

## **China: Qinghai and Tangjiahe – August 2014**

*Report by Sjef Öllers*

This Qinghai tour was my second China trip this year. The mammalwatching went pleasingly well with all major targets seen; highlights in Qinghai included wolf, argali, wild yak, Alpine musk deer, and white-lipped deer but mammal sighting of the trip was a female Pallas's cat with two kittens. In Tangjiahe Nature Reserve in Sichuan white-maned serow, Chinese goral and tufted deer could be added to the list. Birds had to take the back seat on this tour but we still managed to see favourites such as Przewalski's pinktail, Ala Shan redstart, Kozlow's bunting, Roborowski's rosefinch, Pallas's sandgrouse, black-necked crane and Kozlow's Babax. A major dip was Tibetan Sandgrouse.



*The Prince of Darkness*

## Itinerary

July 29	Flight Amsterdam - Chengdu
July 30	Arrival Chengdu – Drive to Tianqian
July 31	Morning: Erlangshan – drive to Daofu
August 1	Daofu – Garze – Serxu
August 2	Serxu – Yushu and afternoon G308/4500 m pass west of Yushu
August 3	Daytrip south of Yushu
August 4	Yushu – Nangqian
August 5	Nangqian - Yushu via Kanda Shan Pass and grand detour
August 6	Yushu – Zhiduo / Afternoon visit Gongsu Monastery area
August 7	Drive to Suojia
August 8	Suojia area – return to “Canyon area”
August 9	drive back to Zhiduo and afternoon Zhiduo-Qumalai
August 10	Daytrip west of Qumalai
August 11	Qumalai - Budongquan
August 12	Budongquan – Wild Yak Valley
August 13	Wild Yak Valley
August 14	Wild Yak Valley - Golmud
August 15	Golmud – Dulan
August 16	Dulan – Ala Shan Redstart Site – Rubber Mountains – Chaka
August 17	Chaka – Rubber Mountains – Heimahe – Gangcha
August 18	Gangcha – Gonghe – Xinghai
August 19	Morning Telzong Monastery – Afternoon Xinghai Area
August 20	Morning Er La Pass – Afternoon Xinghai Area
August 21	Xinghai – Xining - Huzhu Beishan
August 22	Morning Huzhu Beishan – Afternoon: drive to Lintao
August 23	Lintao - Tangjiahe
August 24	Tangjiahe nature reserve
August 25	Tangjiahe nature reserve
August 26	Morning Tangjiahe –Afternoon Chengdu area
August 27	Flight home



*Xinghai: the canyon west of the city*

## Travel Information

The main inspiration to do this trip was [Coke Smith's report Wildlife of the Tibetan Plateau](#). In particular the pictures of the incredible landscapes made me want to visit this part of China, even more so than the great wildlife photos in the report. It is also one of the few reports on this part of China that provides useful mammalwatching and travel information for this area.

A slow but pleasant way of driving up to the Tibetan plateau from Chengdu is taking the Ya'an-Kangding-Maniganggo-Serxu-Yushu road. Great scenery but there is always the risk that the authorities close complete districts in this region because from one day to another they could decide that the political situation is too volatile. We were lucky to drive up the plateau along this route without real problems; we only lost 5-6 hours one day due to roadworks. If very unlucky, you may have no other option than to return to Chengdu and take the much less interesting route east and then north up to Lanzhou/Xining, but the easy alternative is of course simply doing a round trip from Xining.

Driving in China is a fairly unpleasant experience and even in the relatively thinly populated Qinghai province there is not much room for complacency on the main highways and motorways in summer when there are a lot of tourists on the road. In particular, the Lhasa-Golmud highway and the S109 south of Koko Nor were very busy and sometimes dangerous to drive. "Do not assume that Chinese drivers will follow any rule you know" says the entertaining paragraph "Danger" on Wikitravel ([http://wikitravel.org/en/Driving\\_in\\_China](http://wikitravel.org/en/Driving_in_China)), which turned out to be pretty accurate.

Apart from the death-defying driving habits, we saw several accidents that were the result of the irresponsible and often insane way that roadworks are organized (unfinished bridges without roadblocks or clearly marked detours, roads that suddenly end in a mud or brick wall, etc., etc.). Getting involved in a car accident is a real risk (we narrowly escaped several times), but there is not much you can do to avoid the insanity on Chinese roads other than to drive conservatively and just give in all the time.

Pretty much every major road in Qinghai seemed under some form of construction or upgrading. Even the formerly quiet unpaved road from Qumalai to Budongquan was undergoing a major revision/expansion and had a lot of lorry traffic.

Our guide was David Brent from the British TV series The Office; the Wikipedia entry on David Brent is disturbingly accurate in summarizing the experiences with our guide:

*David Brent is the type of ~~boss~~ guide who wants to be a friend and mentor to those who ~~work~~ travel for him. He imagines his ~~workers~~ clients find him very funny and enjoy his company, while still respecting him and looking up to him as a ~~boss~~ guide, even a fatherly figure. However, ~~his employees~~ these clients generally find him pretentious, arrogant and mean. <> Much of the comedy and pathos of ~~the series~~ our trip centered on Brent's many idiosyncrasies, hypocrisies, self-delusions and self-promotion. <> A key aspect of the character of Brent is his obliviousness to how other people actually see him, causing him to lash out whenever the veil of ignorance and vanity he maintains is pierced.*

But all "fun" aside, in the last fifteen years I have never travelled with a guide so complacent, conceited and at the same time so stunningly underprepared. He was an excellent birdwatcher, good in explaining the diagnostic features of a particular species, up to date with recent splits, etc. but this sole positive aspect was in stark contrast with pretty much every other aspect of his guiding. I was extremely disappointed with his planning before and during the trip. Simple logistic issues and basic route finding were often dealt with in an amateurish way or not dealt with at all. The fact that he couldn't read Chinese characters didn't help, but would have been easy to overcome since there are very simple



solutions around this problem with modern communication media. Only a few days into the trip it was also clear that he had very little information on where to see which animals or in some cases he didn't know which animals to look for. So he was close to useless as a mammal guide. Even the sites that he had visited before he did not know very well and he hadn't studied trip reports on the region at all apart from the one or two that I had mentioned to him. If you have the opportunity as a guide to see at least 5-10 mammal megalifers and visit lots of new sites on a client-paid trip, a bit of tour planning and preparation does not seem out of place. Another aspect of his guiding that I found tiring (and often unfounded) was the constant bickering about Chinese, Tibetans, etc.; he really seemed to have a severe case of "bitter expat syndrome". And the above is just the tip of the iceberg, but let's stop here. Please contact me privately ([sollers-at-outlook.com](mailto:sollers-at-outlook.com)) if you want to hear my two cents on guiding alternatives and how to plan a trip to this region.

### **Timing/Weather**

This year we unfortunately could only travel in August, which also in China is one of the main holiday periods. An advantage of travelling in August is that everything looks lush and green, even the steppe and desert areas were quite colourful. In addition, a lot of mammals had young and there are still a lot of flowers in bloom. However, birds were already moulting into winter/non-breeding plumage and many were quite unresponsive to calls.

June to August are the months with the highest rainfall in Qinghai, and we indeed had quite a lot of rain. In the Yushu-Nangqian area, it luckily rained at night and early in the morning, but by midmorning it was usually sunny again. On the high plateau between Yushu and Wild Yak Valley we had rain on most days and sometimes snow. Bad weather days were more frequent than I had hoped/expected, but I am not sure if it really affected mammal sightings. The only two days that were really spoiled by rain/bad weather was the day we went to Er La and the day we drove out of the Suojia area back to Zhiduo.



*Tibetan monks en route*

## Health

The main health issue in this area is altitude sickness. I luckily didn't have too much problems with the altitude, but my wife unfortunately did at the beginning of the trip. I took ibuprofen on the second day, but this actually made me sick and I got all the symptoms I was trying to avoid (dizziness, palpitations, shortness of breath, extreme headache, etc.) but I am sure this was caused by the ibuprofen, to which I often react quite badly. But it seemed to work for our guide, so it's worth a try. The next day at higher altitude I took nothing and felt much, much better. When my wife got altitude sickness, she started taking Diamox, which helped a lot and she started to feel better quickly. I also took half a Diamox pill in Yushu (partly to see how I would react to it) but in my case it made the headaches and palpitations worse, so throughout the rest of trip I used nothing at all and felt fine. Still, you will feel the altitude: shortness of breath and a high pulse are unavoidable if you do anything beyond sitting or walking slowly.

Food poisoning is relatively easy to avoid and we had no problems at all. We even ate quite a lot of salads in places where the hygienic standard appeared to be good. The food is sometimes a little oily or greasy, which occasionally gave mild stomach problems (heavy stomach, etc.), but never anything like diarrhoea. In most places the food was delicious, but like in most Asian countries they would sometimes overdose on MSG, which gave an unpleasant food-on-steroids taste.



*Kiang*

## Accommodation

When I was writing this report, Steve Morgan published a great Qinghai [report](#) and his comments on the hotels pretty much sum up our experiences as well. In general there seemed to be a price/quality optimum in the 180-300 Yuan range in the bigger cities (e.g.,

Yushu, Golmud, Dulan, Xinghai), where there was enough competition to keep prices moderate. In the bigger towns you get a business-hotel-type room in this price range, although you never know which facilities will actually work or not, but usually these were the more pleasant places to stay. The cheaper hotels in smaller towns were typically <200 Yuan per room and varied incredibly in cleanliness, the toilet and other bathroom facilities, the presence/absence of running water and electricity, noise, etc. It is basically hit and miss, and often you have little choice in smaller towns, but it was never really awful. Nangqian and Chaka appear to be bottleneck areas in August with lots of tourists and only a limited number of half-decent hotels, so prices were inflated here. Just like Steve Morgan reports, the place in Budongquan is interesting on many levels, but for one night it's okay. The above prices relate to the holiday/summer season. Hotels were in general much cheaper in April, when it was clearly low season.

