Mammals of N Tibet: 2-15 Oct 2005

An at-a-glance list of 14+ spp of mammals (& birdwatching highlights).

By Jesper Hornskov ***all rights reserved ®*** [this draft 23 Feb 2012]

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

This write-up covers a trip undertaken by A Guillemont, J F Terrasse, M Terrasse & myself.

Thank you for making the journey so enjoyable!

The mammals, the birds (149 species in total), 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 mammal-watchers.

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

We are currently planning a NE Tibet Mammal Special for autumn 2012. The itinerary is inspired by / based on the trip covered by the present write-up, but it has been comprehensively fine-tuned drawing on experience gathered over the intervening years.

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:

Red Fox Vulpes vulpes

One seen at close range on 6th.

***In addition, one was found killed on the road along the S edge of the Qaidam. Zhang (1997) listed the species for nowhere closer than Delingha, roughly at the same longitude but on the N edge of the basin.

Tibetan Fox Vulpes ferrilata

Noted on four dates - 25 individuals in total; daily max <u>16</u> on 6th.

***One on 13th was seen hunting a pika: running up, then back, body straight as a board but reaching an impasse where any next inch of progress would reveal the fox's presence in time for the pika to dive into its safe burrow. That's how we left them, in the snowy landscape...

Asian Badger Meles leucurus

One at long range S of the Maduo wetland on 6th.

Pallas's Cat Felis manul

3-4 on 5th & one [AG] on 8th.

Kiang Equus kiang

1,323 animal-days, concerning no less than 1,251 individuals noted on five dates.

Wild Yak Bos grunniens

626 individuals counted: 625 in 'Yak Valley', and a distant (10kms!?) lone bull on 13th.

Goitred Gazelle Gazella subgutturosa

56 animal-days. Noted on three dates.

***In the time-honoured way we worked hard for our first sightings only to see more easily later on...

Tibetan Antelope Pantholops hodgsoni

335 animal-days, relating to 287 individuals noted over two days.

***Some were close enough to photograph.

Tibetan Gazelle Procapra picticaudata

1,072 animal-days, relating to 992+ individuals noted on five dates.

Przevalski's Gazelle Procapra przewalskii

A group of nine (a buck with four females each with a youngster) was an exceptionally good find. ***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 <u>http://www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/18230/0</u> ***Our animals appear represent an additional 'undiscovered' population.

Blue Sheep Pseudois nayaur

13 animal-days. Two on 5th, six on 13th & five on 15th were all at considerable distance and fewer than we might reasonably have expected as previous, bird-centered trips have yielded groups of up to 30+ animals.

Argali Ovis ammon

67 in 'Yak Valley' was a great bonus, particularly as some allowed extended viewing at reasonable range.

***"Seeing Argali, Wild Yak & Kiang in the same 'scope field-of-view on a hillside is about as much as one can hope for, mammal-wise, in this part of the world."

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana* One on 4th.

Black-lipped Pika Ochotona curzoniae Widespread.

Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus* Fairly widespread.

Bird highlights:

Tibetan Snowcock Tetraogallus tibetanus

19+ bird-days. Noted on two dates, with 17+ on 14th a bonus.

***Two treated us to excellent, close-up out-in-the-morning-sun views as they cackled, whistled, and excitedly cocked their tails!

Bar-headed Goose Anser indicus

c1,360 bird-days.

Ruddy Shelduck Tadorna ferruginea

361+ bird-days. Noted on eight dates with a daily max of 227.

Goosander Mergus merganser

33 bird-days. This charismatic duck was noted on four dates - main event 20 at Koko Nor.

Black Stork Ciconia nigra

Two, or possibily three, present at Koko Nor on 3rd. At least one was an adult bird...

Eurasian Spoonbill Platalea leucorodia

Four bird-days.

Saker Falco cherrug

56 bird-days. Noted on nine dates.

