found three there. Now these are animals not to be taken (!) lightly. The bulls in particular are bad-tempered and have a well-earned reputation amongst Chinese hunters so we approached with caution. And sure enough, thirty metres from one of them, and he started stamping his hooves and took a few menacing steps towards us. Time for a retreat! Fantastic animal though.

Day 18 October 18th Tangjiahe

This morning started with a night drive uphill. Right away we were seeing Takin and we must have seen twenty this morning. We stopped and photographed several. Great stuff! Driving along

a narrow bit we saw something big and prickly wobbling around on the road – a Porcupine. This creature could hardly have behaved better as it wandered back and forth checking out possible meals either side of the road. People got out to photograph it and still it carried on. Something smaller appeared on the road behind it. We couldn't quite see what it was so drove over and there a few metres up a side gully was a brief but full view of a Chinese Ferret-Badger. Sadly not all got on to it in time to see it properly. Further along, more Takin, and then a group of Reeve's Muntjac. By now it was light. More Takin as we alighted and then set off on a short walk up the valley beyond the barrier. Birds were starting to become active and we could see yet more Takin in the river bed up ahead. There was a big party of Red-billed Leiothrix in a berried bush and we had great views of these pretty little birds. Then it was time to return to breakfast at the hotel – rather a rarity on this trip and one we enjoyed muchly!

Breakfast finished we headed down the valley, seeing the stunning scenery in daylight for the first time. Tangjiahe is as quintessentially Chinese as landscapes get. The hills/mountains (they reach not far over 2500m which barely registers as mountains round here...) are cloaked in a stunningly varied forest with maples, oaks, walnuts and a variety of conifers making it very colourful at this season as the autumnal reds and golds were starting to show. The hills and ridges were very shapely and the rivers stunning. The main river – the River of the Tangs as the place is named – is wide and full of smoothly worn boulders, but in other places it narrowed between white cliffs and tumbled over load waterfalls. Just one look at this river and you could imagine a bear or a panda crossing.... The side rivers were smaller bubbling brooks where the boulders were moss covered and the layered maples and liquidambar looked achingly beautiful. Now if this all sounds like it would be difficult to see mammals in I should mentioned that every so often there are open 'meadows' maintained by the Takin, where both day and night one could expect to see grazing animals or.... this morning we stopped by one we'd seen Takin and Muntjac the night before and sure enough there were two Takin higher up the slope. Amazingly one had a Golden Eagle sat in a tree just above it, the eagle looked huge! We were later to find that these meadows extended up the side valleys quite a lot and indeed much of the understorey of the forest was grassy – animals are easier to see here at night but certainly it is possible to find the grazers by day.

We headed up another valley, this one narrower, the sides more precipitous – stunning! This looked a good spot for a walk later. More Takin marked our progress upwards. We parked up and walked up towards the core zone. This was along a vehicle track that rose steadily uphill, we stopped where the track turned to path, but it would have been possible to go higher into the conifer and bamboo zone. It was now getting towards the middle of the day so mammals were few though we did see a couple of Pere David's Rock Squirrels and on the return journey a rather grey long-tailed mouse that seems a best fit for Chinese Birch Mouse. There were regular birds – Elliot's Laughing Thrushes, some nice parties of Sooty Tits etc, and as we ate a light lunch a Eurasian Sparrowhawk and a Mountain Hawk-Eagle soared overhead. A local ranger joined us briefly at this point, showing us where they'd seen an Asiatic Black Bear the morning before whilst they'd been putting out salt for the Takin. We'd seen plenty of evidence of Takin activity where the salt had been placed!

Returning we stopped briefly in the lower valley to check the talus slopes between cliffs and found a single Chinese Goral high on a cliff. We watched it for a while in the telescope and also

found a single Takin, this a gloriously golden animal that shone in the light. Then it was back to the hotel with a good afternoon break before meeting for dinner.

After dinner we did a short night drive. We came across just a few Takin and a Muntjac or two but the easy highlight was a flying squirrel across the river. This was smaller than many of the giant ones I'd been watching recently in Taiwan and scurried about the tree-top in an apparent dither. Roland had just got the 'scope on it when it flew sideways arcing upwards on to another tree. We watched it clamber up this one getting decent views. It had a long black tail and a body and head which as far as we could see was evenly orange all over. We saw it fly out of sight from this tree. A Grey-headed Giant Flying Squirrel.

After dropping everyone back at base I headed out again by myself up a path into the forest. Here I encountered several rodents including a tree mouse of some sort and an Indomalayan Niviventer which I had good close up views of. A tree had foamed masses of pale turquoise eggs! Further up I found a Chinese Goral, and best of all, had really excellent views of a Chinese Serow!

Day 19 October 19th Tangjiahe

As usual we were keen to get out before it got light – the night mammal viewing is so exceptionally good here. We drove uphill to the barrier again taking an hour to cover the five kilometres. Takin were oddly scarce this morning we only spotted a small group of three before the gate. However we did have lots of fun with, and eventually good views of, a Masked Palm Civet which fossicked about over the river. We also spotted four Muntjac across the river.