## Literature

See my Sichuan trip report (April 2014) on <http://www.mammalwatching.com> or [www.cloudbirders.com](http://www.cloudbirders.com) for information on books and field guides. There still aren't many informative trip reports for Qinghai. Jesper Hornskov has published a lot of reports for this region, which provide a good indication of which mammals and birds you can expect to see but they are of little practical use. Apart from the ones already mentioned, I found these reports useful:

- Greentours, *Mammals of the roof of the world*, trip report 2012, <http://www.greentours.co.uk/doc/Trip%20Report%20Mammals%20of%20the%20Roof%20of%20the%20World%202012%20edited.pdf>
- George Wagner, May/June 2005, quite old but still useful <http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/china/Tibet1/tibet-2005.htm>
- Stig Holmstedt, May 31 – June 19, 2013, NE Tibet – Qinghai (Swedish), <http://www.club300.se/Files/TravelReports/Tibet2013.pdf>
- DOF Travel, Northeast Tibet, May 2012 (Danish), <http://doftravel.dk/sites/default/files/NordostTibetMaj2012.pdf>



*Tibetan Antelope*



## Day-to-day Accounts

### July 29-30: Flight Amsterdam – Chengdu; Drive to Tianqian

Things got off to a very pleasant start when KLM upgraded us to business class. Superb food and service! From the airport we drove south to Ya'an and then Tianqian, where we stayed the night. The drive was uneventful with no notable sightings to report. Torrential rain all afternoon and evening in Tianqian.

### July 31: Morning: Erlangshan – Kangding – Daofu (aka Dawu or Tawu)

In the morning we made a longer birding stop at Erlang Shan. Just like in April we had dreary overcast weather. The birding was okay with the most notable birds being chestnut thrush, yellow-browed tit, collared finchbill, Sichuan leaf-warbler, sulphur-breasted warbler, Chinese babax, stripe-throated yuhina, yellow-throated bunting, grey-headed bullfinch and best of all a white-browed shrike-babbler, but only the guide saw a female Lady Amherst pheasant disappear in the scrub.

We stopped for lunch in Kangding, which is quite a big town. Traffic in the town centre was a little hysterical because of the large number of Chinese tourists in August. The second part of the day took us through an agricultural area with very pleasant scenery but no mammals and mostly common birds. Most interesting birds were Brandt's mountain-finch, long-tailed rosefinch, and Daurian redstart. The Tibetans in this area live in pretty richly decorated houses; they "specialize" in agriculture and are more sedentary, but most of them still have unsustainable numbers of yaks. We slept in a simple but okay hotel in a small town in Daofu county.



*Typical scenery on the Kangding – Daofu – Garze route*

### August 1: Daofu – Garze (aka Kandze) – Maniganggo – Serxu (aka Shiqu, Sershul, Dzachuka, or Sêrxü)

Another travel day through beautiful scenery. The towns were getting smaller, the scenery more impressive and the countryside a little wilder, and unsurprisingly the first mammals started to appear. Unfortunately our first mammal encounter was a fresh roadkill of an Asian badger.

A piercing call along a river sounded like a Himalayan marmot but turned out to be a pair of ibisbills. Nice to tick these birds so early in the trip. At the ibisbill stop we also spotted a

rock-dwelling pika, which I think was a Glover's pika. Later in the day we also saw our first plateau pikas.



*Scenery along G317 east of Garze, Kharsar Tso Lake*

We stopped for lunch in Maniganggo, a bit of a wild-west town with a dirty and unappealing looking “official tourist hotel”. The hotel claimed to have no toilet, which seemed to be correct when we checked ourselves. The staff advised us to go to the police station! This unattractive option was rejected (passport checks, why are you here questions, etc.) so we just trained our bladder muscles for a bit longer.

We were making really good progress today and were even considering driving all the way to Yushu, but at some nondescript hamlet in the middle of nowhere we were suddenly halted by a roadblock. Initially we feared that the police had closed down the complete road because of political unrest further down the road, but when I scanned along the road I noticed that they were just paving the road. It would have been ridiculously simple to organize the traffic in such a way that you would let cars pass from one side for five minutes and the other side for the next five minutes. Not here; for a lousy stretch of road, at best one kilometre long, they just closed down the road and made people wait in their cars for an undetermined period of time. After an hour of waiting I guesstimated how much they had paved in an hour. After estimating how much was still left to do, it looked like we were going to be stuck another three hours, so I suggested to drive back a bit and do some birding close to the road. After parking the car we crossed the river into the valley over a log bridge. We must already have been at a pretty high altitude because the thin air was very noticeable here. The birding was not sensational but nice enough. Above the cliffs two golden eagles were hunting and in the shrub next to the river we found yellow-streaked warbler, Eurasian cuckoo, grey-backed shrike, the first Kessler's thrushes, Siberian stonechat, Hodgson's redstart, white-browed tit-warbler, and pink-rumped rosefinch. Along the rocky hill slopes we tried for Tibetan partridge but no luck!

After about four hours the road was finally re-opened. Traffic after a long delay is a guaranteed worst-case driving scenario in China, because making up lost time translates into



absolutely everybody on both sides of the road driving like they have an exceptionally strong death wish.



*Scenery between Maniganggo and Serxu*

Driving to Yushu was clearly out of the question and we were afraid that finding a place to sleep was going to be a problem. En route we saw our first red fox, but we didn't stop and decided to push on. Just when it looked like we were starting to make good progress again and would reach Serxu, the next town of any size, at a decent time, we ran into another roadblock and yet again they were just paving the road. Luckily we realized relatively quickly that there was a detour around this roadblock. The detour was partly a bumpy track, partly just cross-country driving over what was supposedly a motorcycle track through the grasslands. This cost us another extra 1.5-2 hours.

Inevitably we arrived in Serxu long after dark. Initially, as expected, it looked like every half-way decent hotel was fully booked and we were mentally preparing ourselves for some rough camping. After a while we finally found the last rooms in a cheap hotel. We were both too tired to fully realize that we would be sleeping at 4200m when we finally settled in our rooms.

#### **August 2: Serxu – Yushu and afternoon G308/4500 m pass**

Despite a rather restless night and unusually vivid dreams I woke up feeling quite okay with only a persistent but mild headache and moderate palpitations, but my wife was really suffering from altitude sickness. Her headache had gotten worse and she felt miserable and nauseous. Unfortunately, the road out of Serxu was really bumpy the first couple of hours, and this made my wife feel even worse. Our guide's considerate comment was "If you throw up in the car, you can clean up yourself." He was probably trying to be funny, but rather off the mark. My wife started to look paler and paler and we still had a long way to go, but we had no choice but to continue. Yushu was by far the lowest point for an overnight stop. During a mammals scanning stop my wife couldn't hold it any longer and she had to throw up. After that we tried to drive to Yushu with as little delay as possible. We passed through

some excellent scenery that would have deserved more exploration but we still managed to see our first Tibetan fox, four red foxes, a group of Tibetan gazelles and woolly hare.



*Tibetan Fox*

During a short stop at Anbala Pass (4700m according to the sign, 4580m on my altimeter; 33°08' 24"N and 97°29'55"E) we admired the magnificent scenery and did a couple of short birding stops in that area (streaked rosefinch, twite, rufous-necked snowfinch, plain mountain-finch, robin accentor, brown accentor, and Himalyan rubythroat).



*The last high pass (Anbala Pass) on the S307/S217 before connecting with the G214*



After the pass we descended steeply down to the G214 and continued through a broad valley over a good road to Yushu. We arrived in Yushu around lunchtime. Our hotel on the main drag with a male white-lipped deer in the lobby turned out to be very nice, although asking for a room in the back added another 30 minutes to the check-in procedure. The oxygen-rich air in Yushu really helped and my wife started to get some colour back on her face. I convinced my wife to eat some lunch, which luckily worked out fine, but after lunch she stayed in the hotel room to recover.

After lunch the guide and I made an afternoon excursion to the first pass on the S308 west of Yushu (4500m, the sign on the road says 4600 m I think, 33°07'35"N and 96°43'06"E). We explored a track a few kilometres below the pass, which starts at 33°08'28"N and 96°43'46"E. Best birds were brown and robin accentor plus a couple of lifers for me: Tibetan snowfinch and Henri's snowfinch.

On the way back we visited a scenic valley that looked good for deer and the odd mustelid, but we only saw woolly hare, plateau pika and Himalayan marmot. Don't hold me to this but I am fairly sure that the entrance road to the valley starts more or less at 33°04'N and 96°50'E. If coming from Yushu you can enter this valley by taking an unpaved road to the left just before the main road (S308) starts climbing up the pass. When we were there were roadworks in this area, they are building a tunnel through the mountains for the new motorway, so if you are coming from Yushu and you see the tunnel entrance, look to the left and you see the entrance to a lush green valley (at least in summer the valley was much greener than the surrounding areas).



*Woolly Hare*

### **August 3: Daytrip south of Yushu**

After a good night's rest at lower altitude and with the positive effects of the Diamox pills kicking in, my wife felt a lot better and joined us for today's exploratory trip. Our guide had



no mammal or birding information for this area, so we decided to just drive and see what we would find.

From Yushu city centre we drove south on the G214. Once you get close to the airport, the road makes a right turn (to the west) and you traverse a high plain, which should be good for Tibetan Fox and Tibetan Gazelle early in the morning and at dusk. The mammals seemed concentrated at the far (western) end of the plain. Eventually you climb to a pass at about 4500m (32°53'N, 96°41'E). The pass area is worth a quick stop for birds and we checked the rockier areas opposite and below the pass for mammals, but found nothing.



