# Mammals of N Tibet, 18-30 Oct 2012:

An at-a-glance list of 23 species of mammals (& birdwatching highlights).

By Jesper Hornskov \*\*\*this draft 4 Nov 2012\*\*\* ALL RIGHTS RESERVED®

<u>Please note that the following list is best considered a work in progress. It should not be quoted without consulting the author.</u>

Based mostly on my own field notes, this brief write-up covers mammals noted by P Benstead (Greentours), J Blincow, S Da Prato, A Hawkins, M & P Henriksson & myself during the 2012 Greentours ( <a href="https://www.Greentours.co.uk">www.Greentours.co.uk</a>) visit to China's Qinghai province.

The mammals, the birds (178 species in total), the unbeatable scenery, a stimulating mix of local cultures, wonderful food, mostly comfortable accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region being so under-visited by naturalists.

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Enquiries about the scheduled 2013 Greentours 'Mammals of the Roof of the World' trip to Tibet should be directed to enquiries@Greentours.co.uk

In the species list the concept "animal-days" is used - it is the equivalent of man-hours, the day totals added up – it indicates relative abundance but does not consider the "problem" of lingering individuals or, important in a non-scientific context such as a natural history holiday abroad, how satisfying the encounters were. 25 animal-days for e.g. Goitered Gazelle could be one distant herd vanishing in a cloud of dust before you'd had a good look at them, or one individual lingering for 25 days, offering the observers point-blank views anytime in that period...

The sequence of the mammal list follows "A Guide to the Mammals of China", Smith & Xie (ed.) 2008, while in the list of bird highlights I have followed The Howard and Moore Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World –  $3^{rd}$  Edition (Dickinson 2003), in my opinion by far the most useful one-volume checklist to date.

Initials in brackets after a few single-observer sightings does not imply that I have doubts as to the correctness of the ID!

# Mammals:

#### Tibetan Dwarf Hamster Cricetulus tibetanus

One was seen very well on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

#### Mid-Day Gerbil Meriones meridianus

Three animal-days. Noted on two dates but not exactly easy to get on...

\*\*\*'The most desert-adapted of all gerbils. It occupies sandy terrain with different degrees of soil stabilization, preferring brushy habitat characterized by thorn scrub under which it constructs it burrows. Primarily nocturnal (in contrast with *M. unguiculatus*); it is only active during the day during winter. It is unclear how it was given the common name.': Smith & Xie (2008).

#### Gansu Pika Ochotona cansus

Just one seen [AH] on 23rd.

#### Plateau Pika Ochotona curzoniae

Widespread - not systematically recorded.

#### Glover's Pika Ochotona gloveri

8+ animal-days. Noted on two dates – one on 25th 'up on massive boulder across the river somehow spotted by AH as it sat silhouetted against the far-off sky, in the absence of fiercer creatures absolute ruler of that piece of hard-to-get-to real estate'..

#### Woolly Hare Lepus oiostolus

9+ animal-days. Seen on at least five dates – main event 4+ on 23<sup>rd</sup>, when numerous tracks crisscrossing the fresh snow suggested that at least twice that number were present.

#### Pallas' Cat Felis manul

One allowed extended 'scope views as it sat out on a sunny knoll on 22<sup>nd</sup>.

#### \*\*\*Snow Leopard Uncia uncia

Tracks in the snow...

#### Wolf Canis lupus

11 animal-days. Noted on four dates – a long session with two individuals at c4,800m on 24<sup>th</sup>: one of them was seen trying to punch through a patch of frozen snow, then carried on tentatively while the other animal was lying down. All of a sudden that one was making off in a different direction carrying a Tibetan Fox (!), seemingly trying to take advantage of the lay of the land to get away and not share the meal with its companion... nice plan, but as they disappeared from view the more active individual was firmly on the trail of the meal-carrying one.

#### Tibetan Fox Vulpes ferrilata

48 animal-days. Noted on no fewer than seven dates, with any number of satisfying encounters and several photo opportunities: what an animal!

# Red Fox Vulpes vulpes

Singles were noted on four dates.

#### Mountain Weasel Mustela altaica

We were pleased to get extended views (and repeated photo ops!) when one was spotted darting about on 27<sup>th</sup>.

#### Kiang Equus kiang

788 animal-days. Noted on five dates. It was a real pleasure to watch these dignified 'donkeys' - in the absence of hunters they (and other large mammals on the Plateau) are fairly confiding, and in a couple of cases we were able to get good-to-decent photos even without the help of long lenses!

# Siberian Roe Capreolus pygargus

5+ on 18<sup>th</sup> got our trip off the ground in style.

#### MacNeil's Deer Cervus macneilli

Seven S of Yushu on 25<sup>th</sup>.

\*\*\*macneilli is 'the pale red-grey deer of the eastern margins of the Tibetan plateau': Groves (2005).

#### Gansu Red Deer Cervus kansuensis

No fewer than 55 animals in a morning! Memorable 'scope views of several magnificent stags – the crisp air was vibrating with their rutting-time roars, which were audible even from our breakfast spot.

\*\*\*vide Groves (2005), kansuensis is 'quite distinct, the winter pelage being especially different:

macneilli stags are very light, creamy grey, while kansuensis stags are deep steely grey. The black on the croup [...] is much more conspicuous in kansuensis.'

\*\*\*Subsequently (Groves & Grubb: *Ungulate Taxonomy* (2011)) it was felt that *kansuensis* is probably NOT a valid taxon. There are specimens from S Koko Nor Range 37\*N 100\*E (where sightings by birders have resulted in claims of White-lipped Deer!) & from Tatung Shan 37\*15'N 100\*E, and there are sight records from Qilian Shan.