We ate breakfast at the barrier, watching a Takin grazing on the hillside above us. Then it was off to walk the valley. This was a beautiful walk with the valley winding back and forth, often quite open with great views, other times the steep sides closing in. The forest looked amazing, still a week or ten days away from its autumn peak, but nonetheless very colourful. And though it will have been logged fifty years or more ago, it looked totally pristine.

Just after a we left we spotted another nice golden coloured Takin in the river-bed and later three female and a youngster also in the riverbed. One of the youngsters tried to get to the top of a big rock, almost made it, then slid rather gracefully back down again! All three eventually exited left across the river and round a rocky bluff. We started to encounter Pere David's Rock Squirrels and saw them regularly through the day. A Muntjac or two sped away and we continued to find Takin now and again, all now on the higher slopes where a little grass was becoming visible between the trees. One group of four had a particularly fine gold male sitting atop a rock surveying the scene. Above him an almost black youngster caused us brief confusion! Jane spotted our first monkeys – a small group of Tibetan Macaques sitting in trees on the slope above us.

The roadsides were lined with great ferns, all sorts of species, and there were a few flowers still about, notably a large anemone and a fine *Adenophora* with two hanging open bellflowers. There were maples, some red, most still yellow, and there were lots of alders, beeches (or hornbeams?) and walnuts. Fungi were noticeable too with many patches of orange-peel fungus looking fine in the occasionally sunshine. Birds were as good as the scenery. Several times we came across Golden Pheasants but none were so good as the group of five females that were followed by three

stunning males. Nutcrackers were frequently in the air and we saw both Mountain Hawk-Eagle and *japonicus* race Common Buzzard. One mixed flock had several woodpeckers in it including Grey-headed, and we saw two more of these on the way down. Parties of Red-billed Leiothrix seemed to be everywhere, and there were groups of Sooty Tit and Green-backed Tits too. Elliot's Laughingthrushes were also common. As well as the usual water redstarts we saw ten or so lovely Daurian Redstarts and Roland found himself spending quality time with a lovely little Chestnut-bellied Tesia. Two Slaty Buntings were a nice surprise and we also spotted several very out of place looking House Sparrows, Vinaceous Rosefinch, White-naped Yuhinas, Grey-cheeked (David's) Fulvettas, Collared Finchbills and several Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babblers. A party of Vinous-throated Parrotbills were enjoyed and another group of birds lurking in the bamboo included Rufous-capped Babblers and the gorgeous Golden-breasted Fulvetta. Another group of bamboo-huggers had Yellow-bellied Bush-Warbler with a small group of pretty Spectacled Fulvettas.

We took lunch amid some sublime scenery then Martin and Jane decided to wander back down slowly whilst the rest of us pushed on a little higher. A fortunate decision by them as they had a memorable encounter with a Himalayan Black Bear on their way down. It descended from the forest onto the track thirty metres in front of them walked along the road a little and then out into the river bed before crossing the river, giving them plenty of time to get their cameras out to record the event for the rest of us! Meanwhile we were pottering down find a big party that included more Grey-headed Woodpeckers and some Red-billed Blue Magpies. We also saw two Wild Boar. Meeting up again we found the bear-finders with their heads in a bin. Here we found murder most foul! Two very cute Korean (or Chevrier's) Field Mice were devouring what looked suspiciously like another one. Trapped inside the bins, we wondered if the mice had had to draw straws..... We released and photographed the two soft and cuddly (yet somehow tainted!) rodents. Then it was back down to our extremely comfortable hotel for a well-earned break before dinner.

After dinner we went on a night drive. This time we drove uphill. This night drive was brilliant even by the high standards Tangjiahe had already set. The very first animal was a gorgeous little Leopard Cat. This animal was investigating the road verge. We got out and walked over to it, the cat hiding for a while until we refound it just two metres from us! It didn't stay long, stealthily working its way away from us through the grasses and herbage. Great start! Next animal was a Masked Palm Civet which we found up a tree. We watched this one clamber down and then wend its way through riverside boulders. Next was a Takin that seemed very disorientated. We thought at first it was our lights but more likely it was a very old animal. We could have reached out of the window and patted it on the head so close was it. By the way, don't do that with Takin! Next up was a mouse. Coming back downhill we found a superb Serow on a bank right above the road, a great photo-opportunity. Things kept coming.... next a young Hog Badger jogged down the road in front of us, and another couple of Takin appeared, Things were going so well we continued on down the road past the hotel. Here we found another Serow which though on the far bank did allow us prolonged good views.

Day 20 October 20th Tangjiahe

After last night's amazing night drive this morning's was inevitably an anticlimax! We drove down to the bottom of the valley and started the night drive from there, taking the side valley up to the high ground we'd visited on the first day. Takin were really rather common this morning and we had great views of males, females and youngsters, in total fifteen animals being seen. Serow had taken an unexpected lead in the 'goat-antelope' stakes the night before but was soon hauled back into the pack as we found a Chinese Goral and then two Long-tailed Goral, each of these giving good views. Still time for another new mammal as a Tufted Deer was found just above the road. That made it forty-five mammal species for the trip and hopefully counting...