***Mobbing behavior was noted twice on 13th: once the victim was a Lammergeier, while another bird, a juvenile female, was after a Hen Harrier in what appeared to be close to a genuine attack.

Lammergeier Gypaetus barbatus

31 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

***Bone-dropping behavior seen well several times.

Himalayan Griffon Gyps himalayensis

121+ bird-days. Noted on ten dates. Main event 42 on 4th.

Hen Harrier Circus cyaneus

12 bird-days. Noted on five dates. Main event five (four 1st c-y birds & one adult male) at Koko Nor on 3rd.

Northern Goshawk Accipiter gentilis

Singles on 5+6th. ***The juvenile at the wetland on 6th was chased by Brown-headed Gulls and then landed on roof beams of a disintegrating hut...

Upland Buzzard Buteo hemilasius

235 bird-days. Noted on ten dates. Main event 128 on 6th. Interestingly, eight at Er La Pass on 4th were all heading S.

Greater Spotted Eagle Aquila clanga

Three bird-days. One on 4th & two on 5th.

Steppe Eagle Aquila nipalensis

53 bird-days. Noted on nine dates. Main events 13 migr on 4th (with several seen very well being one of the ingredients in a superb raptor passage which was unfortunately curtailed by heavy hail showers) and 14 migr the next day.

Eastern Imperial Eagle Aquila heliaca

Three bird-days. One immature migr on 6th & two immatures (of which at least one was migr) on 13th.

Golden Eagle Aquila chrysaetos

24 bird-days. Noted on eight dates.

Demoiselle Crane Anthropoides virgo

Patience paid off on 3rd with a flock of c185 passing at 18h22... On 9th four migr over Rubber Mt may have been the last of the season.

Black-necked Crane Grus nigricollis

28 bird-days, involving as many individuals noted on two dates.

Tibetan Sandgrouse Syrrhaptes thibetana

Six on 13th... mixing in with the Chirus we were photographing: Tingaling!

Eurasian Eagle-Owl Bubo bubo

Two bird-days. One flew across the road N of Gonghe on 9th; the other was seen memorably in Roadside Wood on 14th.

Little Owl Athene noctua Four bird-days.

Long-eared Owl Asio otus Two migrants roosting in desert poplars on 15th.

Tibetan Grey Shrike Lanius (s.) giganteus

One in desert W of Chaka on 9th.

Tibetan Magpie Pica (pica) bottanensis

One in Wild Yak Valley on 11th & eight W of Dulan on 14th.

Henderson's Ground Jay Podoces hendersoni

Seven bird-days. Seen only in the Qaidam, with three on 10th & four on 14th. *** Several offered photo opportunities as our driver deftly maneuvered the car turned mobile hide into position.

Hume's Groundpecker Pseudopodoces humilis

129 bird-days. Noted on 11 dates.

Common Raven Corvus corax

247+ bird-days. Noted on nine dates. Daily maximum 138 on 12th. ***One on 12th was in a playful mood: it hang upside-down from a wire, first holding on with both feet, then just with one, holding on for several seconds before letting go.

Pere David's Laughingthrush Garrulax davidi

Five near Xining on 2nd.

Guldenstadt's Redstart Phoenicurus erythrogastrus

27 bird-days. Noted on six dates.

Tibetan Snowfinch Montifringilla adamsi

69 bird-days. Noted on two dates. Main event 60 in The Gully on 4th.

White-rumped Snowfinch Onychostruthus taczanowskii

93 bird-days. Noted on seven dates. Daily maximum 72 on 6th.

Blanford's Snowfinch Pyrgilauda blanfordi

36 bird-days. Noted on four dates. Particularly approachable at our lunch stop on 12th... ***The species has a distinctive *huizt* call: an "eh! Look-over-here" whistle...

Roborovski's Rosefinch Kozlowia roborowskii

Four females at Er La Pass on 7th.

References:

Zhang, Yongzu *et al.* (1997) <u>Distribution of Mammalian Species in China</u>. Beijing: China Forestry Publishing House.