\*\*\*If kansuensis ends up being considered invalid the animals we saw were still not 'Red' Deer Cervus 'elaphus' but Cervus canadensis alashanicus.

# White-lipped Deer Przewalskium albirostris

39 animals in a single day. A herd of 29 included five huge-antlered stags & a full mix of juveniles, females, and 'lesser' stags – at x60 magnification we could see the senior stag roaring repeatedly as it stood silhouetted against the sky, allowing undistorted looks in crisp afternoon air, but what with the distance & the flowing river we were unable to hear it.

#### Goitred Gazelle Gazella subgutturosa

31 animal-days. Noted on two dates – 28 in a day was pretty good, especially as the magnificent dawn air allowed undistorted 'scope viewing on x60 magnification.

#### **Tibetan Gazelle** Procapra picticaudata

808+ animal-days. Noted on seven dates – as is the case with Kiang, in the absence of human hunters these nimble creatures are fairly confiding (if still jumpily high-strung, no doubt on account of the healthy population of wolves roaming the hills: in August 2005 we were even privileged to witness four particularly mean-looking wolves undertake a successful hunt, killing and ripping apart a Tibetan Gazelle) - we were able to get frame-filling photos even without the help of heavy artillery lenses.

#### Przevalski's Gazelle Procapra przewalskii

76 on 20<sup>th</sup> – all were female/juveniles.

\*\*\*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 <a href="http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/18230/0">http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/18230/0</a>

\*\*\*Our animals appear to represent an as far as the IUCN is concerned 'undiscovered' population.

#### Wild Yak Bos grunniensis

111 animal-days. These impressive animals were seen in to separate areas... WOW! views were had by all.

#### **Argali** Ovis ammon

24 animal-days. Noted on two dates – watching a herd of 14 (incl at least three good-sized males)

for a couple of hours was just the sort of relaxed, in-depth experience we'd hoped for.

## Tibetan Antelope Panthalops hodgsonii

Seeing 80 along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road was truly something to remember.

\*\*\*See http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/15967/0

## Blue Sheep Pseudois nayaur

c158 animal-days. Noted on three dates.

# **Birds** – among the highlights (a detailed list is being prepared):

Przevalski's Partridge Alectoris magna

**Daurian Partridge** Perdix dauurica

White Eared Pheasant Crossoptilon crossoptilon

Bar-headed Goose Anser indicus

Ruddy Shelduck Tadorna ferruginea

Baikal Teal Anas formosa

Red-crested Pochard Netta rufina

Black Stork Ciconia nigra

Saker Falco cherruq

White-tailed Eagle Haliaeetus albicilla

Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus

Himalayan Griffon Gyps himalayensis

Black Vulture Aegypius monachus

Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus

Northern Goshawk Accipiter gentilis

Himalayan Buzzard Buteo burmanicus

**Upland Buzzard** Buteo hemilasius

Steppe Eagle Aguila nipalensis

Eastern Imperial Eagle Aquila heliaca

Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos

Black-necked Crane Grus nigricollis

Ibisbill Ibidorhyncha struthersii

Pacific Golden Plover Pluvialis fulva

Great Black-headed Gull Larus ichthyaetus

Brown-headed Gull Larus brunnicephalus

**Tibetan Sandgrouse** Syrrhaptes thibetana

Pallas' Sandgrouse Syrrhaptes paradoxus

Oriental Turtle Dove Streptopelia orientalis

Chinese Grey Shrike Lanius sphenocercus

Tibetan Grey Shrike Lanius (s.) giganteus

**Eurasian Jay** Garrulus glandarius

**Tibetan Magpie** Pica (pica) bottanensis

Henderson's Ground Jay Podoces hendersoni

Hume's Groundpecker Pseudopodoces humilis

Daurian Jackdaw Corvus dauuricus

Rufous-vented Tit Parus rubidiventris

White-browed Tit Parus superciliosus

Stoliczka's (= White-browed) Tit-Warbler Leptopoecile sophiae

**Long-billed Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha maxima* 

Common Chiffchaff Phylloscopus collybita tristis

Kozlov's Babax Babax koslowi

Elliot's Laughingthrush Garrulax elliotii

Chestnut Thrush Turdus rubrocanus

Kessler's Thrush Turdus kessleri

Northern Red-flanked Bluetail Tarsiger cyanurus

Przevalski's Redstart Phoenicurus alaschanicus

White-throated Redstart Phoenicurus schisticeps

Guldenstadt's Redstart Phoenicurus erythrogastrus

Blue-fronted Redstart Phoenicurus frontalis

Red-breasted Flycatcher Ficedula parva

Red-throated Flycatcher Ficedula albicilla

White-throated Dipper Cinclus cinclus

Henri's Snowfinch Montifringilla henrici

**Tibetan Snowfinch** Montifringilla adamsi

White-rumped Snowfinch Onychostruthus taczanowskii

Pere David's Snowfinch Pyrgilauda davidiana

Rufous-necked Snowfinch Pyrgilauda ruficollis

Blanford's Snowfinch Pyrgilauda blanfordi

Robin Accentor Prunella rubeculoides

Brown Accentor Prunella fulvescens

Przevalski's Rosefinch Urocynchramus pylzowi

Pink-rumped Rosefinch Carpodacus eos

Pallas's Rosefinch Carpodacus roseus

Chinese White-browed Rosefinch Carpodacus dubius

Eastern Great Rosefinch Carpodacus rubicilloides

Spotted Great Rosefinch Carpodacus severtzovi

Pine Bunting Emberiza leucocephalos

Eastern Rock Bunting Emberiza godlewskii