

## **2015 Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau Mammal Watching Trip**

by Kevin Zhong (China) Photos by Li Bin

**Duration:** Oct 31 to Nov 14th

Participants: local guide: Kevin Zhong ([KEVIN-8566@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:KEVIN-8566@HOTMAIL.COM)) and 5 friends from U.S and U.K. 2 local drivers: Mr Yang and Mr Li.

Those good photos by my friend Mr Li.

### **Locations:**

Xining---Maqin---Wenquan---Huashixia---Yushu---Nangqian---Qumalai(Sanjiangyuan Reserve or Three River Headsources Reserve)---Budongquan---KeKeXiLi Reserve (Kor Kor Nor Reserve)---Yeniugou Valley(Wild Yak Valley)---Golmud---Chaka---Qinghai Lake---Xining

### **Target Mammal Species:**

White-lipped Deer, Wild Yak, Tibetan Antelope, Tibetan Gazelle, Tibetan Argali, Tibetan Fox, Przewalski's Gazelle, Kiang

### **Other possible species we hope to see:**

Snow Leopard, Wolf, Pallas' Cat, Lynx, Chinese Mountain Cat, Blue Sheep, Musk Deer, Badger, Red Deer, Goitred Gazelle, Red Fox, Dhole, Himalayan Pica, Glover's Pica, (Himalayan Marmot and Brown Bear in hibernation)

### **Bird Species we would like to see in this season:**

Black-necked Crane, White-eared Pheasants, Blood Pheasants, Himalayan Griffon, Cinereous vulture, Upland Buzzard, Saker Falcon, Great-necked Chukar, Tibetan Partridge, Large-billed Crow, Red-billed and Yellow-billed Crow, Tibetan Bunting, Tibetan Rosefinch, Pink-tailed Bunting(Przewalski's Bunting), Mongolian Ground Jay, Hume's Ground Pecker, White-rumped Snowfinch, White-winged Snowfinch, Rufous-necked Snowfinches, and some widely spread waterfowls

Vehicle we use: 2 Toyota 4500

### **Books we will use:**

<A Field Guide to the Birds of China>

<A Guide to the Mammals of China>

Accommodation: From comfortable in the city to extremely poor in the wild. It's really difficult to find a place to stay in some of the small town.

Food and Supply: We bought most of our packed food in the bigger towns, while in the smaller towns only very limited choice for supply.

Weather condition: We're lucky to have sunshine almost every day, the temperature can reach to 5°C when the sun rises, and it will drop to -20°C at night. Very windy.

Logistic: We prepared tents, warm sleeping bags, cooking stuff just in case.

Elevation: Starts from 2200M in Xining then climb up to over 4000M in the next day, and most of the days will stay above 4000M, most of people should feel the elevation in the first few days. Ask your doctor for advices before travel.

Language: Tibetan and local Chinese dialect, No English at all.

Best seasons for the mammals watching in this area:

From Sept to Nov

**Rut seasons(collected from internet):**

	Mar	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb
White-lipped Deer								*	*			
Wild Yak							*	*	*			
Tibetan Antelope									*	*		
Tibetan Gazelle										*	*	
Tibetan Argali										*	*	
Przewalski's Gazelle									*	*		
Kiang						*	*					

**Permits:**

Many foreigners are very confused about the use of Tibetan permit in Qinghai Province, We double checked with Qinghai Police Office, They said that you don't need any permit to travel around Qinghai. But we're later stopped by Tibetan Police at the check point out of Golmud, finally we found that the road and railway to Lhasa is now in the charge of Tibetan police, and they do need see your Tibetan Permit if you will travel from Golmud towards Tibet.

For the permit to Ke Ke Xi Li Reserve and Three River Head source Reserve. It's almost impossible for tourists to get a permit for getting into the core area of these two reserves, they're strictly protected by the government, you can only drive on the national road in these reserves, don't even tried to get off the road by walking or driving, the ranger and forest police will fine you and took away your cameras according to the law.