*Saker Falcon*

If you continue on the G214 beyond the 4500m pass, the road splits only several kilometres later. To the left you go to Nangqian (still on the G214). Straight on/to the right the road continues to a town called Zhadoi. If you continue on the road to Zhadoi (S309), you will almost immediately see a wetland to your right (Tibetan fox, black-necked crane, ruddy shelduck, and waders). Only about 1-2 km after the turn-off there is a very obvious well-graded track branching off on the left side of the S309. Take this track and on the first stretch check for both fox species. After a few kilometres, there is a small settlement and

beyond that you will see proper mountains (we had griffon and bearded vulture, golden eagle, saker and blue sheep in this area, but allegedly deer species and snow leopard also occur). About a kilometre beyond the village, the road branches again. If you drive straight on you will reconnect with the G214. If you turn to the right towards higher mountains, you pass through an interesting mountainous area on a good track that eventually reconnects with the S309. We had rain here and didn't see much, but the area looks good for red deer and possibly also white-lipped deer occurs and we did see our only Tibetan grey shrikes of the trip here.

If you don't take the S309, but continue on the G214 you will soon drive into a scenic area with narrow canyons (blue sheep, snow pigeon). The next 15-20 km leads through beautiful mountain scenery, which can be scanned from the road. Even better is to take one or more of the many tracks that lead into the mountain valleys. One good road to try is the area around the first village with a large monastery after the S309/G214 junction. I can't remember how far the village with the monastery is from the junction but it must be something like 45-60 minutes driving. However, the village is impossible to miss since it is the first proper town/village after the junction. In the village you will first see the monastery on the right side of the road (photo below). Continue maybe a kilometre and look for a bridge across the river. Directly after crossing the bridge turn left and continue on a good track into an obvious mountain valley. This road leads to a small village with a small monastery run by nuns, who invited us for tea. This area looks good for deer, but we only found several large groups of blue sheep (including a 150+ group).

Any drivable and interesting looking track that leads into these mountains is probably worth trying. According to the locals (at least those that gave somewhat credible sounding answers), snow leopard, brown bear, white-lipped deer, argali and McNeill's red deer are all still around.



*Temple of a monastery between Yushu and Nangqian on the G214*

#### **August 4: Yushu – Nangqian**

Today we took the direct route (G214) to the Nangqian area, but we did check out a track into a mountain valley that starts at the kilometre marker G214-896. The track into the valley is a bit strange in the beginning because you have to keep to the right first and loop

around a low hill to get into the obvious mountain valley. We only drove in several kilometres and our first scanning stop immediately produced McNeill's red deer and blue sheep.

We then continued to the scenic region around Nangqian. Here we explored the Kanda Shan pass area. The target birds, Kozlow's babax and Kozlow's bunting, were found quickly. At the pass area we found several groups of blue sheep, some of which were very close to the road. We continued beyond the pass (magnificent scenery) for about 10-15 kilometres, but found little of note, although the area looked interesting enough to explore in more detail tomorrow.

Nangqian town was a crazy mess (lots of tourists). The two main hotels were fully booked. So we had to relocate to a place deeper into town. The place was basic but the Tibetan family running the place was very friendly. Since I had already seen most of the birds that occur in Beizha Forest on the April trip, we decided to stay only one night in Nangqian and focus on the mammals and birds in the Kanda Shan area.



*Blue Sheep at Kanda Shan pass*

#### **August 5: Nangqian to Yushu via Kanda Shan Pass and grand detour**

We left the hotel when it was still dark. After narrowly escaping a full-on collision with a horse on the G214 just outside of town we headed back to the Kanda Shan pass area. On the pass we scanned the highest mountain ridges for blue sheep, argali and snow leopard, but only found blue sheep. We decided to follow the road beyond the pass assuming that a 2-3 hour detour would eventually bring us back on the G214.

I am still not sure which route we took exactly but after the descent from the Kanda Shan pass the road eventually leads to a small town with a monastery called Zurmang Namgyeese. Just after this town we followed a road to the left along the river for a while until we got to a bridge. We crossed the bridge and then took a left turn (which was probably a mistake if you want to be back on the G214 sooner; you should probably stay on the other side of the river) and did not continue to the nearby Khartin monastery, which is well worth the visit according to four friendly Belgian tourists that we met that day. (Note: I couldn't find both monastery names on Google Maps/Earth, but a bilingual sign at the turn-off on the G214 for the Kanda Shan road showed these names for the monasteries).



Despite seeing very little mammals, this exploratory route was great and led through fantastic scenery. En route we also found a few small patches of forest. White-browed tit, pink-rumped rosefinch, white-throated redstart, blue-fronted redstart and giant laughing-thrush were some of the better sightings here. In the end we drove for hours and hours on all kinds of roads in the remote hinterland between Nangqian and Yushu to end up near Yushu airport in the late afternoon.



*Kanda Shan pass area*

#### **August 6: Yushu – Zhidui (Zhiduo)/Afternoon visit Gongsu Monastery area**

The weather was awful all morning (low clouds, cold, and non-stop rain). Consequently we did not see much the first half of the day. This was particularly annoying when we drove past a large wetland that looked like it would have deserved several longer scanning sessions with the scope. Still, a few quick stops produced Tibetan fox, black-necked crane, and several wader species. Only once we got close to Zhiduo, the weather suddenly improved significantly, and the rest of the day it was sunny.

In the afternoon we explored the area around Gongsu monastery, which is only about 13 km from Zhiduo. On a riverbank near the monastery I noticed three large brown loglike objects that turned out to be white-lipped deer (two males and a female) resting on the riverbank. The area around the monastery had been the scene of a horse racing festival for the last week or so, so the whole place pretty much looked like Woodstock the day after. Definitely the largest open toilet I have ever seen. We continued a bit further along the road to see if this was the road to the Suojia area. After asking around a bit this seemed to be the case.

On the way back I noticed that the white-lipped deer had moved a bit further down the riverbank and were now feeding on the grassy banks next to the river. We could easily approach them on foot. The animals weren't shy and as long as we left about 50 meters between them and us, they were relaxed. Not sure if these were proper wild animals but still nice to see this spectacular deer so close.



*White-lipped Deer*

#### **August 7: Drive to Suojia**

When we started the long drive to Suojia we saw the same three white-lipped deer again near the monastery but this time higher on a mountain slope. In the same area we also saw a Tibetan fox.

On our drive to Suojia the road was busier than usual because a major horse racing festival in Zhiduo had just ended. Probably not so great for wildlife viewing, but I am not so sure that we would even have gotten to Suojia that day if we hadn't had regular opportunities to ask locals for direction. Since our guide didn't take a road atlas and didn't have any useful directions, we had to use a very rudimentary sketch map that I found on the Internet and ask pretty much every car we encountered for directions. Completely unnecessary as there were road signs with some regularity so finding your way would have been pretty straightforward with a road atlas and a few decent Google Maps prints. Just before we flew off to China, our guide also claimed to have good gen on finding snow leopard in this area. His gen was about as specific as claiming that the Kalahari is a good place to see ground pangolin. But I was curious enough to give this remote area a try and see what we would find.

The weather was rather miserable (light rain/drizzle) for large parts of the day. In the end it took us about 12-13 hours to reach the small settlement of Suojia. In Suojia there is a small shop that sells basic food items and they sell petrol at twice the normal price (at least to foreigners), but I wouldn't count on either. Make sure you are self-sufficient and take all the food and petrol you think you need.

On the drive to Suojia we saw a lone youngish looking wolf about 2,5 hours west of Zhiduo, a decent number of Tibetan foxes, and closer to Suojia Tibetan gazelles and kiangs. About

halfway we saw a large group of vultures on a yak carcass, but they were all griffons. Not bad and the wolf was a lifer for my wife, but I had expected to see a bit more wildlife in this remote area. The Tibetan foxes along this road were extremely shy, so there must be opportunistic hunting for pelts here from truck drivers or locals.



*Wolf*

As expected there was no place to sleep in Suojia so we drove to a road going more or less north and eventually found a pretty nice camping spot overlooking a large flat river valley. Scoping here only produced a few Tibetan gazelles and kiangs. Luckily it had stopped raining when we started looking for a camping spot and we were lucky enough to set up the tents in dry weather with even a bit of sunlight.

#### **August 8: Suojia area – “Canyon area”**

We slept surprisingly well in our tent. When we got up around dawn it was dry and cold, but dark clouds were already looming in the distance. This was the first morning that we were subjected to our guide's camping routine. At this stage we assumed he was just a little rusty, but after a few more camping sessions it was clear that he was unorganized, lazy and extremely inefficient. None of his camping equipment (bowls, cups, cutlery, tents, etc.) had been cleaned before the trip (or ever). In hindsight I regret not taking pictures of some of the garbage that he called camping equipment; the saucepan was disintegrating before our eyes during the trip. Interestingly, the first evening that we camped, he claimed the largest and cleanest bowl for himself. We were given dirty cutlery and a pathetically small bowl and a cup to eat our food from. Despite the fact that he kept boasting throughout the trip that one could get absolutely everything in Chengdu and many times cheaper than in Europe, buying 3 or 4 plastic plates or decently sized bowls obviously was beyond his capabilities. The camping food that he provided was mostly oats, more oats, and some extra oats and leftover food that other clients had left with him from earlier private trips (some of which was already months over date). This would all be totally fine if good-quality food would have been hard to find. Well, it is quite the opposite; even in fairly remote places such as Qumalai



and Zhiduo they sold tons of fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, good quality noodles, herbs, spices, milk, eggs, meat, a variety of packaged foods, sweets, cakes, cookies, etc., etc. Basically everything you would dream off for a camping trip!



*Suojia area: beautiful scenery, awful weather*

After packing up our tents we continued on the remote road that headed north but relatively soon we ran into an area with a lot of road works (even here, this remote, the Chinese were doing their best to “tame” the countryside). The weather also had changed for the worse again; most of the morning it was raining non-stop. We managed to get past a few hairy stretches, but at some point we reached a very muddy stretch that would require careful driving in order not to get stuck. So after checking out the road, my wife and I decided to turn around. This was remote country with very little traffic and we were not even close to our destination. The main reason for turning around was the allround poor preparation for this part of trip. Without a halfway decent map or any other reliable information on how to navigate through the area and a haphazard GPS signal, it was all a little too amateurish. A little annoyed we started the drive back but we kept looking for wildlife. Kiang, Tibetan gazelle and Tibetan fox were seen with some regularity, but in low to moderate numbers.