We parked up and had breakfast in the dawn light. The weather didn't look great. There were heavy grey clouds over the ridges around us and rain was falling lightly in places. We took the superbly made path up to a viewpoint. A two and a half kilometre walk that would take us up to around 2200m on a ridge. There was just the smallest chance we might get a sight of a Red Panda up there but we couldn't see any, the gloomy conditions not helping. We did see another Takin though! The birds however were another story with many great species. Perhaps chief among them were a group of five male (and two female) Golden Pheasants that walked through the understory between bamboo brakes like a bunch of colourfully robed Chinese courtiers. Truly stunning. The Red-winged Laughingthrushes that landed and clucked around them were almost as good, these birds have brilliant red wing feathers. They were part of huge bird party. There were large numbers of Red-billed Leiothrix and White-collared Yuhinas in this group, and there were other Laughingthrushes with both Elliots and Black-faced in numbers. There were Spectacled Fulvettas, and a bunch of Chestnut Thrushes, as well as pretty little Rufous-capped Babblers and a Great-spotted Woodpecker. A White-backed Woodpecker was with the pheasants.

I saw a White-crowned Forktail on the way up and along the streams generally were several White-capped Water Redstarts and a few Himalayan Bluetails. Red-billed Blue Magpies scolded us from the low tree canopy and in this we found quite a number of Chestnut-vented Nuthatches. Several Rufous-gorgetted Flycatchers were enjoyed and we saw a single female Snowy-browed Flycatcher. Roland's loo break allowed him to have great views of Bar-winged Wren-Babblers

Two fabulously patterned Barred Laughingthrushes posed briefly before returning to the bamboo home. Other great birds this morning included Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler, a Chestnut-bellied Tesia, and Roland had a Slaty Bunting. Driving down for lunch another forktail crossed the road just avoiding hitting the car!

Undoubtedly we must have gone on a night trip and seen loads of nice things but I've forgotten what did happen this evening, so it's over to tomorrow....

Day 21 October 21st Tangjiahe and journey to Chengdu

Stars and a clear sky greeted us this morning making it decidedly cool, though above freezing. Our theories about star and moonlit nights (though we couldn't blame the moon here as it finally broke the horizon just as the sky was tuning blue) and animal activity seemed rather to be borne out this morning as we found relatively little. That is if you can call eight or so Takin and a couple of Reeve's Muntjac a quiet pre-dawn hour. One of the Takin youngsters decided to head for freedom across the road in front of us and jumped straight into a rockface rebounding,

apparently unhurt, back onto the road.

We went back to breakfast and then packed out bags. I popped out for a short walk across the river seeing a fine Wild Boar oblivious to my presence, hearing another muntjac and seeing a White-crowned Forktail.

Walking a little down the entrance road Martin spotted three more Wild Boar. Jane spotted a beautifully lit large male Tibetan Macaque on a tree hanging from cliffs above us. Then it was along a short trail to a beautiful waterfall where we hoped to see Rhesus Macaques, no luck today though. The waterfall was beautiful and we did see a Red-billed Starling back by the vehicles.

Nothing for it now but head down and on to Chengdu. We followed a different route skirting the basin through the mountains for a long time, following the course of a large river. This was through continuously mountainous and beautiful scenery. We didn't stop except briefly and in the warm sunshine found a goodly number of butterflies flying around. There were several Himalayan Jesters, a Blue Pansy, a kind of veined white, a sailor species and just as we were leaving an Autumn Leaf species. We stopped for lunch in a little town where the roadside restaurant (outdoor – now that was a first on the trip!) served us beef noodle soup in wamr sunshine. We were fascinated by the loud, colourful and exceedingly characterful locals here. Soon after a tunnel marked our passage to the lowlands and then it was an expressway that saw us into Chengdu in very good time, we arrived at Hollies Hostel in the Tibetan Quarter by four in the afternoon. After settling in and saying farewell to Roland who had looked after us so well around Tangjiahe some of us pottered about the Tibetan Quarter for a while enjoying a little shopping amongst the monks and assorted monkery. It is a fascinating and vibrant place.

Dinner was upstairs in Hollies an though we could all say that we had honestly enjoyed the excellent cuisine on all parts of this tour we still all ordered a full English Breakfast for dinner followed by apple pancakes! We did have the excuse that we would be up too early the following morning to enjoy the breakfast then!

Day 22 October 22nd Return

We left the hotel at five, arriving swiftly at Chengdu's gleaming (literally) modern airport, and finding ourselves forty minutes too early for check-in – better safe than sorry! Our flight had been changed so that we had to fly back via Hong Kong rather than directly to Amsterdam. This duly took off on time and the short connection in Hong Kong was easily made.

Systematic List Number 1 Mammals

Order and nomenclature follow Smith & Xie (2008) *A guide to the mammals of China*. Species in [square brackets] were recorded by sign only.

