

Michel GERVAIS gervais.michel@wanadoo.fr

From 23/04/2016 to 13/05/2016 with my wife we visited Uzbekistan. Our targets were tulips, mammals and 3 historic cities.

With the very clement winter Uzbekistan experienced this year, there was a month of delay to see tulips in bloom in the desert !

No problem for the monuments ! Regardless of the weather report they are always there !

For mammals we knew that it would be difficult ! We had found neither trip report nor book to help us prepare...

Another complication : nature conservation is not a priority for Uzbekistan. Hunting seems to be a common practice, if it is not poaching !

For example in the historic city of Khiva, tourists buy Caps made of skin of wolf, fox and snow leopard !!!!

Other complication : as a foreigner you are obliged to stay in accredited accommodations, which do not exist outside tourist zone ! Entering reserves and parks is very difficult for tourist and in some case it is forbidden !

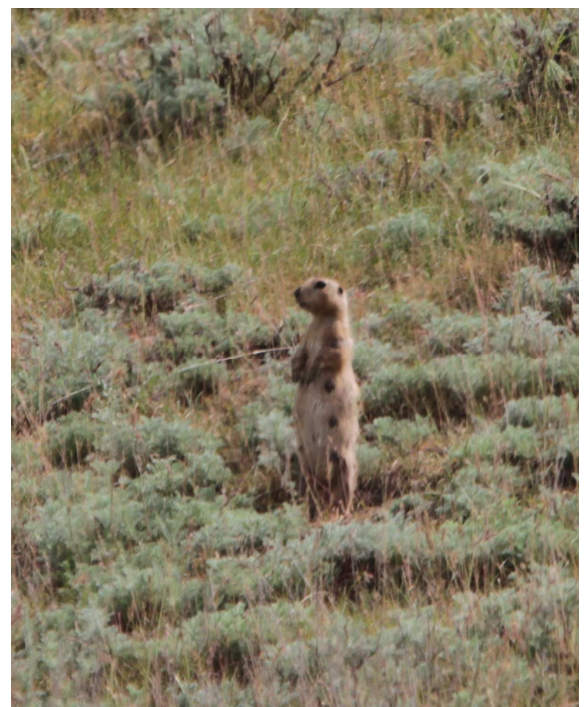
So we contacted a local travel Agency and specially Salokhiddin who is not a naturalist but very interested in wildlife (for more informations please contact me). For mammals, he planned for us a trip 130 km north of Uchquduq with hunters, staying first near Aydarkul lake, then in moutains of Nouratau and finally in Chimgan (Foothills of the mountain Thian Chan).

**Thian Chan** was in the clouds during the 3 days of our visit. So we don't see any mammals except one little rodent with very long incisors that was not identified !

In **Nouratau** we stayed in Hayat near the reserve of Nuratinsky which unfortunately we were not authorized to enter ! On crests we were able to observe several Argali (*Ovis severtzovi*). The first night I tried a night walk. But the owner of the guest house stopped me quickly – I had just enough time to take picture of Eurasian Scops Owl. We negociated to look at porcupine's hole that are numerous in the valley ! We easely find one occupied and wait 3 hours in the night. Nothing except two yapping of fox !



Argali (*Ovis severtzovi*). Picture took in a paddok near the guest house.



On the road from Navoiy to Nurota (Qoratov Hills), in the first bend North of the pass, some Long tailed Marmot (*Marmota caudata*) near their holes.



Near **Aydarkul lake**, no mammal during a night walk ! In the morning some Jerboa, perhaps Northern tree toed Jerboa (*Dipus sagitta* cf) jump near their holes.

Little cat left tracks on the sand.

**Uchquduq** : On the road est of Uchquduq, and after mid day, many Yellow Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus fulvus*).

We left at night the town of Uchquduq to the north (road N° 4P211). During more than 1 hour many small mammals crossed the road (1 on average every 30 seconds) : Great Jerboa, and others species of gerboa and gerbil, voles, shrews, rats, mice, hares (perhaps *Lepus capensis ssp tolai*) and two Long eared Hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*).

At midnight we arrived near a yurt. After a meal, the shepherd accompanied us on off road drive with strong light... We saw 4 Turmen Gazelle (*Gazella gracilicornis*), 1 fox sp and 1 Pallas's Cat (*Felix manul*). Unfortunately our guides were hunters that wanted to charge at animals : it was the first time they accompagnied tourists ! So we did not have the pleasure to admire animals !!

Hunters said : wolf very rare, last migration of Saïga in winter in 1990s .



Yellow Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus fulvus*)



Long eared Hedgehog (*Hemiechinus auritus*)



Turmen Gazelle (*Gazella gracilicornis*)