We then stopped at a place that overlooked a wide valley on the left side of the road. Since I was sitting on the right side of the car, it was easier to scan the hills to the right of me. First I was making some half-arsed shots of an upland buzzard in poor overcast light. While I was changing with my camera settings, I saw a black marmot-like silhouette in the corner of my eye along the slope of the hill on my side of the car. Initially, I didn’t even want to bother to look at it assuming it would yet another marmot, but just before we drove off, I decided to check the silhouette. Holy Yeti! A Pallas’s cat! As luck would have it, the very first car (a big truck) of that day drove past us right at this spot and the cat disappeared in a burrow. My wife and I thought that this was it. But since it was about lunchtime we decided to drive to a spot where we could overlook the hill slope and have a snack. A few scans across the hill slope didn’t reveal the cat. We decided to get out of the car, walk up the hill and make a big loop around the place where we had seen the cat and then look from above. This was a

good idea, because our guide relocated the cat quite quickly. We had wonderful full scope views and after a while a kitten joined the mother on the lookout. Amazing! After watching the cats for some time we walked back, had a proper lunch and then drove back to the original spot along the road to take a few more record shots. When we got there it turned out that now there were two kittens. They were frolicking and playing around the mother, while the mother stayed on the lookout with the calm of a stoic. Brilliant stuff.



*Pallas Cat with kittens*

It was now mid-afternoon and at least another 8-9 hours back to Zhiduo. We abandoned the idea of driving back to Zhiduo, because it would be far too dangerous to drive here at night. Apart from massive potholes, several smaller bridges along the route were completely missing, damaged or still under construction. The detours around those bridges were often not indicated with proper signs or clear stone markers so it wasn't too difficult to have a fatal accident here at night. Hence we started looking for a campsite in the late afternoon. We drove onto a side road with promising looking mountains in the not too far distance and hoped to set up camp there and scope a bit for the off chance of a snow leopard. Again the annoying road building activities of the Chinese prevented us from getting to our destination. A bit later we found another quiet side road that led into a beautiful canyon area and set up camp there.

#### **August 9: drive back to Zhiduo and late afternoon Zhiduo-Qumarleb**

We woke up around 6am, but the gentle percussive sounds on our tent indicated that it was raining. By 6.30am I finally crawled out of the tent. It was still drizzling. On the mountain slopes around our campsite I found a group of blue sheep but unsurprisingly no cats. I scanned the surrounding mountains a bit more for argali, but only found perched Himalayan griffon vultures. On our way back to Zhiduo the weather was pretty bad again and most of the day was spent driving through drizzle or rain. After about three hours we reached a point where the recent rain had turned a 40-meter stretch of road into a muddy quagmire; there was a slightly tricky detour (although manageable if driven with care) through a bog next to the road. Our guide didn't inspect the route properly and we got stranded about halfway in the bog. Initially, it looked like we had to drive backwards past numerous small but deep water-filled potholes in the bog, and start all over again. We then saw (at the spot where we were stranded) a faint track through the bog that completely circumvented the bad stretch of road. In another display of Brentian bravado, our guide indicated that he didn't need help or guidance and literally two seconds after putting the car in reverse he hit the first water-filled pothole. The wheel in the back on the left was stuck in a 50 cm deep pool and the right wheel in the front was at least 30 cm up in the air. Excellent! Amazingly, we had the dumb luck that right at that moment a large 4x4 arrived from the other side. The car blasted at high speed through the massive mud pool on the actual road and luckily the

guy stopped and checked out with some amusement what had happened. He turned out to be a government official of the Ministry of Transport and helped us pull our car out. Crisis averted and hours of misery avoided. The mammalwatching was poor that day; best sightings were a handful of woolly hares and several very shy Tibetan foxes.

Mid-Afternoon we got back to Zhiduo, but we didn't see an appealing restaurant on the main street so we drove straight on to Qumalai. Again a lot of annoying road works between both towns. We didn't see much but at the entrance of Qumalai town the guide found an Eastern spotted rosefinch on a lamppost. We quickly found a hotel in Qumalai, the pleasant and friendly Qumalai Hotel along the main street, close to the market square with a golden yak. Since this would be the last town of any size before we would reach Golmud, we spent the late afternoon shopping for supplies for our visit to Wild Yak Valley and possible camping stops en route, although in the end these didn't materialize.



*Countryside around Qumalai*

#### **August 10: Daytrip west of Qumalai (aka Qumarleb or Qumarleh)**

Based on the sparse information I had found in other trip reports we spent a day exploring the area west/northwest of Qumalai. At the northern end of the main drag in Qumalai, you get to a roundabout. The turn-off to the right heads to Qingshuihe (back to the 214 highway). Straight on is the road to Budongquan/Golmud (to the left is a dead end that leads to some government buildings). Take the road to Budongquan/Golmud. The road slowly climbs up a pass in about 20-25 min (maybe 15-20 km). On the way up you may see white-lipped deer on a deer farm on the right side of the road. The road then descends on the other side of the pass quite quickly with several serpentines. On the way down look out for a road/track that veers off to the right and where a bridge crosses a river after a couple of hundred meters (more or less at 34°14'N and 95°46'E). Follow this track beyond the bridge that heads into a valley with relatively low hills/mountains. Allegedly this track continues for another 100 km or so. Two locals claimed that there was a good argali area about 80 km down this road. We only explored the first 15 km or so and on two visits here we found white-lipped deer (two different groups), Tibetan gazelle and Tibetan fox (plus woolly hare, plateau pika and Himalayan marmot).

Another good nearby alternative is to continue on the main road to Budongquan/Golmud. After the pass the road continues for a short while through a valley, where the road more or



less follows the river. After several kilometres (maybe five kilometres or so) the main road veers off to the right and starts climbing up another pass. This also the point where the river and the road start to diverge, i.e., the road goes to the right up a pass. The river continues to the left into another valley. Where the river and the road start to diverge there is a (cement?) factory on the left side of the road (approximately at 34°16'N and 95°43'E). Look for a track parallel to the river that leads to a small settlement a couple of kilometres away.

From the first kilometres of this track we scanned the steep hill slopes on the opposite side of the river. Here we had one of the better wildlife experiences of the tour. My wife spotted a pack of wolves that were walking parallel to us on the other side of the riverbank, maybe 300-350 meters away from us. At some point one of the younger wolves started running like crazy into the river more or less towards us.



*Record shot of the wolf pack*

For a second I thought they were starting a hunt, but it turned out that the young wolf had spotted a yak cadaver in the river. After nibbling a bit on the carcass, he rather quickly returned to the others who were still on the side of the river on guard. Despite the relatively large distance between them and us our presence made the wolves uneasy and after about 15 minutes they started walking up the mountain slope. I then scanned randomly all the way up the mountain slope and to my surprise I found six magnificent white-lipped deer stags. The deer were resting on the ground and taking it easy and as long as the wolves stayed at the foot of the mountain slope, they didn't take much interest in the wolves. The wolves initially made their way up the mountain very slowly and only 20% up the slope they found another carcass, which they mainly used to roll in on their backs to mask their scent.

While this was going on, one the senior wolves went ahead of the pack and walked up the mountain slope in a steady pace. The other three wolves stayed around the carcass a bit longer.



*The wolf pack around the carcass on the mountain slope*

When the first wolf was about halfway up the mountain, out of nowhere a deer that must have been resting on the ground materialized out of nowhere about halfway between the wolf and the white-lipped deer males that were higher up. The deer immediately started pronking up the mountain in springbok-like fashion. This was quite sensational to see, in particular the speed with which the deer managed to go up the steep mountain slope the while it kept pronking. The pronking deer also made the white-lipped deer males jump up immediately. When the smaller deer was at the same altitude as the white-lipped deer but further to the right, it stopped for a while and I could finally lock it in the scope. An Alpine musk deer, brilliant!!



*Record shot of white-lipped deer males. The male at the top was absolutely stunning.*



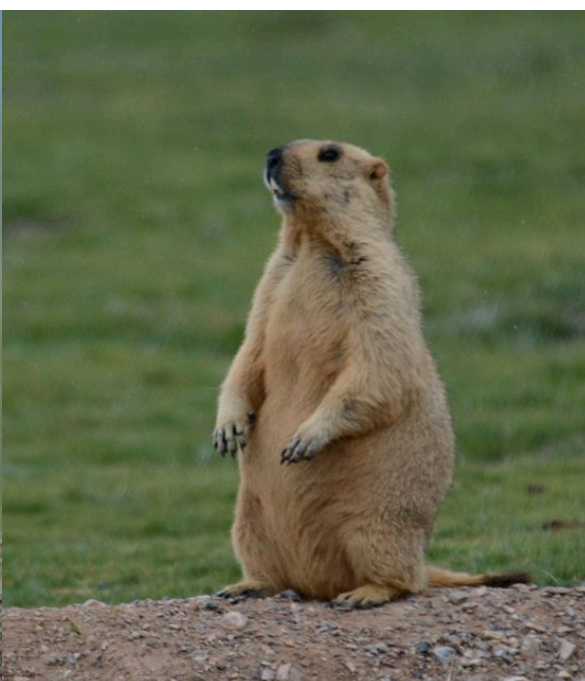
After a short break (and now all four wolves moving up the slope) the musk deer ran like crazy higher up the mountain. It only stopped again when it was all the way up on the mountain ridge when we had some more scope views although the views were much poorer against the grey sky. With the musk deer out of the picture there was now a stand-off between the white-lipped deer and the wolves. In the end the wolves decided that they were not even going to try and they continued up the slope in a different direction while the deer slowly moved off to the right in the other direction.

After all this excitement we only drove as far as the settlement (maybe 3-4 kilometres from the main road but maybe it is worth exploring that track beyond the settlement). Again, there were other tracks in this area and I am sure many of them are worth trying. We just happened to be lucky on these two tracks.

In the afternoon we revisited the same sites again and drove up another mountain pass, but we didn't see anything new.