Tibetan macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>	Only in Sichuan. Small numbers daily at Tangjiahe.
Grey-headed flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista caniceps</i>	Only in Sichuan. One seen at Tangjiahe on night trip – beautifully-marked animal.
Père David's rock squirrel	<i>Sclerotamias davidianus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Reasonably common at Tangjiahe.
Himalayan marmot	<i>Marmota himalaya</i>	Up to 7 seen daily for the first few days, already hibernating at higher altitudes.
Malayan Porcupine	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>	Only in Sichuan. Great views of one along the entrance road at night, Tangjiahe
Chinese Birch Mouse	<i>Sicista concolor</i>	Only in Sichuan.
Korean Field Mouse	<i>Apodemus peninsulae</i>	Only in Sichuan. The beautiful little mice residing (reluctantly) in the rubbish bin at Tangjiahe were either this species or the closely related <i>Apodemus chevneri</i>
Indomalayan Niviventer	<i>Niviventer fulvescens</i>	Only in Sichuan. Leader only - Tangjiahe.
Przewalski's Steppe Vole	<i>Eolagurus przewalskii</i>	Noted on here dates.
Kam dwarf hamster	<i>Cricetulus kamensis</i>	Several seen north of Maduo at around 4450m.
Tibetan dwarf hamster	<i>Cricetulus tibetanus</i>	One high above the Wenquan Pass was seen well.
Black-lipped pika	<i>Ochotona curzoniae</i>	First seen around the edge of Koko Nor and frequently encountered thereafter (on some days we must have seen thousands).
Glover's pika	<i>Ochotona gloveri</i>	Noted south of Yushu.
Gansu pika	<i>Ochotona cansus</i>	Seen on two days, several noteworthy in the sand dunes at Huashixia.
Tsingling pika	<i>Ochotona huangensis</i>	Hu Zhu area.
Wooly hare	<i>Lepus oiostolus</i>	seen in small numbers in suitable habitat.
Pallas' cat	<i>Felis manul</i>	One high above the Wenquan Pass – a trip highlight – watched in the 'scope for several minutes as it hunted pikas!
Leopard Cat	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>	Superb but brief views on a night trip in Tangjiahe
Tibetan wolf	<i>Canis (lupus) chanco</i>	11 in total. Noted on three dates – main event a memorable pack of seven on 12th: six joined by a seventh after moving uphill scraping & scent-marking – greeting ceremony seen: animals falling over each other w/ tails wagging... finally moved off across snow covered hillside... wonderfully lit, evocative photos obtained by MS! Just one less than seen on the 2013 tour!

Tibetan fox	<i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>	Frequently encountered in high altitude habitat. A joy to watch. A highlight was the staggering total of 39 seen on one day across the snowy Chang Tang. Some at very close range too.
Red fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	Scattered – total of 8 seen.
Asiatic Black Bear	<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>	Only in Sichuan – Jane and Martin made the rest of us green with envy with the photographs they obtained of one crossing the path in front of them and then crossing the river in Tangjiahe!
Asian Badger	<i>Meles leucurus</i>	1 seen in the Chang Tang, running off into the distance populated by Tibetan Gazelle – a wonderful moment!
Hog Badger	<i>Arctonyx collaris</i>	Only in Sichuan – 2 animals seen exceedingly well on different night trips
Masked Palm Civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>	Only in Sichuan. 2 seen well at night in Tangjiahe.
Chinese Ferret Badger	<i>Melogale moschata</i>	Only in Sichuan. 1 seen well (but briefly and only by the leader!) at night in Tangjiahe.
Mountain weasel	<i>Mustela altaica</i>	One at Old Qumalai, a great treat to watch as it hunted.
Kiang	<i>Equus kiang</i>	581 total. Noted on four dates... It was a real pleasure to watch these dignified 'donkeys' -in the absence of hunters they (and most other large mammals on the Plateau, even the mythical Chiru) are fairly confiding, and in a couple of cases it would have been possible to get good-to-decent photos even without the help of long lenses!
Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Only in Sichuan – a few seen daily in Tangjiahe.
[Siberian roe deer]	<i>Capreolus pygmaeus</i>	Heard only at Hu zhu.
Reeve's Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>	Only in Sichuan. Frequent at Tangjiahe.
Tufted Deer	<i>Elaphodus cephalophus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Just the one seen at Tangjiahe.
Gansu Red deer	<i>Cervus (elaphus) kansuensis</i>	50 in mts W of Koko Nor – ONE very impressive alpha stag, and quite a few well antlered younger stags: once we got to our vantage point and were feasting our eyes on a rare concentration of these little-known animals (we could see the clouds of steam emitted with clearly audible bellows!). ***In N Tibet the respective ranges of <i>Cervus kansuensis</i> and <i>Cervus canadensis alashanicus</i> are unclear, as is their taxonomic status. The type locality for <i>kansuensis</i> is Lintan (= Xincheng: 34° 42'N, 103° 21'E), not far NE of where Schafer collected undoubted <i>macneilli</i> . ***vide Groves (2005), <i>kansuensis</i> is 'quite distinct, the winter pelage being especially different: <i>macneilli</i> stags are very light, creamy grey, while <i>kansuensis</i> stags are deep steely grey. The black on the