For more information about the permits, you can send me email: [KEVIN-8566@HOTMAIL.COM](mailto:KEVIN-8566@HOTMAIL.COM)

**Itinerary:**

Day 1, Arrive in Xining and get prepared.

Day 2, Xining to Maqin

Day 3, Maqin exploring for Red Deer and White-lipped Deer.  
Day 4, Maqin to Maduo via Huashixia  
Day 5, Maduo to Yushu  
Day 6, Yushu to Nangqian  
Day 7, Nangqian Baizha Forest  
Day 8, Nangqian to Qumalai  
Day 9, Qumalai to Xidatan  
Day 10, Kekexili Reserve  
Day 11, Yeniugou Valley(Wild Yak Valley)  
Day 12, Xidatan to Golmud  
Day 13, Golmud to Xiangride  
Day 14, Xiangride to Qinghai Lake  
Day 15, Qinghai Lake to Xining



**About Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau(from Wiki):**

The Tibetan Plateau is surrounded by massive mountain ranges. The plateau is bordered to the south by the inner Himalayan range, to the north by the Kunlun Range which separates it from the Tarim Basin, and to the northeast by the Qilian Range which separates the plateau from the Hexi Corridor and Gobi Desert. To the east and southeast the plateau gives way to the forested gorge and ridge geography of the mountainous headwaters of the Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze rivers in western Sichuan (the Hengduan Mountains) and southwest Qinghai. In the west the curve of the rugged Karakoram range of northern Kashmir embraces it.

Buddhist stupa and houses outside the town of Aba, on the Tibetan Plateau.

The Tibetan Plateau is bounded on the north by a broad escarpment where the altitude drops from around 5,000 metres (16,000 ft) to 1,500 metres (4,900 ft) in less than 150 kilometres (93 mi). Along the escarpment is a range of mountains. In the west the Kunlun Mountains separate the plateau from the Tarim Basin. About half way across the Tarim the bounding range becomes the Altyn-Tagh and the Kunluns, by convention, continue somewhat to the south. In the 'V' formed by

this split is the western part of the Qaidam Basin. The Altyn-Tagh ends near the Dangjin pass on the Dunhuang-Golmud road. To the west are short ranges called the Danghe, Yema, Shule and Tulai Nanshans. The easternmost range is the Qilian Mountains. The line of mountains continues east of the plateau as the Qin Mountains which separate the Ordos Region from Sichuan. North of the mountains runs the Gansu or Hexi Corridor which was the main silk-road route from China proper to the west.

The plateau is a high-altitude arid steppe interspersed with mountain ranges and large brackish lakes. Annual precipitation ranges from 100 to 300 millimetres (3.9 to 11.8 in) and falls mainly as hailstorms. The southern and eastern edges of the steppe have grasslands which can sustainably support populations of nomadic herdsman, although frost occurs for six months of the year. Permafrost occurs over extensive parts of the plateau. Proceeding to the north and northwest, the plateau becomes progressively higher, colder and drier, until reaching the remote Changthang region in the northwestern part of the plateau. Here the average altitude exceeds 5,000 metres (16,000 ft) and winter temperatures can drop to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $-40^{\circ}\text{F}$ ). As a result of this extremely inhospitable environment, the Changthang region (together with the adjoining Kekexili region) is the least populous region in Asia, and the third least populous area in the world after Antarctica and northern Greenland.



Day 1    Oct 31

We met in Xining(2200M), and bought some food for the next few days. Xining is quite a big town where you can find big shopping malls for most of the things you may need.