*Himalayan Griffon*



*Himalayan Marmot*

### **August 11: Qumalai - Budongquan**

We left Qumalai a little before dawn. Our guide did his usual morning routine of boasting about himself for disproportionate periods of time. My wife and I instead tried to focus on what's outside and quite quickly we found the first Tibetan foxes and Tibetan gazelles.

Unfortunately, the lovely weather we had had yesterday had been pushed out by another bad weather front that had rolled in overnight. In the higher areas (above 4300m) we had snow, but the first part of the day was mostly spoiled by moderate but persistent rain. This road is usually very good for mammalwatching, but the first 4-5 hours we saw very little. The road was being "upgraded", which meant that there were roadworkers, roadworker camps, endless numbers of trucks, shovellers, etc. almost everywhere along the first 150 km of the road, and this may have kept mammals away. Around 11.30 am we reached Qumahe, where



we stopped for lunch in the small restaurant on the corner of the market square with the statue of Tibetan antelopes.

In the early afternoon the weather started to improve. It was quite sunny but a strong and cold wind kept blowing all day. For a long time the road follows the broad river valley of the main river in this area, the Qumar He. Beautiful scenery with a mosaic of wetlands, moist grassland, sandy dunes in some areas, and drier stonier grassland on the surrounding slopes. Along this stretch the road works were a little less intense and the number of mammals increased notably. About 50-60 km west of Qumahe town we saw the first Tibetan antelopes. They were a little distant (about a kilometre away), but it was a nice mixed group with females, juveniles and adult males, some with the characteristic black muzzle/forehead.

In hindsight it would have been better to camp in this area, because the mammal density in this area was quite high and further exploration of the area would probably have been worthwhile. On the remote but beautiful stretch where the road runs quite close to the river Qumar He, we saw more Tibetan antelopes (usually in small groups of 2-5 animals), several dozens of Tibetan gazelles, a handful of Tibetan foxes, woolly hares, Blyth's mountain voles and to my surprise only four kiang. I was a little disappointed that we didn't see wolves, which are often reported along the Budongquan-Qumalai road in other reports.

We also encountered a German woman who was cycling from Germany to Australia. She was an interesting character and had some interesting stories to tell about her travels in the Middle East and central Asia.



*Tibetan Antelopes*

Late in the afternoon we finally reached the Budongquan turn-off. The weather had started to change again and it looked like snow showers were building up. It was also windy and miserably cold. Right at the junction there was a massive traffic jam in the direction of Golmud, so we feared that something had happened and all accommodation in Budongquan was booked out.

So we first drove south in the direction of Lhasa to see if we could find a decent camping spot. The driving on the Lhasa-Golmud highway was insane. Where a lot of minor roads with

almost no traffic are turned into excessively oversized highways or even motorways, this part of the Lhasa-Golmud road is still a single-lane highway with way too much traffic (in August anyway, almost all Chinese tourists). After driving only ten kilometres or so we found a very faint track to some electricity pylons. We checked if we could camp in a lower depression near the track. Unfortunately the very open Kekexili landscape around Budongquan isn't very appealing camping terrain. The soil was very loose and sandy and it was unclear whether a storm was building up so we decided against camping here.

We drove back in the direction of Budongquan to check out some other areas but closer to Budongquan we noticed that the traffic jam had magically disappeared. We quickly found the friendly owner of the truckstop "motel" and he asked a ridiculous 180 Yuan for a room, but we had done enough driving for today, so we decided to stay here. There was no heating, no locks on the rooms, just a bed and a stove in a shed-like construction, but outside there were okay-ish toilets. Next to the shop there was a tank with water to wash your hands. In the shop you can sit down for a chat with the owner, who speaks English amazingly well, and at least it's warm and cosy there.

It was bloody cold at night and it snowed a little in the middle of the night, but we were both fine in our sleeping bags and thermal underwear.

#### **August 12: Budongquan – Wild Yak Valley**

We were up at dawn and headed straight for Wild Yak Valley. The drive to the entrance takes about 1-1.5 hours. Things seem to have changed quite a bit since Coke Smith visited the area. At the entrance of Wild Yak Valley a tacky tourist attraction has been built: <http://www.mountkunlungeopark.com/en/v/album/2014-6-23/97.html>. The road into Wild Yak Valley starts directly to the right of the tourist site (35°53'N and 94°22'E). There is even a website about Wild Yak Valley these days: <http://www.mountkunlungeopark.com/en/> and a map with the main tourist sights: <http://www.mountkunlungeopark.com/en/exp.html>. The road through Wild Yak Valley also seems to have been upgraded recently; a wide unpaved road has now replaced the old narrow track. This makes driving up and down the valley a lot easier and faster, but this could be a mixed blessing. When we there, several of the architectural and touristic monstrosities indicated on the map could not (easily) be reached by car or did not yet seem to be fully "operational".

At the start of the valley the road leads through an area that recalls the arid areas of central Asia or maybe even the southwest in the USA. Apart from a few desert wheatears we did not see much here.

The first majestic view into the valley you get at the Braided River Viewpoint. Here we also had the first Tibetan gazelles and Blanford's snowfinch. For a change, our guide surprised us in a positive way by spotting a group of male argali on a distant mountain slope. A little far, but still impressive to see a group of fully adult males. They were all lying on the ground, basking in the morning sun.



*Braided River viewpoint*

We slowly worked our way up the valley, but where was the wildlife? No wild yaks, no kiangs, only the occasional gazelle. After about 50 km we drove into a bad weather zone with thick fog and precipitation that couldn't decide whether it was snow or rain. 80 km into the valley, the lack of wildlife seemed a little ridiculous and we started to look for the yaks in earnest assuming and hoping they would be on higher pastures in summer. Finally, around the 90 km mark, we found a majestic wild yak close to the road. We tried to walk up to him (there was a river between him and us), but he was quite wary and kept a distance of at least 100 m. Still, I could get some half-decent shots in the winterlike weather.

A typical feature of Wild Yak Valley was the changeable weather. Clouds with rain or snow could roll into the valley from the surrounding mountains or just materialize at any time of the day, and temperatures would drop rather violently. When we were there it was usually sunny down in the lowest part of the valley and high up at West Queen Jade Pool (at around the 120 km mark), while the bad weather moved up and down the valley more or less between the 40 and 110 km markers.

Only about 15 minutes after we had seen the first wild yak in snow and fog, the sky opened completely and it was sunny again. On the higher grassy mountain slopes we found to our relief hundreds of yaks, but they were usually 1-3 km from the main road. We drove all the way up to West Queen Jade Pool, a scenic spot, which is well worth the drive if you have enough time. Here we saw Pallas's gull, Blanford's snowfinch, and greater short-toed lark.





*Our first wild yak (the tiny black dot, bottom right) in the massive landscape of Wild Yak Valley*

We set up camp around the 60 km mark with spectacular views on the surrounding mountains. Despite the excellent looking habitat, we didn't see anything else than distant yaks on the mountain slopes. Birds seen around the camp were desert wheatear, Hume's ground tit and Blanford's snowfinch.



*View from the first campsite in Wild Yak Valley*

Just after we had set up the tents it started raining and for a while it looked like it wasn't going to stop before dark, but eventually the clouds drifted away and we could enjoy the last hour of the day in sunlight. We made a walk around the campsite but saw little of note.

We noticed that the yaks seemed to descend to areas closer to the road as the day drew to a close and we intended to drive the short distance to where they were feeding tomorrow early in the morning in the hope of getting better pictures. However, ten minutes later we were shocked to see how a large 4x4 with Chinese photographers (600mm/f4 lens, etc.) had noticed these yaks too and they didn't think a second, drove off track up the mountain slope and chased up the yaks. Of course the animals started running like crazy back up the mountain. What the point of this all was, I still don't understand, because the light was awful for photography.



*Wild Yaks*

### **August 13: Wild Yak Valley**

At night it had been bitter cold and we found a crispy layer of frost on our tent. There was fresh snow on the higher slopes and the sky was overcast but only an hour later we had glorious blue skies again. From our campsite we walked up the valley on a narrow track along a dry riverbed. Distances were deceptive again and only after an hour we reached a low saddle where we scanned for mammals. We did find a few kiangs and Tibetan gazelles, but nothing else. Wild yaks were only seen as tiny dots on the mountain slopes in the far distance. From our scanning spot we also saw a large Aquila eagle. At the time we thought it was an imperial eagle, but when I checked the photos at home it turned out to be a golden eagle, which is also more likely.

On the way back I took another route to stalk a group of Tibetan gazelles. This worked surprisingly well and I got a few decent shots. In the tamarisk bushes along the dry riverbed I also found a Przewalski's toad-headed agama (at least that's what I think it is, see photo on page 57). Pretty cool animal.

In the afternoon we drove past a slope where the yaks weren't too far from the road, so I decided to have a go and walk up to them to get some more pictures of the yaks. My wife and the guide didn't want to join, so I walked up there myself. I used a gully to climb up the slope and stay out of sight. The walk wasn't steep but it was a steady climb at about 4000 meters. The first half of the climb I managed to maintain a steady pace, but at some point the altitude got to me. The last stretch I had to stop every five minutes to catch my breath. Even if the yaks appeared to be really nearby from the car, the sheer dimensions of the countryside in this valley again proved hard to underestimate. It took me about 45 minutes to walk up to the yaks. On the way up I encountered a male Tibetan gazelle, the omnipresent plateau pikas and Himalayan marmots, and a couple of Blanford's snowfinches (and several common birds).

When I got to the place where the yaks were, I couldn't see the yaks from the bottom of the gully, so I climbed out of the gully on the left side (the yaks were on the right side) to avoid ending up in their fight-or-flight zone straight away. This worked out well, the yaks were about 40-50 metres away from me with a deep gully between us to keep us both happy. In the beginning the yaks were relatively unconcerned by my presence and as long I didn't make sudden moves, they kept grazing and checked me out for a few seconds every two minutes or so. After enjoying them for a while, they suddenly got distracted by something on the other side of the hill that I couldn't see. I was quietly hoping that a wolf or fox would show up on the ridge of the saddle, but the thing that upset them (possibly a passing car) remained unseen. Unfortunately, the yaks now also seemed less pleased with my presence and when I made a slight movement to reposition myself, they seemed startled and immediately ran off. Strange, but still magnificent to see them this close.