		croup [...] is much more conspicuous in <i>kansuensis</i> . ***Subsequently (Groves & Grubb: Ungulate Taxonomy (2011)) it was felt, however, that <i>kansuensis</i> is probably NOT a valid taxon. There are specimens from S Koko Nor Range 37°N 100°E & from Tatung Shan 37°15'N 100°E, and there are sight records from Qilian Shan.
McNeil's deer	<i>Cervus macneilli</i>	Five – incl two well antlered, pretty much alpha stags – 'scoped S of Yushu on 9th. ***Groves (2005) concluded that two Shou taxa merit full species treatment - <i>Cervus wallichii</i> & <i>Cervus macneilli</i> . They 'retain many features' 'that characterized the primitive basal stock of the entire red deer/wapiti/sika/ruosa group'. *** <i>macneilli</i> is 'the pale red-grey deer of the eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau': Groves (2005)..
White-lipped deer	<i>Przewalskium albirostris</i>	At least 86 en route to Qumalai. 105 just out of town the next day!
Goitered gazelle	<i>Gazella subguttorsa</i>	Just 6 en route to Dulan.
Tibetan gazelle	<i>Procapra picticaudata</i>	Frequently encountered on the high plateau in both the flat valley bottoms and the mountains. 1,187 seen. Noted on six dates – main event no fewer than 779 in a day along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road!
Przevalski's gazelle	<i>Procapra przewalskii</i>	A bachelor group of 17 males at fairly close range (great photos by MS!)... ***The species has recently be 'downgraded' to 'merely' Endangered (following the discovery of additional herds in 2003) although the world population may be no more than 350-400 mature individuals. See http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/18230/0
Wild yak	<i>Bos grunniens</i>	189 animals on The Roof of the World - incl some impressive bulls 'just across the river'!
Golden Takin	<i>Budorcas taxicolor</i>	Only in Sichuan. ' <i>bedfordii</i> ' race. At least eighty sightings in Tangjiahe, every day some were on the lawns of the hotel, making close up and sometimes rather scary views a daily routine!
Chinese Serow	<i>Capricornis milneedwardsii</i>	Only in Sichuan. A total of 3 seen in Tangjiahe including great views of two.
Chinese goral	<i>Naemorhedus griseus</i>	Only in Sichuan. A total of three seen in Tangjiahe
Long-tailed goral	<i>Naemorhedus caudatus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Narrow winner of the Tangjiahe goat-antelope stakes with 4 sightings!
Argali	<i>Ovis ammon</i>	62 seen. Noted on two dates – main event a herd of 36, incl 2-3 near-alpha rams! ***Our first three permitted digiscoping as they grazed not far above

Blue sheep	<i>Pseudois nayaur</i>	<p>the road without showing any sign of being alarmed; however, if they'd timed their move across the hillside into a steep gully even slightly differently we'd quite likely not have seen them at all!</p> <p>463+ seen. Noted on six dates... Given how important a prey this species is to Snow Leopard (Schaller, 1998: pp204-5) we felt almost aggrieved that we failed to spot one – the closest we got to seeing one was, as far as we know, getting an undeniable whiff of cat pee along a cliff on 5th..</p>
Tibetan antelope	<i>Pantholops hodgsonii</i>	<p>131 along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road – we pottered closer without at all spooking the animals, getting back to the cars only at 6PM, by which time the weather had quite suddenly turned menacing (and soon we indeed found ourselves driving through a snow squall) after the loveliest light on both the antelopes and on the far-away snow peaks, revealed briefly in all their glory.</p>

Systematic List Number 2 Birds

The systematic order is taken from the 'Birds of China' by Mackinnon and Phillips (2000), nomenclature and taxonomy invariably is not. Deviations are marked with a † and are totally justified!

Daurian partridge	<i>Perdix dauurica</i>	5 seen in the Dulan Mountains.
Tibetan partridge	<i>Perdix hodgsoniae</i>	A total of 25 seen on 3 dates.
†White eared-pheasant	<i>Crossoptilon crossoptilon</i>	A total of 35 seen south of Yushu.
Common pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	Small numbers encountered around Hu zhu on the first day.
Golden pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus pictus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Up to 8 birds daily at Tangjiahe.
†Svertzov's hazelhen	<i>Tetrastes svertzowi</i>	3 on the first day in the Hu zhu area (leader only!).
Whooper swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	4 at Koko Nor.
Greylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	Small numbers at Koko Nor and other plateau wetlands
Bar-headed goose	<i>Anser indicus</i>	A few at Koko Nor and other plateau wetlands.
Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Frequently encountered on plateau wetlands.
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor.
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor.
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor.
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Small numbers at Koko Nor.
†Chinese spot-billed duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>	Several at Koko Nor.
Northern shoveler	<i>Anas chlypeata</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor.
Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor and other plateau wetlands.
Falcated Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>	In flight at Koko Nor.
Common teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor and a few other plateau wetlands.
Red-crested pochard	<i>Rhodonessa rufina</i>	Large numbers at Koko Nor only.
Ferruginous duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	Several at Koko Nor. 5 at Longbaotan
Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Two near Yushu.
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>	Recorded at Koko Nor and other plateau wetlands including 70+ at Bayankala.
Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus major</i>	A male on the first day around Hu zhu and one at Chaka gulag. Frequent at Tangjiahe
Crimson-breasted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus cathparius</i>	Only in Sichuan. Several at Tangjiahe.
White-backed woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus leucotos</i>	Only in Sichuan. 1 at Tangjiahe.
Grey-capped pygmy woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopus canicapillus</i>	Only in Sichuan. 1 at Tangjiahe.
Grey-headed woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	1 on the first day around Hu zhu and 1 at Tangjiahe
Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	One on the Chang Tang!