Day 2    Nov 01

We started early in the morning heading to Maqin(3730M), 8 hrs driving on very good road, we didn't stop for wildlife too many times, just try to get as far from the civilization as we can. Overnight in Maqin town, hotel is good, with heater, hot shower and most important elevator. What we saw today are: **One Tibetan Fox, 3 Himalayan Griffons, Plain Laughingthrush, Hume's Ground Pecker, Snowfinches and Picas.**



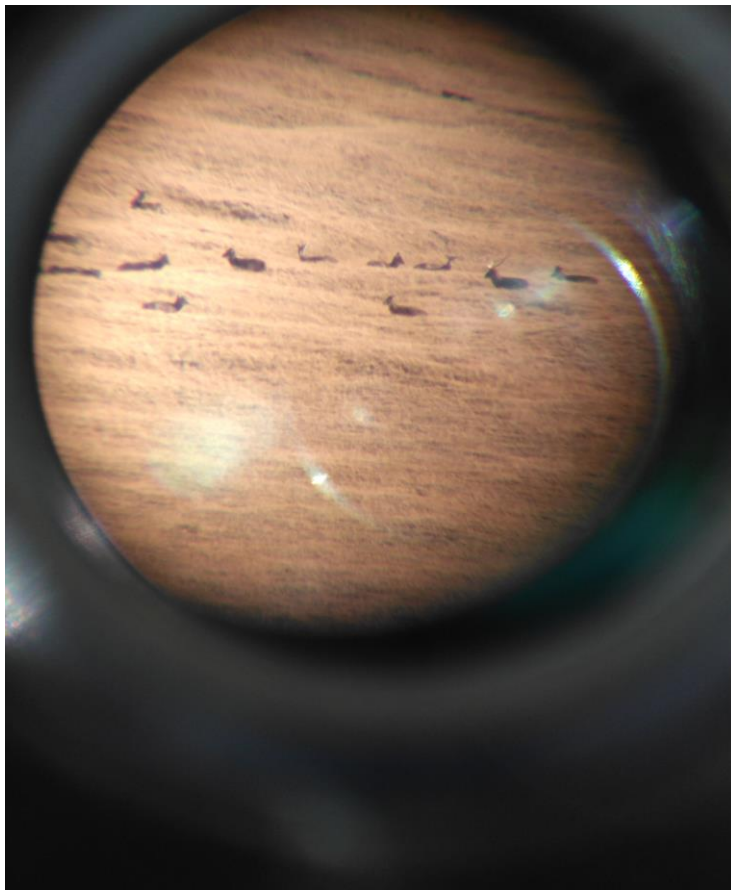
Day 3 Nov 02

It started getting bright at around 7:30, so we left from the hotel at about 6:30. After one hour's driving to Dongqinggou village, we found a deer not far from the road at our first stop, It was a male Red Deer, and we heard at least another 3 male howling in different direction, but couldn't see them in the tall bush. Then we move to another spot (Longitude 99.81422, Latitude:34.60835 ), and we saw **5 groups of Red Deers**, total number is 18. And **a Red fox** at the same place.

In this same area, we checked with the local about the China endemic **White-lipped Deer**, they said around 7:00p.m the deer will move lower down to the valley near the new building highway. So we waited at a highway bridge, and we did saw 15 of them looking at us on the slope of the valley at the eye level. 1 big male, 2 young male and 12 female. They were very curious about us and soon walking away when we tried to get closer(60-70m).

Overnight in a local construction company's room. Heard the howling of Red Deer almost all night, that's the right rut season.





Day 4 Nov 03

We hope to see those White-lipped Deer at the same spot in the early morning but in vain. Then

we headed to Maduo(4200M) via Huashixia. When we climb over the Animaqin Snow Mt Pass, where we saw **50+ female Blue Sheep and 10+ Tibetan Gazelle**,but we didn't stop for them because we know they are common in the places we're going to.

Around the lake of Huashixia is an amazing place for wildlife. We saw **4 wolves** just finished eating, they looks extremely nice with the fresh blood on their face when they standing in the snow field. They were healthy and big, and they soon jumped over the fence in the middle of the road right in front of us and run away to the wild open. Other mammals we saw are **30 Kiangs, 70+ Tibetan Gazelle, 2 Tibetan Fox**. We learned that *around the lake of Huashixia, there is a valley should be one of the best places for Snow Leopard in March and April, and also for Pallas's Cat and Lynx*, but we have no luck for this time.