In the late afternoon we set up camp on the edge of the wetland in the lower part of the valley. Although our campsite was closer to the road and in a busier spot with more traffic, the views from the campsite were superb. We camped in front of the mountain chain where we had seen the argalis yesterday morning. It didn't take long to find more argalis, this time a group of 11 magnificent males! They still were quite far away, but much closer than yesterday. The evening light was perfect though and we had splendid views of them in our scopes. Some were standing sentinel on exposed rocks. Very cool!

#### **August 14: Wild Yak Valley - Golmud**

In the morning we spent most of the time birding/hanging around the camp waiting for our guide to complete his snail camping ritual. By about 9.30 am we were finally ready to go and drove the relatively short distance to Golmud. Around noon we found a decent hotel on the edge of town (hot shower working!) and ate in a more upmarket restaurant across the street where the food was more creative than usual. The rest of the day was spent relaxing and shopping for supplies.

#### **August 15: Golmud – Dulan**

A travel day. The first half of the route to Dulan passes through stark desert scenery (basically the edge of the Qaidam basin) but the views unfortunately were marred by endless rows of electricity pylons and roadworks. Henderson's ground jay was quite common along this stretch. About 100-150 km west of Dulan one enters a transitional area that is reminiscent of the drier parts of Greece or eastern Turkey. An interesting mixture of desert and steppe to the north and south of the road high mountains with alpine grassland and juniper forests. We made a few short stops here that produced isabelline shrike, Richard's pipit and two upland buzzards that looked very similar to long-legged buzzards.

The area between the oasis town called Xiang Ri De (approximately at 35°58'N, and 97°52'E) and Dulan looked like it deserved further exploration, in particular several mountainous areas south of the road. We made a longer stop at the touristy Kao Xiao Tu Scenic Spot (signposted from the main road, entrance 50 Yuan, turn off approximately at 36°03' N and 98°03' E). The area looked good for Ala Shan redstart, but we only found a juvenile/female-type bird that seemed to be this species. Otherwise not much was seen (it was midday), but it is a pleasant area with magnificent large juniper trees. My wife had a wallcreeper feeding only a couple of meters away. Throughout the day I also kept an eye open for goitered gazelle, but this was the only mammal on my shortlist I didn't have any decent information on. So it was needle-in-the-haystack searching and unsurprisingly we didn't find any.





*Juniper forest at Kao Xiao Tu, desert and semi-desert in the background*

We found a cheap and very good hotel in Dulan along the main road (forgot the name of the hotel but plenty good and cheap hotels in town). I found Dulan a much nicer place than the touristy and slightly unpleasant Chaka. Late afternoon the guide and I strolled through an area of agricultural fields and low hills just outside Dulan at the southern end of town. Brown accentor, Richard's pipit and a flushed couple of Daurian partridges were the most interesting sightings.

#### **August 16: Dulan – Ala Shan Redstart Site – Rubber Mountains – Chaka**

In the morning we visited a site for Ala Shan redstart, which is located along the G6/S315 northwest of Chaka. The site is about 30 minutes/35 km along this road from the turn-off at Chaka. I couldn't see any clear kilometre markers, but if coming from Chaka the site is on a farm on the left side of the road opposite a large quarry on the other side of the road (see map on page 61). You must ask the people on the farm permission to bird on their land, but they were friendly when we went there. After the endless driving, it was really nice to do some birding on foot. The climb up the mountain slope was fairly steep on the higher slopes but otherwise straightforward and easy. Normally this place is good for both Daurian and Przewalski's partridge but we didn't see or hear either. On the way up we saw four blue sheep and lots of marmots. The Ala Shan redstarts were at their usual spot about 2/3 up the mountain slope in areas with small trees and bushes. In the end they showed well; at least two males and several females/juveniles were present. Other birds seen included red-fronted and Chinese beautiful rosefinch.

After lunch we went to the Rubber Mountains to try for Przewalski pinktail (see map at the end of this report). Luckily this required more birding on foot and once again we are off into pleasant mountain scenery. In the valley where the birds are usually seen, we pretty much saw all the resident birds (including streaked rosefinch, brown accentor and Tibetan snowfinch) but not the pinktail. We then climbed up one of the hills and tried a neighbouring valley, but again we couldn't hear or see the pinktail. However, we got a very nice bonus in the form of a couple of female Gansu red deer that allowed good views.



*Entrance to Przewalski Pinktail site*

After making a detour to Heimahe to get some food, we returned to Chaka to set up camp near the lake. When we arrived at the lake edge, it was already quite late and not long after we arrived, the first sandgrouse started flying over the area. I had good views in the beautiful evening light and managed to scope one that was on the ground for a short time.

To see the sandgrouse: from Chaka drive east on the G6 and drive onto the track that starts at 36°44'43' and 99°11'57" (Google Earth) towards the salt lake. The sandgrouse are usually closer to the lake edge but can be seen flying to and from the area along the entire track. Just keep scanning the skies around dawn and dusk. We had no luck with the mammals here but Asian badger, goitered gazelle and a variety of small rodents have been seen here.

#### **August 17: Chaka – Rubber Mountains – Heimahe – Gangcha**

Our guide managed to set a new snail camping record by taking four hours to boil some water for coffee and take down the tent. After wasting the best hours of the day on dismantling a tent, we made our way to the pinktail site again to see if we could reverse yesterday's bad fortune. Today it was significantly cooler and things seemed a bit livelier overall. And indeed, soon enough we found a juvenile Przewalski's pinktail. A rather odd, drab-looking brownish bird.



*Przewalski's Pinktail (worn adult and juvenile)*

I decided to hang around a bit longer and walk on a bit beyond the area where we had been yesterday. Initially I didn't see much else other than robin accentor and brown accentor, but then we noticed several rather strange-looking birds that our guide identified as crimson-browed finches. Not the greatest views though. When we turned around and headed back to the car, I suddenly found a weird looking "rosefinch" perched on one of the bushes. It was an adult pinktail! His plumage was little messy but all the main features could easily be distinguished.

In the early afternoon we drove to the provincial town Gangcha (our base to look for Przewalski's Gazelle). The road north from Heimahe leads along the much quieter and more pleasant western and northern shores of Koko Nor. Gangcha had a decent number of hotels and we stayed in a rather nondescript place one block north of the main street. Please check Coke Smith's Przewalski's Gazelle trip report for more information on the [Przewalski's Gazelle Site](#).



*Przewalski's Gazelle males*

In the afternoon we first drove 10 km east of Gangcha along the main road. After almost exactly 10 km we found a few tracks going south towards the bridge over the railway line (coordinates of the turn-offs: 37°16'59"N and 100°14'09"E or 37°16'52"N and 100°14'42"E; look for a large bridge crossing the railway line from the main road). With the help of a local we managed to find the exact point for crossing the bridge across the railway line and ended up in a pretty area that looked promising for the gazelle. However, the roads soon became tracks and the whole area was quite wet and swampy in places. In an area where it was not quite clear whether we could proceed (approximately 37°14'23"N and 100°14'06"E), our guide asked a Mongolian family for more information. It was clear they knew the gazelle well and while the Mongolian guy suggested that the gazelle also occurred in that area, he informed us that the tracks closer to the lakeshore were in bad condition and basically not drivable and it would be better to check out an area east/southeast of Ha'ergai (aka Ha'ergaizhen). So we drove back to the main road and then 17 km to Ha'ergai. Despite the fact that I had brought along Coke Smith's directions, good IUCN maps and a scientific paper



with clear maps – all accurately indicating the location of the gazelle reserves – our guide insisted that he had understood the Mongolian herdsman correctly, i.e., we should take a right turn somewhere in the town. As a result we drove through endless rape fields southwest/south of Ha’ergai for the next 1.5 hours. At some point I got so fed up with his pigheadedness that I called it a day and suggested to drive out the fastest way possible, and try in the correct area tomorrow. Just as we were about to get back on the main road east of Ha’ergai we bumped into a stretch of abandoned farmland and finally we were in the kind of habitat that might sustain gazelles. And sure enough two minutes later we saw our first Przewalski’s gazelles. I was really glad that we found them but I was also annoyed that we had spent all evening driving through rape field in beautiful evening light that would have been excellent for photography! In hindsight, I realized that the Mongolian herdsman may actually given the correct directions for the gazelles because when I showed the Mongolian guy my Google Maps print, the area he pointed out to me was exactly the area where we found the gazelles, but our guide had probably misunderstood something or missed one or two crucial words.



*Przewalski's Gazelle female*

#### **August 18: Gangcha – Gonghe – Xinghai**

Next morning we drove back to the area where we had seen the gazelles. The area is relatively easy to find. Drive from Gangcha to Ha’ergai. Continue through the town. Just outside the eastern end of town the main road continues over a railway overpass and only about a kilometre further on, there is a T-junction (with a police checkpoint when we there, no checks though, coordinates 37°12’52”N and 100°26’19”E, see maps at the end of the report). This T-junction is not further than 1.5-2 km after you have left Ha’ergai. Turn right at the junction (you are leaving the main road). Check the area left of the (unpaved) road (it is

currently a gravel road but was in the process of being paved when we there). This is where we saw the gazelles. Along this stretch there is also a rough track going off to the left. Here we had even more gazelles. The unpaved road (that is being paved) continues only for a few kilometres until you cross the railway line. Beyond the railway line there are rape fields! If you don't find gazelles along this short stretch, I would continue along the rough track, which leads through good habitat for the gazelles. The gazelles were not supershy, but they usually became alert if the distance between them and us was less than 80-100 meters. Since there were a lot of young animals, I didn't want to push for better photos. We spent about an hour or so with the gazelles and then moved on. The whole area east of Ha'ergai (north and south of the road) is probably worth exploring; the landscape here is much more suitable for the gazelles than the areas south and west of town, which are mainly rape fields.

