

Mammals of NE Tibet, 8-27 Aug 2011:

An at-a-glance list of 29+ species of mammals (& birdwatching highlights).

By Jesper Hornskov ***this draft 22 Feb*** 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 M Campbell, M Chalmers, T Ford, J Holmes, I Robinson, J Scott, G Sellappan, M Watelet, D White, K White & myself during the 2011 Oriental Bird Club Fundraiser visit to China's Qinghai province.

The mammals, the birds (224 species in total), the butterflies, the plants, the unbeatable scenery, a stimulating mix of local cultures, wonderful food, comfortable accommodations & (not least) the companionship all came together to produce a trip the more memorable for the region being so under-visited by bird- & mammal-watchers.

One additional species was recorded in the grounds of our hotel in Beijing: Amur Hedgehog *Erinaceus amurensis* (D & K White).

Anyone considering China as a destination for mammal watching is welcome to contact the author at:

E-mail [goodbirdmail\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:goodbirdmail(at)gmail.com) or [goodbirdmail\(at\)126.com](mailto:goodbirdmail(at)126.com)

Tel/fax +86 10 8490 9562 / mobile +86 135 1335 9831

Inquiries concerning future trips to NE Tibet (**several are currently planned**) or Yunnan - our trips to China's biologically most diverse province have been very popular - can be made directly to this author.

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!

vv

Mammals:

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana*

44+ animal-days. Noted on at least six dates.

Tibetan Dwarf Hamster *Cricetulus tibetanus*

10+ animal-days. Noted on three dates.

Gansu Pika *Ochotona cansus*

At least six were seen...

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

Widespread – not systematically recorded.

Chinese Red Pika *Ochotona erythrotis*

Five animal-days. Seen well on two dates.

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri*

13+ animal-days. Noted on four dates.

Large-eared Pika *Ochotona macrotis*

One amongst rocks at c4,900m on 14th.

***ID based on different habitat & lack of black lips...

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus*

27 animal-days. Noted on at least ten dates.

Tolai Hare *Lepus tolai*

Two seen well near Xining on 8th.

?Pearson's Horseshoe Bat *Rhinolophus pearsoni*

Several 'large' bats seen above the Yangtze in the afternoon of 14th may have been this species.

?Little Tubenosed Bat *Murina aurata*

This species' small size & wide distribution (specimens from up to 4,000m) makes it a strong possibility for a bat seen over the Mekong on 17th.

Lynx *Lynx lynx*

An adult w/ a juvenile high up on a hillside on 15th... Bingo!

Wolf *Canis lupus*

Eight animal-days. Noted on two dates – prolonged views of three on the prowl on 13th...

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata*

22 animal-days. Noted on five dates – 'scoping five playful cubs on 13th was a highlight!

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Singletons were noted on three dates.

Asian Badger *Meles leucurus*

Two seen well on 17th.

***In addition, a freshly dead female on a road near Koko Nor on 11th...

Mountain Weasel *Mustela altaica*

Six animal-days. Noted on four dates.

Steppe Polecat *Mustela eversmanii*

One on 15th – photographed (MW *et al.*)!

Kiang *Equus kiang*

126 animal-days. Noted on three dates.

Alpine Musk Deer *Moschus chrysogaster*

One seen well on 19th.

'Red Deer *Cervus elaphus*'

Three animal-days.

***It seems certain that with taxonomic updates the animals we saw should be assigned to two species, *Cervus kansuensis* & *Cervus macneilli*.

White-lipped Deer *Przewalskium albirostris*

20 on 20th – 19 up on a hillside & one attempting to cross the river.

Wild Yak *Bos grunniens*

There can be little doubt that 11 yaks on 21st – at >4,500m & well away from any shepherds' encampment – were the genuine article...

Goitred Gazelle *Gazella subgutturosa*

53 on 23rd – most of them seen well in the dawn light...

Tibetan Gazelle *Procapra picticaudata*

414 bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Przevalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii*

No less than 47 were seen & photographed on 23rd.

***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>

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

Chinese Serow *Capricornis milneedwardsii*

One 'scoped and photographed as it took its time coming down a ravine at c3,750m on 17th.

Tibetan Antelope *Pantholops hodgsonii*

113 bird-days. Noted only along the remotest Roof of the World stretch of road.

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

Blue Sheep *Pseudois nayaur*

271+ animal-days. Noted on seven dates. A number of memorable encounters – headbutting males, and a mixed-age herd of no less than 67 unconcerned individuals allowing us prolonged 'scope views (AND photo ops!) at c4,900m...



Bird highlights:

Szechenyi's Monal Partridge *Tetraophasis szechenyi*

20+ bird-days. Noted on two dates – a family of five proved very cooperative on 19th, granting our team photographers plenty of chances to get it just right.

Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus*

21 bird-days. Noted on three dates – a pair with three half-grown chicks allowed prolonged 'scoping' as they fed unconcerned below towering cliffs at c4,500m on 17th.

Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*

22 bird-days. Noted on three dates – a pair w/ three very small chicks on 17th were especially memorable.

White Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon crossoptilon*

56+ bird-days. Noted on four dates – seeing seven adults w/ six tiny, dark brown chicks on 15th was a treat.

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*

2,233+ bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

A pair w/ two f g 'ugly ducklings' were present at Koko Nor.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

17+ bird-days. This charismatic species was noted on fast-flowing streams at least three dates.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

275+ bird-days. Noted on five dates.

