

Mammals of N Tibet: 2-18 June 2013

An at-a-glance list of 18 species of mammals identified (& birdwatching highlights).

By Jesper Hornskov ***this draft 2 July 2013*** ALL RIGHTS RESERVED®

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

Based mostly on my own field notes, this brief write-up covers mammals noted by T Carlberg, K Carlsson, B & G Frisk, H Holm, S Holmstedt, J Hulting, L Imby, S Karlsson, M Marend, A Rane & myself during a birdwatching visit to NE Tibet, China's Qinghai province, over 2-18 June 2013, following a day's combined sightseeing & birdwatching around Beijing.

Our itinerary did unfortunately not afford us opportunities to see Wild Yak *Bos grunniensis*, Argali *Ovis ammon* or Tibetan Antelope *Panthalops hodgsonii*, all species which can be targeted without adding too much time- or costs-wise and which are indeed seen on trips designed to see mammals (as well as – in the case of Wild Yak & Tibetan Antelope - on e.g. Oriental Bird Club's Fundraiser trips).

The mammals, the birds (225 spp in total), the unbeatable scenery (at this time of the year in many places absolutely blanketed in wildflowers), an intriguing amalgam of local cultures, wonderful food, comfortable - from 'definitely OK' to 'surprisingly good' - accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region - though in many ways an indisputable 'MUST' destination for anyone hooked on Palearctic and/or Asian mammals or birds - being so under-visited.

We are all indebted to S Holmstedt for getting this jolly group together – THANK YOU!

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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 – 3rd 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.

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Mammals:

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*

50+ near Nangqian on 11th – we were able to get prolonged ‘scope views of a number of individuals: females doing impressive feats of rock climbing with a baby clinging on literally for dear life, one male on guard duty intermittently shaking his perch to warn us off...

***Yellowy-olive tinge to upper hindlegs, in some individuals connecting above base of tail, and reddish face eliminates Assam Macaque *Macaca assamensis*: Francis (2008). Very large troop size supports ID as Assam Macaque occurs in single-male troops of 10-15 individuals: Smith & Xie (2008).

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

30+ animal-days. Noted on 11 dates, ensuring that we all came away with a fair idea of how these fascinating sleepy-head herbivores pass their lives – it was, for example, amazing that all it took to get one animal to keep up alarm-calling for >30min was one vocalization from a neighbour, and equally interesting to watch another keenly eye a passing wolf, alarm-calling incessantly.

Tibetan Dwarf Hamster *Cricetullus tibetanus*

One [JH] at c4,650m on 7th.

Black-lipped (= Plateau) Pika *Ochotona curzoniae*

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

Glover’s Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

Seven animal-days. This cute-looking species was noted on five dates.

*****Moupin Pika** *Ochotona thibetana*

One near Nangqian [TC] was undoubtedly this species...

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

23+ animal-days. Noted on seven dates.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

Four singles near Xining on 2nd.

*****Pallas’ Cat** *Felis manul*

Frustratingly, only our drivers saw (and photographed!) one...

Wolf *Canis lupus*

Five animal-days: a group of three up high on 10th & two singles on 15th.

***Though not the closest, a female which came down off a hill made the greatest impression: ‘a herd of yaks bunched up to protect a not-that-small calf, one bold individual out in front, the wolf testing the defender’s resolve...when the wolf reappeared after having been out of view behind a rise we thought it was chasing the yaks but it was the other way around! The wolf eventually realized it stood little chance of getting near the calf & continued, taking its time, passing us in good light at c400m all the while allowing satisfying ‘scope views. Three of our photographers at my suggestion ran closer when the animal was again out of view.

It was a slender, light-footed animal – looking back it stumbled over a yak turd...’

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*

Seven animal-days. Noted on five dates.

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica*

One [SK] seen...

Kiang *Equus kiang*

89 animal-days. Noted only on two dates as we traversed the Roof of the World...

***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: not much field craft was needed to get frame-filling photos!

Siberian Roe *Capreolus pygargus*

Two heard barking N of Xining on 3rd.

Gansu Red Deer *Cervus kansuensis*

13 animal-days. Noted on just two dates.

****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*

13 animals were 'scoped at c200m in evening sun as they grazed up on a hillside near Nangqian on 11th.

Goitred Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*

29 W of Koko Nor on 5th.

Tibetan Gazelle *Procapra picticaudata*

172+ animal-days. Seen on six dates – frequently at very close range.

Przevalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii*

Six seen rather distantly on 5th.

***The species has recently been '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>

***Our animals appear to represent an additional 'undiscovered' population.

Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur*

200+ animal-days. Noted on six dates – several memorable encounters included 13 mostly males on the Mekong side at Nangqian, doing quite a bit of earnest head-butting.

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

- Severtzov's Hazel Grouse** *Tetrastes sewerzowi*
- Szechenyi's Monal Partridge** *Tetraophasis szechenyi*
- Tibetan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus tibetanus*
- Przevalski's Partridge** *Alectoris magna*
- Daurian Partridge** *Perdix dauurica*
- Tibetan Partridge** *Perdix hodgsoniae*
- Blood Pheasant** *Ithaginis cruentus*

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*
Blue Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon auritum*
Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*
Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*
Saker *Falco cherrug*
Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*
Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*
Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*
Black Vulture *Aegypius monachus*
Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*
Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*
Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*
Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*
'Spot-fronted' Sand Plover *Charadrius atrifrons*
Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*
Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*
Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes thibetana*
Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*
Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*
Little Owl *Athene noctua*
Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali*
Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*
Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*
Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius giganteus*
Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*
Hume's Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*
Yellow-bellied Tit *Parus venustulus*
White-browed Tit *Parus superciliosus*
Grey Crested Tit *Parus dichrous*
White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*
Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*
Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica*
Long-billed Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha maxima*
Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris*
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*
Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*
Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*
Elliot's Laughingthrush *Garrulax elliotii*
Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*
Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus*
Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri*
Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
Himalayan Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis*
Himalayan Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus*
Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*
White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps*
Guldenstadt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*
White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides*
Grandala *Grandala coelicolor*
Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*
Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula hodgsonii*
White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

Henri's Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici*
Himalayan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi*
White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*
Pere David's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda davidiana*
Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda ruficollis*
Blanford's Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*
Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*
Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides*
Rufous-browed Accentor *Prunella strophiatea*
Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla tschutschensis*
Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*
Tibetan Siskin *Serinus thibetanus*
Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*
Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*
Mongolian Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*
Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*
Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*
Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus davidianus*
Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus eos*
Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*
Three-banded Rosefinch *Carpodacus trifasciatus*
Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius*
Eastern Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides*
Spotted Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus severtzovi*
Red-fronted Rosefinch *Pyrrhospiza punicea*
Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*
Grey-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca*
White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carniceps*
Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*
Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*