We continued our journey south/southeast more or less along the eastern shore of Koko Nor; here we also passed through an area with some interesting sand dunes. Around lunchtime we birded at the southeast corner of the lake, where we saw a decent number of waterbirds. We then had to drive a stretch of the G109 Heimahe-Heike road, which was hell. It was the holiday period and the driving was suicidal on this stretch! Then onto the new G6 motorway to Gonghe, which thankfully was almost car-free. The last stretch to Xinghai was relatively quiet as well. In Xinghai we found a nice hotel, where for a change everything seemed to work as intended. We had lunch in the hotel's restaurant, which was good and some of the dishes even had influences from the Middle East /Central Asia.

In the afternoon my wife stayed in town to do some sightseeing and shopping. The guide and I went to an area southeast of town to look for desert finch, which we didn't find, but pied wheatear and meadow bunting were nice additions to the list.

#### **August 19: Morning Telzong Monastery – Afternoon Xinghai Area**

Next morning we explored the area west of town. Without realizing this until we got to the monastery, this turned out to be the area that Coke Smith describes as Xinghai Canyon in his report. For the monastery many different names are used (Sendzong, Salzong, Drakar Tredzong, Telzong, etc.) but they are all the same monastery (coordinates for the monastery are approximately 35°30'N and 99°47'E).



*Entrance Gate to Telzong Monastery: Blue Sheep on the mountains in the background*

If you drive to the west from Xinghai town (see maps at the end of the report), you will first drive a few kilometres through flat grassland area. Then the road descends spectacularly into a canyon, where it crosses a bridge at the bottom of the valley and then enters a narrower and even prettier canyon. At the end of the second canyon you climb up to another table grassland plateau (with sensational views). In front of you, you will now see the first mountains with some remnant forest patches. After following this road for a while you will eventually reach the monastery, which is worth a stop for scenery, wildlife and of the course the monastery. We weren't as lucky as Coke Smith here, but we did have distant views of a few blue sheep on the rocks above the monastery.

We then continued on the road beyond the monastery and this was the kind of narrow mountain road that we both hoped to have encountered more often. You need a good car here because the road is very steep and rocky in places. High ground clearance and 4WD are pretty much a must here, especially if the weather suddenly changes. Luckily we had fantastic sunny weather here. We drove to two high mountain passes at around 4100-4300 m and scanned the spectacular surroundings, but despite appearing remote I think the population and domestic yak density was far too high to sustain a lot of wildlife although I am sure that blue sheep and the odd mustelid or Pallas's cat might occur here. Himalayan marmot and plateau pikas were only seen in moderate numbers on this stretch. There were plenty of birds along the road but nothing new for the trip. Birds seen included saker, bearded vulture, twite, plain mountainfinch, robin accentor, Tibetan, white-rumped and rufous-necked snowfinch.

Back home I checked Google Earth and found out that the road eventually reconnects with the G214 highway, so it is theoretically possible to make a loop, but at the highest pass we turned around and drove back to the monastery and then Xinghai.



*Xinghai Canyon Area*



On the way back we saw a sign for the Yellow River Grand Canyon Scenic Spot (or something along those lines), which was about 60 km from Xinghai. We suggested to our guide to visit that area in the afternoon.

After a lunch break and shower we were ready to head off to the local Grand Canyon. Our guide claimed to know this site but then drove off completely in the wrong direction. He took us to a bridge across the river only a little further than the desert finch site. No way this was the correct place! I am pretty sure he knew this, but he clearly had been too lazy to do his homework during his afternoon break and just drove us to a place that he seemed impressed with, i.e., there was a single-lane bridge and crossing it was obviously very exciting for him. On the other side of the bridge he suggested to do some birding, which made no sense at all, and unsurprisingly we saw nothing. He claimed that it was pointless to continue on the road on the other side of the river, so back we went to Xinghai (having been away barely an hour). I am not sure if he just couldn't be arsed to do some proper guiding that afternoon, had no clue where the Grand Canyon site was or didn't feel well. Probably all of those reasons, but my wife was so fed up with this amateurism that she asked to be dropped off at the hotel. The guide and I then had another look in the first canyon west of town, but after he had fallen asleep behind the wheel several times I had had enough as well. A totally wasted afternoon after such a wonderful morning.



*Rain-soaked male Roborowski's snowfinch*

#### **August 20: Morning Er La Pass – Afternoon Xinghai Area**

When we drove off in the dark, it was clear that the weather had changed. It was cloudy and far too warm and humid outside!! The previous days it had been warm and sunny in daytime but the nights and mornings had been cold and dry. We drove to Er La anyway but unfortunately it started drizzling on the drive up to the pass. When we got there, it was very cloudy and windy but even here at 4500m it was unusually warm for the altitude.

We slowly made our way up from the road to the flat-topped mountain next to the road. We were still well acclimatized to the altitude, so it was relatively easy to walk up the mountain.

Still, the going was slow and every ten minutes we stopped for a short break to catch our breath, but the walk itself was simple and straightforward. When we went up, the visibility was still okay-ish, but once we were on the top, the fog was quite dense. There were birds, but most of them were seen as silhouettes. We managed to identify alpine accentor, horned lark, Henri's snowfinch, and after a while the first Roborowski's rosefinches (only females though). Once we reached the far side of the flat-topped area, the clouds opened a bit and I noticed that the areas just below the mountain top looked brilliant for Pallas's cat (lots of pikas, lots of rocks and gullies, etc.). We strolled a bit through the area and luckily we found a male Roborowski's rosefinch. This was pretty much the last sighting we made. Shortly after the clouds rolled in again and now it started raining for real and the temperature was falling rapidly. We decided to walk back to the car because it looked like it was only going to get worse. Pretty soaked we got back to the car. We quickly evaluated our options, driving down to the Wenquan area or return to Xinghai. We chose the latter.

I was really disappointed that we couldn't spend more time on Er La. It looked like the kind of place where you could have a good time scanning and walking all day. In decent weather your chances of finding a Pallas's cat here must indeed be pretty good if you take the time to scan the area carefully, in particular at dusk and dawn.

In the afternoon we explored the desert finch area southeast of Xinghai again but we didn't see the finch. Most interesting sightings were a hobby and a Daurian partridge.

#### **August 21: Xinghai – Xining - Huzhu Beishan**

When I got up, I felt sick and unusually tired. The weather still hadn't improved (overcast, showers, etc.) so we abandoned the idea of revisiting Er La and drove in the direction of Gonghe. We made a few birding stops en route picking up Mongolian lark, isabelline shrike and crested lark among others. Since we had made good progress by the time we got to Xining, we continued to Huzhu Beishan via the S102. The drive up there took longer than expected (about 2.5 hours from Xining). We stayed in the Green Hotel at the park entrance, which was fine if a little expensive (something like 320 Yuan per room). When I got in the hotel room, I was shivering constantly and had a bad fever. I decided to lie down for an hour but the fever only got worse, so I had to call the afternoon excursion off. Very annoying because this reduced our chances to see our target mammals significantly (Siberian roe deer, Tolai hare and maybe the odd exotic pika).

#### **August 22: Morning Huzhu Beishan – Afternoon: drive to Lintao**

After a rather delirious night I woke up feeling better the next morning. The fever had gone but I was still a bit wobbly. From the Green Hotel we turned left (i.e., back in the direction of Xining and the S102) and drove up the valley. I can't remember the exact distance or time but about 30 minutes after leaving the Green Hotel there is a very obvious gate and sign on the left side of the road (right side if coming from Xining; coordinates of the entrance are more or less at 37°01'N and 102°30'E I think, the resolution of that area in Google Earth is quite poor) that leads into a forested valley and tourist area with several campsites. After about a kilometre, there is a gate where you have to pay an entrance fee (which seems to vary between 25 and 100 Yuan per person depending on the day, season and the astrological forecast for that week). Although reasonably busy, the area is very pleasant and the higher/further you drive into the valley, the quieter it gets. It is always nice to see the Chinese interact with nature (a father learning his son how to shoot birds with a catapult, how to dispose your garbage straight into a crystal clear mountain stream while carefully

navigating past all the rubbish bins on the campsite, etc.). Nevertheless, the birding was good in this valley. Highlights included Chinese white-browed rosefinch, grey-headed bullfinch, olive-backed pipit, plain and Elliot's laughing-thrush, buff-barred warbler, Gansu leaf-warbler (lots), Songar tit, five redstart species, Himalyan bluetail, Chinese song thrush and chestnut thrush.

Almost at the end of the road (coordinates 36°99'N and 102°22'E) we hiked to the north into a quiet mountain valley, where we heard a roe deer call. It was quite close but it was in a steep rocky area with a lot of undergrowth, not ideal terrain to explore off-track. Our guide suddenly wanted to try another valley. The other valley was equally pretty, had good birding but seemed less ideal for mammal watching (less open spaces to scan). It was already 10 am and our chances to see our target mammals seemed slim, but our guide claimed that were several other valleys to try. On the drive out the guide had an inspired moment and found a group of blue eared pheasants high on a mountain top. So once we got to one of the "other valleys", there were some guys just sitting along the side of the road at the entrance. Somehow the presence of the guys annoyed him and he told us that the site would probably be too busy and wasn't that good anyway. Sigh. Apart from the fact that it was late morning and probably too late to see our target mammals, it again turned out that he only had very superficial knowledge of the area and had actually never visited any of the alternative sites. On the way back to Xining we stopped briefly to scan the slopes around the main mountain pass (37°00'N and 102°08'E) and a little below the pass near a tourist viewpoint that overlooks some hairpin turns (37°02'N and 102°24'E). We saw goshawk but little else.

The afternoon drive was notable for passing through the Lanzhou area, an ecological nightmare that even in China has some notoriety. You could actually feel your throat and eyes burn from the air pollution. Quite amazing! The wider area around the city looked post-nuclear. Luckily we didn't have to sleep in Lanzhou, but stayed in Lintao, which is a small town about an hour south of Lanzhou.