Saker *Falco cherrug*

33 bird-days. Noted on no less than six dates – outstanding views on several occasions: we'd been feeling a bit jinxed but then came across an adult on a telegraph post. It flew off, but returned to a post further along with a pika it had caught with so little effort that we hadn't even noticed – we approached it slowly, and were able to watch from <20m away as it proceeded to pluck its prey, fluffs of wool drifting slowly to the ground, as the team photographers made the most of the opportunity (superb light enhanced by a backdrop of grey cloud).

Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*

34 bird-days. Noted on ten dates – there were plenty of chances to simply enjoy this charismatic species...on 17th we were first treated to views of a bone-dropping 1st/2nd c-y bird: it landed in view at reasonable range, and we were able to 'scope it as it dealt with what anatomically competent team members judged to be a rib - then another bird appeared as if on cue just as someone uttered the word 'Lammergeier': a fine adult which proceeded to circle directly overhead to the delight of the team photographers: a BINGO!

Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*

296+ bird-days. Noted on 17 dates – on 18th we watched 68+ coming in ahead of a hail shower.

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo burmanicus*

Five bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

165+ bird-days. Noted on 12 dates... a powerful, lumbering buzzard that preys on Black-lipped Pika.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

18 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

Two at Koko Nor on 26th – arguably the most attractive of all the cranes...

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

72 bird-days. Noted on seven dates – this hardy yet vulnerable (and ‘Vulnerable’: <http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/143783/0>) Tibetan Plateau endemic breeder was one of the most hoped-for species, and it was cheering to see several pairs accompanied by thriving chicks.

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

13 bird-days. This highly distinctive species was noted on six dates.

Tibetan Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes thibetana*

A pair w/ three week-old chicks was seen and photographed on 21st.

Pallas’ Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*

35+ on 24th – ‘scope views of family parties on the ground!

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*

20+ bird-days. This montane specialist was noted on four dates.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

182 bird-days. Noted on 16 dates.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

One on 19th – the bird was seen briefly as it flew in without calling... MC, carrying a camera, volunteered to investigate despite the risk of missing it if it flew off along the tree line. Which is, alas, exactly what it did.

Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius giganteus*

Single birds were noted on four dates – on 17th the additional time granted to photograph one approachable individual proved a sound investment as camera-less group members spotted a family of Tibetan Snowcocks during the interlude.

Henderson’s Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*

13 bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Hume’s Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*

249+ bird-days. This charming high-altitude specialist was noted on 16 dates.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*
Eight bird-days. Noted on two dates.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*
66 bird-days. Noted on seven dates.

White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*
107 bird-days. Noted on no less than ten dates!

Crested Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile elegans*
28+ bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Kozlov's Babax *Babax koslowi*
18+ bird-days. Noted on three dates. One of our main 'pretexts' for visiting an unbeatably pretty area on the remote Xizang border, this restricted-range species proved comparatively obliging.

Giant Laughingthrush *Garrulax maximus*
28+ bird-days. Noted on three dates.
***This superb-looking species has an impressive range of calls, some subdued, some anything but, yet others direct or derived mimicry – duetting birds are often a striking component in the dawn chorus, and throughout the day groups travelling through the pristine forest will mark their progress with occasional sessions of loud calling.

Northern Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Nine bird-days. Noted on four dates.

Przevalski's Nuthatch *Sitta przewalskii*
Ten bird-days. Noted on four dates – on 9th a busy group of four birds was seen well, with one or two birds allowing 'scope views in soft, morning light... one even did a bit of flycatching!

Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria*
Eight bird-days. This attractive species was noted on four dates.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*
Eight bird-days. This 'Nightingale of the East' was noted on two dates – superb views of a pair carrying food on 9th.

Przevalski's Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus*
Five on 23rd – an adult male obliged our team photographers by sitting out in a patch of sunshine... 'arguably the prettiest in the genus'? Oh yes!!

Grandala *Grandala coelicolor*
Two 1st c-y birds was photographed (& generally enjoyed!) at <10m along a ridge at c3,950m.

White-rumped Snowfinch *Onychostruthus taczanowskii*
124+ bird-days. Noted on six dates. Almost invariably associated with pika colonies...

Przevalski's Rosefinch *Urocynchramus pylzowi*

10+ bird-days. This enigmatic species was seen on two dates – superb views!

***The taxonomically challenged Przevalski's Rosefinch is nowadays considered to represent a monotypic family - is it a "Rosefinch"? or is it a "Bunting"?... good question, seeing that in the field it does not appear obviously close to either, with its graduated, blindingly pink tail, absurdly thin lower mandible, and a summertime habit of doing 'parachute' type songflights.

Chinese White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus dubius*

78+ bird-days. Noted on six dates – main event 42+ (incl 35+ 'down by the river': JS, MW) on 18th.

Roborovski's Rosefinch *Kozlowia roborowskii*

15 bird-days. Noted on three dates – our team photographers nearly got memory-carded out when a full adult male presented itself at <10m: TINGALING!!

Kozlov's Bunting *Emberiza koslowi*

14 bird-days. Noted on two dates. Only when this highly localised endemic is 'in the bag' does anyone allow themselves a sigh of relief and a pleasant 1st taste of 'we've done it!'. And did we do it!? Superb views and ditto photo opportunities of adult males, adult females & fledged juveniles.