Day 5 Nov 04

Driving from Maduo to Yushu (330km, 4hrs express way), good road, nice plateau view, we didn't stop for the Kiangs on the way. A lot of upland buzzard(dark form) on the way. Yushu (3700) is a big town where you can find good hotels, internet access and food supply.

Half day resting and shopping.

Day 6 Nov 05

Left from Yushu towards Nangqian, after 1 hr driving, I saw hundreds of big animals on the top of a mountain, after we checked them through binoculars, we got very excited because this is a **huge group of White-lipped Deer. Total 230+, among them there were about 20 males including 5 huge old male!** And one of the oldest female seems have not just a white lip but a white face.

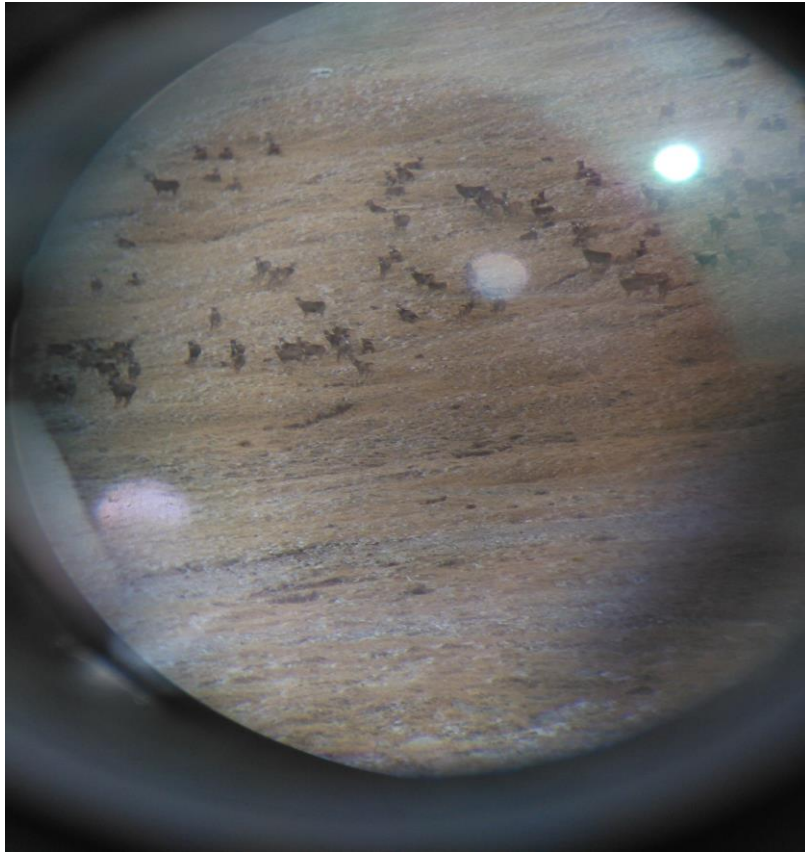
We then spent hours to learn their habit, and we climb up from 4400m to 4700m to the very top of this mountain, we found their safe distance is over 400m.

It was a gorgeous view to see the mountains from the top. 2 local came to us when we're looking at the deers through telescope, they thought we're poachers... After we explained why we're here they told us about what they know about the deers, they said they usually see those deer came to this place from Sept to Dec every year, the number gets to peak in Nov, they are happy to collect the dropped horns in May and sell them. The number of deers are growing due to the protection by the government and local, once they saw poachers they'll immediately report to the police.

**Two Black-necked Crane** flew just above our head. Not very often seeing them in winter in Qinghai.

170km driving to Nangqian for overnight. There should be some *Argali* on the way, but we only





Day 7 Nov 06

Today we explored the Baizha forest 25km away from Nangqian town. No luck for mammals only **20+ Blue sheep**. But very good day for birds, **80+ White-eared pheasants** at the usual place and **40+ Blood pheasants** just off the road. Other nice birds we saw are: **Elliot's Laughingthrush**, **Chinese Babax**, **Streaked Rosefinch**, and the endemic **Tibetan bunting** near Kandashan Pass.