Crested kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>	Only in Sichuan. Twice in Tangjiahe.
Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	Just one in the Dulan Mountains
Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>	One at the Chaka gulag.
Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Scarce in towns in the lowlands.
Hill pigeon	<i>Columba rupestris</i>	Recorded on four dates on the plateau.
Snow pigeon	<i>Columba leuconota</i>	1 south of Yushu.
Oriental turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	2 on the first day around Hu zhu
Collared dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Small numbers on four dates up on the plateau.
Black-necked crane	<i>Grus nigricollis</i>	A trip highlight. Noted on four dates on the plateau (total of 65), the high point coming at Longbaotan where we counted 40!
Common coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Only seen Koko Nor.
Tibetan sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes tibetanus</i>	1 watched flying in Wild Yak Valley – wow!
Pallas' sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>	At least 70 at the site outside Chakha.
Common snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1 at Koko Nor.
Spotted redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	Small numbers at Koko Nor only.
Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	3 at Longbaotan.
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Koko Nor.
Ibisbill	<i>Ibidorhynchus struthersii</i>	4 seen on 3 dates all in or around Yushu.
Asian golden plover	<i>Charadrius fulva</i>	noted at Koko Nor.
Northern lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Small numbers at Koko Nor.
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	Noted at Koko Nor
Avocet	<i>Avosetta recurvirostra</i>	6 at Koko Nor
Pallas' gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	Small numbers on four dates on the plateau.
Brown-headed gull	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>	Frequently encountered on plateau wetlands.
Black-headed gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	A few at Koko Nor. Not common on the plateau.
[Oriental honey buzzard]	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	None seen but a fine tail feather found at Hu Zhu!
Black-eared kite	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>	Noted on just one date on the plateau.
Lammergier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	Records on nine days on the plateau. One of the highlights of the tour was the frequently excellent observations of this fantastic species.
Himalayan griffon vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	Recorded daily on the plateau, often in large numbers.
Black vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	Up to 10 birds on two dates on the plateau.
Western marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Scattered at wetlands on the plateau
Hen harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>	Recorded on five dates on the plateau, mostly singles.
Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Scattered records.
Grey-faced Buzzard	<i>Butastur indicus</i>	Only in Sichuan. 1 at Tangjiahe
Common buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	The race <i>burmanicus</i> was noted at Hu Zhu on the first day. The few birds noted at Tangjiahe were <i>japonicus</i> .
Upland buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>	Large numbers daily on the plateau.
Greater spotted eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>	One on the first day.
Steppe eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Noted on four days on the plateau.
Imperial eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Only one seen on the plateau.

Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	singles on three dates on the plateau, also 1 at Tangjiahe
Mountain Hawk-Eagle	<i>Spizaetus nipalensis</i>	Only in Sichuan. A total of 3 in Tangjiahe
Common kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	widespread.
Lesser kestrel	<i>Falco naumannii</i>	4 near Xining.
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Two birds recorded on the Tibetan leg of our journey.
Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1 at Koko Nor delighting in setting everything to flight!
Saker	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	One of the delightful aspects of the Tibetan leg of the tour was the frequent encounters, often at close range, with this fantastic species – amazingly no less than 44 were seen on the first day across the Chang Tang!
Great crested grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Recorded in small numbers at Koko Nor.
Black-necked grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Recorded in small numbers at Koko Nor.
Great cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Small numbers at Koko Nor.
Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Only in Sichuan Basin, where reasonably common, even turning up in the middle of towns.
[Great egret]	<i>Casmerodius alba</i>	A feather at Koko Nor!
Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	scattered.
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Chengdu area.
Eurasian bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	2 at Koko Nor.
Black stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Single en route to Chaka on the second day.
Long-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Only in Sichuan. Single near Chengdu.
Chinese grey shrike	<i>Lanius sphenocercus</i>	Several of the Tibetan plateau race <i>giganteus</i> seen, also 1 nominate bird seen well en route to Xining on the last day.
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	Small numbers in the woods on the first day, also some Tangjiahe.
Red-billed blue magpie	<i>Urocissus erythrorhyncha</i>	Only in Sichuan. Frequently encountered around Tangjiahe.
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	'Lowland' birds were of little interest to us but the Tibetan race <i>bottanensis</i> was quite different and was recorded on three dates.
†Henderson's ground-jay	<i>Podoces hendersoni</i>	A total of five birds noted whilst crossing the Qaidam Basin.
Hume's groundpecker	<i>Pseudopodoces humilis</i>	This frequently encountered clown was the jewel of the crown in the plateau's avifauna.
Spotted nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Only in Sichuan. Common at Tangjiahe.
Red-billed chough	<i>Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax</i>	Recorded daily on the plateau.
Daurian jackdaw	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>	South of Yushu on the Tibetan leg of the tour.
Carriion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	Noted in Hu Zhu only.
Large-billed crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchus</i>	Small numbers on the first two days, thereafter only low down south of Yushu and in Sichuan.

Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Only on the high plateau, where recorded daily.
Brown dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>	Only in Sichuan. Common in Tangjiahe.
Naumann's thrush	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>	1 en route to Xining on the last day on the plateau.
Red-throated thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis</i>	Recorded on 5 dates on the Tibetan leg of the tour.
Chestnut thrush	<i>Turdus rubrocanus</i>	One on the first day in the Hu zhu area. Small flocks encountered at Tangjiahe.
Kessler's thrush	<i>Turdus kessleri</i>	recorded at scattered locations on the plateau.
Red-flanked bluetail	<i>Luscinia cyanura</i>	Only in Sichuan – frequent at Tangjiahe.
White-throated redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>	Small numbers on the first day around Hu zhu and also seen south of Yushu.
Daurian redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Several daily at Tangjiahe.
Hodgson's redstart	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i>	1 at Nanquan on the plateau and 1 at Tangjiahe.
†Guldenstadt's redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogaster</i>	Frequently encountered often in large concentrations on the plateau leg of the tour.
Blue-fronted redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	Frequently encountered on the first day only..
White-capped redstart	<i>Chaimarornis leucocephalus</i>	Only in Sichuan where common.
Plumbeous redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosa</i>	Small numbers noted along rivers and streams in Sichuan.
†Taiga flycatcher	<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>	1 at tangjiahe in Sichuan. 1 seen at Chakha was either this species or <i>Ficedula parva</i>
Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophiiata</i>	Only in Sichuan. Several at Tangjiahe
Snowy-browed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hyperythra</i>	Only in Sichuan. A female noted at Tangjiahe
Little forktail	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>	Only in Sichuan. 3 seen at Tangjiahe.
Spotted forktail	<i>Enicurus maculatus</i>	Only in Sichuan. 3 seen at Tangjiahe.
Red-billed starling	<i>Spodiopsar sericeus</i>	1 at Tangjiahe
White-cheeked starling	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>	1 on the road to Xining!.
Chestnut-vented nuthatch	<i>Sitta nagaensis</i>	Only in Sichuan. Small numbers encountered in flocks at Tangjiahe.
Chinese nuthatch	<i>Sitta villosa</i>	One of the many highlights of the first day was these little beauties in the Hu zhu area.
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	2 near Yushu.
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	A few encountered on the first day.
†Songar tit	<i>Parus songarus</i>	Common on the first day. Birds seen later south of Yushu were <i>weigoldicus</i> , treated by some authorities as a separate species, Sichuan tit.
White-browed tit	<i>Parus superciliosus</i>	Small numbers of this smart little bird on two days on the plateau.
Yellow-bellied Tit	<i>Parus venustulus</i>	Sichuan only. Tangjiahe
Rufous-vented tit	<i>Parus rubidiventris</i>	A few on the first day. Also Yushu.
Grey-crested tit	<i>Parus dichrous</i>	A few on the first day.
Grey tit	<i>Parus minor</i>	A few Yushu.
Green-backed tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Recorded at Tangjiahe in small numbers daily.
Sooty tit	<i>Aegithalos fuliginosus</i>	Only in Sichuan. A few flocks in Tangjiahe.

