

A short mammal trip to Sichuan 8th – 18th Nov 2015

Phil Telfer

This trip was arranged at fairly short notice with Sid Francis, who can be contacted at chengduuk@hotmail.com.

The main purpose was to try to see Chinese Mountain Cat which Sid has now seen four or five times on the edge of the Tibetan Plateau to the north of Rouergai. We were joined on the trip by Steve Morgan and the flexible itinerary ended up as follows;

9th – Tangjiahe

10th – Tangjiahe

11th – Rouergai

12th – Rouergai

13th – Day - Baxi Night – Jiuzhaigou

14th – Baihe (Golden Snub-nosed Monkey site)

15th – Tangjiahe

16th – Tangjiahe

17th – Chengdu Airport Hotel

Monday 9th Nov

We were met by Sid mid-morning at Chengdu airport for the five hour drive up to Tangjiahe and it took most of the first hour driving to clear the smog of the Chengdu basin. Once through the park entrance we encountered several Golden Takin before reaching the hotel for a two-night stay. Spotting the 15 kilometre main road between the entrance and the hotel over several runs produced the following;

Reeve's Muntjac – *Muntiacus reevesi*

Golden Takin – *Budorcus taxicolor*

Chinese Goral – *Naemorhedus griseus*

Masked Palm Civet – *Paguma larvata*

Chinese Serow – *Capricornis milneedwardsii*

Tufted Deer – *Elaphodus cephalophus*

Forest Musk Deer – *Moschus berezovskii*

Hog Badger – *Arctonyx collaris*

Malayan Porcupine – *Hystrix brachyuran*

Confucian Niviventer – *Niviventer confucianus*

Chinese Ferret Badger – *Melogale moschata*

Leopard Cat – *Prionailurus bengalensis*

Daytime mammal watching is on the slow side apart from groups of Tibetan Macaques, the odd Takin, Muntjac and Wild Boar. Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys are around but difficult to find but the place does come alive at night and is a fantastic mammal watching destination.



Tibetan Macaque



Takin

Wed 11th

Today we drove up to Rouergai (six to seven hours) which sits at around 3500m and after checking in to our hotel we headed out towards the grasslands and straight into a snow blizzard. We decided to wait it out a while and after the snow eased we had a superb night, with quite a few Tibetan Foxes some unidentified eye shine of a possible cat and then our first Chinese Mountain cat sat up on a large rock pile. We climbed onto a small hillock and set scopes up and watched the cat for nearly an hour in the bitter cold, pressure now well and truly off.

On our second night out the cat was back in almost the same spot and really not too concerned about our approaching to within about 100m to try for some photos. The cat was surprisingly large and we could clearly see the prominent ear tufts.



Chinese Mountain Cat



During the day Plateau Pika were everywhere, we found many Tibetan foxes, some very distance Tibetan gazelles and a lone Tibetan wolf found through the scope by Sid at great range.

After two days and nights at Rougerai we had a change of scenery and a day at Baxi which is an excellent site for a range of ungulates. Scanning the hilltops for several hours from early morning found us Tufted Deer, Serow, Siberian Roe Deer and Sika Deer. This is also a good spot for Gansu Pika and Sid has seen Yellow Throated Marten here.

Mammals seen at Rouergai/Baxi;

Red Fox – *Vulpes vulpes*

Tibetan Fox – *Vulpes ferrilata*

Plateau Pika – *Ochotona curzoniae*

Chinese Mountain Cat – *Felis bieti*

Tibetan Gazelle – *Procapra picticaudata*

Tibetan Wolf – *Canis Lupus*

Woolly Hare – *Lepus oiostolus*

Chinese Serow – *Capricornis milneedwardsii*

Tufted Deer – *Elaphodus cephalophus*

Siberian Roe Deer – *Capeolus pygargus*

Sika Deer – *Cervus Nippon*

Mid-afternoon we left Baxi to drive towards our next site and a two-night stay around Jiuzhaigau. Around half an hour drive from here Sid now has a site for Golden Snub-nosed monkey at a place called Baihe. We met up with our guide for the day, Mr Tang and followed him for a toughish three hour trek up into the mountains. Eventually we emerged into a clearing in the fabulous forest with stunning scenery all around us and this was the scanning area for the monkeys. We had all started to think that this was needle in a haystack time but then Sid announced he'd found the monkeys through the scope. There were five in total and very distant but we watched them for maybe an hour and were very pleased to have seen these truly wild monkeys having talked about the idea of driving ten hours to Foping to see the habituated monkeys there.

For the last couple of nights we decided to head back to Tangjiahe and a stop on one of the high passes managed to produce Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel in a patch of conifer forest. We also found a freshly dead Siberian Weasel in the road, this was a lovely orange colour and would love to have seen a live one. Just before reaching Tangjiahe a couple of Perny's Long-Nosed Squirrels ran across the road and during the day in the park we found Pere David's Rock Squirrel. For our last day at Tangjiahe and a change of tactic we tried a pre-dawn spotlighting run to see if this would turn up anything different. A big bonus for us on this drive was the Chinese Ferret Badger and we also got our only Leopard Cat.

Overall we had a great trip, Sid knows the sites for the mammals and he puts in a tremendous effort and will stay out as late as you like. He also provides all food, with flasks of tea and coffee to take out with you and also travels with a hot plate and toaster and sets up a mini kitchen in the hotel room which was really useful and avoids wasting hours sitting around in restaurants.

Other mammals seen;

Wild Boar – *Sus scrofa*

Tibetan Macaque – *Macaca thibetana*

Golden Snub-Nosed Monkey – *Rhinopithecus roxellana*

Swinoe's Striped Squirrel – *Tamiops swinhoei*

Pere David's Rock Squirrel – *Sciurotamias davidianus*

Perny's Long-Nosed Squirrel – *Dremomys pernyi*