Day 8 Nov 07

A long driving from Nangqian to Qumalai(450km). Today we saw **a wolf** with one leg missing, but still in a good condition, we looked at it for a long time, he can catch the picas with no problem at all, but the Tibetan herd dogs were threaten to him. The local villager told us that some herders are still setting traps or shooting wolves when the wolves get too close to their sheeps or yaks.

Then we saw a **Tibetan fox** are killing picas and he can hold 3 fat picas in the mouth at the same time, that's probably why their face are designed so wild.

Driving into a narrow valley, we saw **11 Tibetan Partridge** standing on the ice and drinking water in the stream.

Before we got to Qumalai town(4200M), we saw **many White-lipped Deers (over 160)** at the usual place on the other side of the valley.

The hotels in Qumalai are all very poor and dirty...

Day 9 Nov 08

Today we drive from Qumalai to Xidatan(360km). Out of Qumalai town, there's a White-lipped Deer farm, after the farm we drive over a mountain pass, and then we started to see many Tibetan Gazelles, Tibetan Foxes and Kiangs all the way to Qumalai. This part of plateau belongs to Sanjiangyuan Reserve(Three River Head Source Reserve), and is very well protected, you can see the whole eco system is very healthy, many raptors and other top predators. In the southwest of

this reserve around Zaduo and Suojia is said to have the highest density of the snow leopard in the world, We hope to try that part in the next trip.

When we were very close to Budongquan, we found **7 male Tibetan Antelope** drinking water together, nice breeding color and amazing reflection in the lake. And we can see some female were in the far end.

Overnight in Xidatan, no guesthouse... I called my friend who's in charge of the Mountaineering School in Xidatan for help, and he let us living in their school rooms, nice warm two beds rooms, but no tapped water because it was frozen...