Eurasian crag martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	Scattered throughout.
Pale Martin	<i>Riparia diluta</i>	One on the plateau in the snow was a surprise.
Asian House Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Common at Tangjiahe
Collared finchbill	<i>Spizixos semitorques</i>	Only in Sichuan. A few at Tangjiahe.
Chestnut-headed tesia	<i>Tesia castaneocoronata</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Single twice at Tangjiahe.
Yellowish-bellied bush-warbler	<i>Cettia acanthizoides</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. A few at Tangjiahe.
White-browed tit-warbler	<i>Leptopoecile sophiae</i>	Widely scattered on the plateau.
Crested Tit-Warbler	<i>Leptopoecile elegans</i>	A male at Hu Zhu on the first day
Buff-barred warbler	<i>Phylloscopus pulcher</i>	Noted at Hu Zhu on the first day and also a few at Tangjiahe in Sichuan.
Tickell's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>	Noted at Hu Zhu on the first day.
Gansu leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus kansuensis</i>	Noted at Hu Zhu on the first day.
†Sichuan leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus forresti</i>	Only in Sichuan at Tangjiahe. A recent split from pale-rumped leaf warbler <i>P. chloronotus</i> .
Hume's warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>	One in Wemquam.
Tarim Hill Warbler	<i>Rhopophilus albosuperciliaris</i>	3 in the Qaidam Basin – a rarely seen species.
Barred laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax lunulatus</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Several at Tangjiahe.
Elliott's laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax ellioti</i>	Vocal and seen in small numbers on the first day. Thereafter encountered in lowland areas, eg south of Yushu and in Sichuan.
Giant laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax maximus</i>	South of Yushu.
Black-faced laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax affinis</i>	Only in Sichuan. Small numbers at Tangjiahe.
Red-winged laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax formosus</i>	Only in Sichuan. Small numbers at Tangjiahe.
Bar-winged Wren-Babbler	<i>Spelaornis troglodytoides</i>	Only in Sichuan. 2 at Tangjiahe.
Rufous-capped babbler	<i>Stachyris ruficeps</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Often encountered in flocks of fulvettas at Tangjiahe.
Kozlov's babax	<i>Babax koslowi</i>	several birds south of Yushu.
Streaked barwing	<i>Actinodura souliei</i>	Only in Sichuan. Four birds along the nursery trail at Laba He.
Red-billed leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Common at Tangjiahe.
Green shrike-babbler	<i>Pteruthius xanthochlora</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. 1 at Tangjiahe.
†Golden-breasted fulvetta	<i>Lioparus chrysotis</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. A few parties encountered at Tangjiahe. Clements recently transferred this species to the old world warblers, so it is not a babbler!
Grey-hooded fulvetta	<i>Alcippe cinereiceps</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Small numbers at Tangjiahe. Formerly part of the streak-throated fulvetta complex.
Spectacled fulvetta	<i>Alcippe ruficapilla</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Frequent at Tangjiahe.
David's fulvetta	<i>Alcippe davidi</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Common at Tangjiahe.
White-collared yuhina	<i>Yuhina diademata</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Common at Tangjiahe.
Bearded parrotbill	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	Koko Nor – Bearded Tit!
Vinous-throated parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis webbiana</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Tangjiahe.

Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	Seen on the first day at Hu Zhu.
Tibetan lark	<i>Melanocorypha maxima</i>	Seen well at Koko Nor and heard and seen elsewhere on the plateau in wetter areas.
Asian short-toed lark	<i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>	Noted Koko Nor and Dulan Hills.
Eurasian skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Koko Nor.
Oriental skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>	scattered in the lower-lying areas of the plateau.
Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	Frequently encountered often in good numbers on the plateau.
House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Recorded en route to Xining. The 'Bactrian' race – a migrant. Also noted in Sichuan!
Tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	Almost ubiquitous.
Rock sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	Scattered on the plateau.
Henri's snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla henrici</i>	Two flocks encountered, 25 near Wemquan, and 76 on the Chang Tang.
White-rumped snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda taczanowski</i>	A bruiser! Frequently encountered in the vicinity of pika colonies on the plateau.
Père David's snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda davidiana</i>	Only seen in the desert near Chaka, where many small flocks.
Rufous-necked snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda ruficollis</i>	Only on the higher plateau where recorded, often in large flocks, on eleven dates.
Blanford's snowfinch	<i>Pyrgilauda blanfordi</i>	Small numbers on the plateau and in the desert outside Chaka.
White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Frequent throughout.
Citrine wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	A few most days on the plateau.
Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1 seen at Tangjiahe, Sichuan.
Olive-backed pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	A few first day at Hu Zhu.
Water pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	Scattered records..
Robin accentor	<i>Prunella rubeculoides</i>	Frequently encountered in suitable habitat on the plateau leg of the tour, noted on eight dates.
Rufous-breasted accentor	<i>Prunella strophiiata</i>	Several on the first day. Also 1 Qaidam Basin
Brown accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	Small numbers Yushu area.
Plain mountain finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>	Just 1 seen, south of Yushu.
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	Recorded on eight dates on the plateau leg of the tour.
Mongolian finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>	4 at Koko Nor.
Pink-rumped rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus eos</i>	A few south of Yushu.
Vinaceous rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus vinaceus</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. 1 at Tangjiahe.
†Chinese white-browed rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus dubius</i>	A few south of Yushu.
†Eastern great rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilloides</i>	Noted on four dates in high altitude scrub and woodland.
†Spotted great rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilla</i>	Prefers more arid areas to previous species – noted Wild Yak Valley and Qaidam Basin.

†Przewalski's pinktail	<i>Urocynchramus pylzowi</i>	At least 6 at Jesper's site for this fantastic species on the plateau. Also 2 the next day on the pass before Yushu.
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Yushu area
White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>	c.15 at Hu Zhu on the first day and many on the Dulan Hills.
Slaty bunting	<i>Latoucheornis siemsseni</i>	Only seen in Sichuan. Up to 2 daily at Tangjiahe.
Pine bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	A few in the Dulan Mountains and 1 at Er La.
Godlewski's bunting	<i>Emberiza godlewski</i>	Scattered records on the plateau.