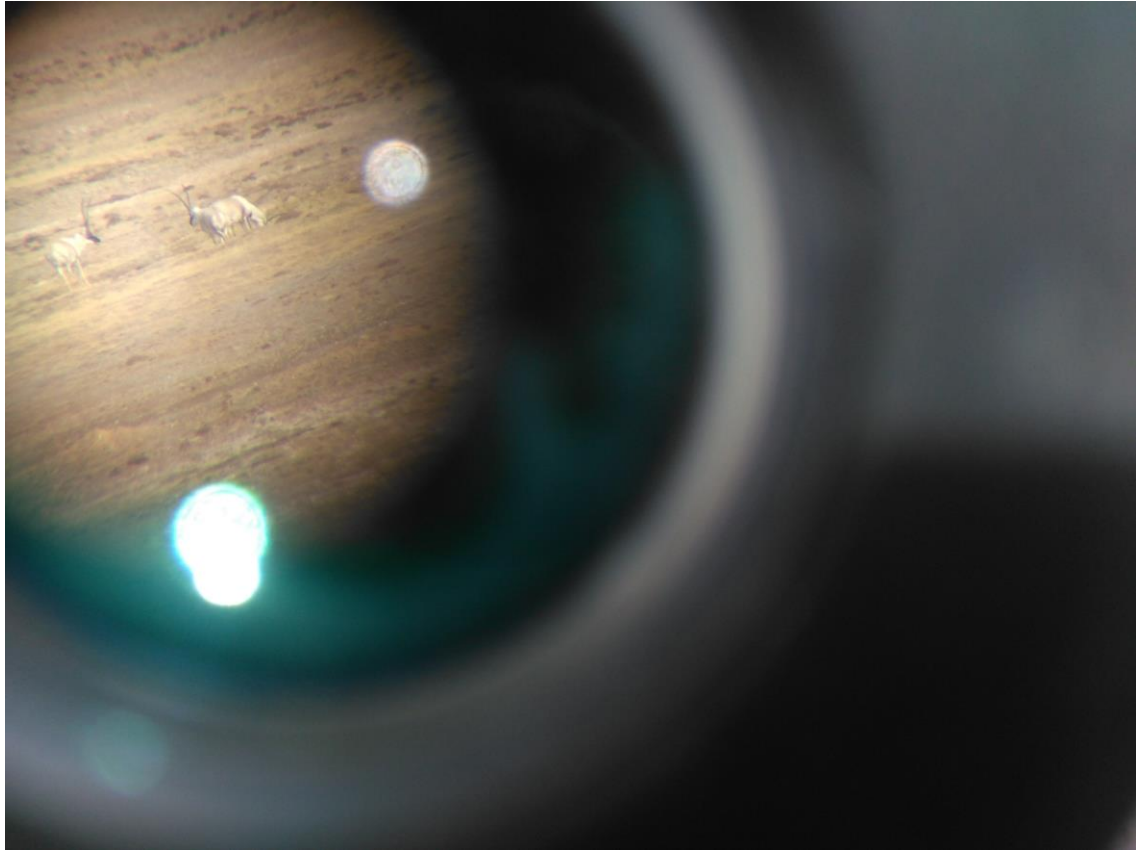
Day 10 Nov 09

We spent a whole day explore the KeKeXiLi and Sanjiangyuan Resrve along Kunlun Pass, Budongquan and Chumar River. We saw **4 wolves and 10+ big wild Yak, 500+ Tibetan Antelopes in Kekexili both male and female and 100+ Tibetan Gazelles**. We tried our best to get approach to those animals as possible, and we found that the female Antelopes don't mind eating near the road, while the males like to keep over 100m from cars and people. We know it might be silly to walking close to the wild yak, but we did standing as close as 50m in front of a giant male with 3 female, and the view in the camera were awesome with the snow mountain as background!

We stopped at the 2 ranger stations for break and information, we learned a lot about the immigration of animals, numbers of each species, when and where to see them, their living habit, and many other useful knowledge about this reserve. Then it was very kind of the ranger took us to **milk the rescued baby antelope** and showed us their **wildlife exhibition room**.







Day 11 Nov 10

We spent a whole day to explore the Wild Yak Valley, the pumping road in the valley make the long driving day very uncomfortable... We read the research reports about this place, thought it should be a very good place for wildlife especially Argali, Yak and even snow leopard, but we



only have limited time along the road, so nothing too excited found today.  
Overnight in Xidatan.





Day 12 Nov 11

Xidatan to Golmud(140km).

The day before, the ranger told us we may see the Argali around the Kunlun Pass, so when we were passing by, we looked very carefully, and we did see 7 **Argalis** near the pass. After that nothing found, we directly headed back to the civilization to Golmud, which is the second biggest city in Qinghai Province. We had a lovely shower and delicious yak meat hot pot in the evening.





Day 13 Nov 12

We went for Goitred Gazelle in the north and east of Golmud, and **20+ Goitred Gazelle** founded near the Wuzi Lake. Then we headed to the next town 400km away --- Xiangride. And we met across the respected Dr George Schaller and his Snow Leopard Team in the same hotel! I'm surprise to see my friend is one of them! We shared some information, and they do saw snow leopard in northwest of Golmud, and they're heading to Wild Yak Valley.



Day 14 Nov 13

A long driving day from Xiangride to North of Qinghai Lake. Birdwatching for **Pink-tailed Bunting(or Przewalski's Bunting)** at the best site in Mt.Xiangpishan before we arrived at our destination, and yes we found one after carefully searching.



Day 15 Nov 14

Once you know where to find the **Przewalski's Gazelles**, it became very easy, because they like to stay at the same place. This Gazelle has the smallest number of all the Chinese Endemic Mammal Species, and also the smallest number of the Even-toed mammals in the world! There use to be only around 300 left in the world due to poaching and lost of habitat, and now the government set a place as their reserve, although it's small and seems not very serious, it did help the gazelles number reach to over 1000. The rut is in the end of Nov. We totally saw **300+ Przewalski's Gazelles** in a small region. The looks strong and good at running, but I heard that they're not very good jumpers, so some of them were hurt or killed by the fence... Or killed by the wolves and foxes by the fence because they can't jump over...

After the nice time with Gazelles, we drove back to Xining in the evening. Tour Ended.