### **August 23: Lintao – Qingxi (entrance Tangjiahe)**

Most of this day we travelled through rural Gansu, which was interesting because you got a glimpse into the China of yesterday. Some parts of Gansu seem to have been left behind a bit in the general development megalomania, but that wasn't necessarily a bad thing (but don't get the naïve idea that they weren't building flats, "upgrading" roads, etc. at all). The main business here was agriculture and some areas even had old-fashioned rural charm. However, in this part of Gansu province we passed only once through a sizeable area of natural vegetation. Driving through this rural part of the country was slow and it took us about 12-13 hours to drive from Lintao to Qing-Xi, the small town at the entrance of Tangjiahe nature reserve. About 40 km from Tangjiahe we found two dollarbirds on electricity wires, a good sighting for Sichuan.

The area around Tangjiahe nature reserve is still very pretty; the area is quite well developed, but manages to retain its rural charm. We stayed at a simple but pleasant guesthouse in Qing-Xi. They were very friendly but in the evening I walked to the top floor and noticed they had a disturbing number of birds in cages (at least eight including the inevitable hwamei, two red-billed leiothrixes, and at least one other laughing-thrush species, which I couldn't see very well). Sigh! After dinner my wife and I made an evening stroll through the village. An entertaining mix of Chinese tourists, local hipsters hanging around the local disco (don't get too excited) and pensioners from the village trying to sell you all



kinds of obscure dried food. The only downside was the fact that it was Saturday evening, so we had to endure some truly awful karaoke from the hotel next door until about midnight.

#### **August 24: Tangjiahe Nature Reserve**

We left our guesthouse a little after dawn and drove the short distance to the gate of the nature reserve. The gate was closed, but our guide managed to persuade the staff at the entrance to let us in. We found at least six takins at their usual place just north of the Caijaba Plain Protection Station (there is a little map on the back of your entrance ticket to the park, which shows all the sites mentioned in this report but it is printed in font size 2 so you may need a magnification glass). We drove all the way up to the Poolground Protection Station about five kilometres beyond the hotel, where there is a barrier and one can only proceed on foot. We parked the car and walked up the road into the core zone. The rangers usually don't ask for a permit if it looks like you are just going to hike up the road. We didn't see much of note on the walk, but it was good to do some walking and the scenery is really nice.

Very interesting though was a new trail that led into the forest on the right side of the road (there is a noticeboard that shows snub-nosed monkeys). Our guide wasn't keen on walking the trail and only after walking 250 meters up the trail he started moaning that the trail would go up and down like this forever. Luckily for him I ignored him and walked on. Only 200 meters further on we bumped into a little house where food was stored and there was a set-up that was clearly a feeding station (probably for habituating snub-nosed monkeys). There were so many apples and other food items on the forest floor that most of the animals living in the area must be diabetic or morbidly obese by now. I think it would have been interesting to continue on the trail and see what we would run into, but both my wife and the guide were not keen on following the trail deeper into the forest. My wife was afraid that we would be kicked out of the park if we got caught on the trail, which indeed didn't seem impossible. Since we still had quite a lot of time in the park, we decided to come back here later. And indeed, minutes after we had left the trail and were back on the road, a large group of Chinese tourists and a couple of park guides showed up at the start of the trail.

We returned to the road and walked up for another three kilometres or so and then turned around. Bird activity on the walk up was not overwhelming, but we still saw among others Chinese bamboo-partridge (one crossing the road), Chinese sparrowhawk, red-billed leiothrix, Richard's pipit, Claudia's warbler, and brown shrike. Just like in April we also found bullet shells in bushes next to the road. We returned from our walk mid-afternoon and then first had lunch in the restaurant. Despite the fact that there were a lot of tourists, the menu was very limited and the dishes tasted not nearly as exciting as in April.

We then checked into our hotel rooms. In principle, the rooms in the hotel are (or rather used to be) excellent but as always zero maintenance has been done so some of the furniture was already falling apart and the shower could have been cleaner and less mouldy if properly cleaned every now and then. However, the shower worked, had warm water and the drain was at the lowest point, so no flooded bathroom floor for a change. Things could have been worse.

In the afternoon we made a short walk and then drove down the road to the junction with the road to Motianling Protection Station. To our surprise the road to Motianling Protection Station was technically closed, but it was possible to circumvent the roadblock. We decide to drive up a bit to see if the road was blocked because of a landslide but we got stopped in our

tracks almost instantly: two tawny fish owls! An adult and almost fully grown juvenile. Brilliant. In the same area we also had flight views of two crested kingfishers. Around dusk we slowly drove back up the road to the hotel, but there was too much traffic and we didn't see any mammals. My wife was tired and took a pass on the night drive. The guide and I then waited until it was properly dark, but the night drive on the stretch of road above the hotel was disappointing. We only saw two muntjacs and I had poor views of a palm civet.



*Tawny Fish Owl*

#### **August 25: Tangjiahe Nature Reserve**

We got up before dawn to do a bit of spotlighting along the stretch of road above the hotel and now we found a goral resting on rocks along the river. Unsurprisingly, our presence made the exposed animal nervous and it quickly wandered off into the forest, but we had pretty good views. We turned around at the Poolground Protection Station and then drove down to Caijaba Plain Protection Station. A little north of Caijaba we bumped into a massive male takin on the road. Instead of keeping up with the takin our guide slowed down the car and started telling some random nonsense story. Total lack of focus. My wife urged him "can we please drive on and focus on the takin now!". We still got pretty good views of the male but the photo opportunity was wasted. We found another large male takin a bit higher up the slope, which allowed good but short views before it melted away in the undergrowth.

When we got to the junction with the road that leads up to Motianling Ranger Station, we still found the sign that road was technically closed. We decided to park the car and just walk up the road and see what we would find. We encountered the young tawny fish owl

again and also saw another crested kingfisher. A bit higher up we scanned the first massive cliff face on the right side of the road (if going up) and rather quickly my wife found a goral for a few seconds. Somehow the animal managed to disappear but in the same area our guide also found a wild boar. After 15 minutes or so I finally managed to find the goral again, now a bit lower down. We had pretty good scope views but it was interesting to see how the relatively large goral managed to melt away into a background of rocks and half-open forest. While scanning the cliff face we noticed that several cars with Chinese tourists drove up the road so obviously the access was not as restricted as we thought. Our guide walked back to get the car while we walked up the road to scan several other cliff areas. Other than a white-crowned forktail we didn't see anything new. Brown dippers and plumbeous and white-capped water redstarts were very common along the river here.

Just like in April the walk up to Motianling Pass was beautiful, but birdwise the place was almost dead. However, we did see a group of Tibetan Macaques. We walked relatively fast to stay ahead of several Chinese families. At the pass area the birding was a bit better with grey-capped woodpecker, white-collared yuhina and Elliott's laughing-thrush. Barred laughing-thrush remained heard only again despite being frustratingly close!

After another hotel lunch and a break, the guide and I returned around 17.30 to the Poolground Protection Station and started walking up the road into the core area to look for the snub-nosed monkeys. Our guide still appeared to be tired from this morning's walk, because we were going up the road at a snail's pace. After an hour we had walked 2 km and it was about 6-7 km to the start of the forest trail that leads to the feeding station. After having walked a little over an hour a motorcycle with a park official and a young guy with a camera suddenly turned up and stopped us. The ranger requested us to walk back. He said that the weather was going to change soon and people were not allowed to be in the core area after dark. Well, not totally surprising or unreasonable I guess. Then our guide completely lost his cool, started shouting at the park ranger like a madman, and then walked up to him so close that their nostrils must have touched. Not sure what he was thinking but intimidating a park official is unlikely to work out in your favour. Anyway, he shouted to me "ignore the idiot, we will just continue". I looked at him bewildered and our guide then looked back and noticed that the park ranger was calmly dialling a phone number on his cell phone: "oh, now he is calling the police". Another discussion followed and unsurprisingly the outcome was that we had to turn around.

When we got back to the car, it started raining really heavy. So the ranger had actually been right about the weather. Our guide should probably have been grateful to the park ranger because walking up there and spotlighting back in the dark would probably have taken about 6-8 hours at the speed we were walking. Anyway, since it was raining we first drove down to the junction of both park roads and then waited for the rain to stop. After an hour or so the heavy showers slowed down to a drizzle and we set off on our night drive, which produced several takins and prolonged views of a female goral with her calf.

#### **August 26: Morning Tangjiahe –Afternoon Chengdu area**

Our last spotlighting session in the early morning was pretty productive again with a goral feeding along the river just north of the hotel. A bit further we had a serow calf feeding right next to the road at close range. On our way down in the direction of the hotel we found a tufted deer resting on the ground close to the road. Views were a little brief but excellent close-up views of this odd deer species. At dawn we checked out the "takin slope" just north of the Caijaba Plain Protection Station. Sure enough we found three of them plus a male



munthjac, and my wife also spotted a male wild boar here. We drove to the other valley that leads to Motianling Station to the cliff where we had seen the goral yesterday, but this time nothing was seen. On the way back to the hotel we observed two female wild boar feeding in open forest along the river. After having breakfast at the hotel, we packed up and headed back to the Chengdu area.

#### **August 27: Flight home**

Unexciting travel day. No upgrade on our flight back to Amsterdam, so back in cattle class.



*Upland Buzzard*

## MAMMAL LIST

Tibetan Macaque *Macaca thibetana* – only seen in Tangjiahe: a group of at least eight was seen from the trail to Motianling Pass, the “habituated” group along the main road to the hotel was seen on August 25 and 26

Pallas's Squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus* – several in Tangjiahe

Père David's Rock Squirrel *Sciurotamias davidianus* – several in Tangjiahe

Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana* – common to abundant on the plateau, seen almost daily from August 1 to 22

Chinese Dormouse *Chaetocauda sichuanensis* – a pale sandy-grey coloured mouse that crossed the road in Tangjiahe on a night drive must have been this species. A medium-sized mouse with dense fur, longish hairy tail with a clear brush at the tail end can in my opinion only be this species. The habitat fits with the description in *Mammals of China*. On the night drive on August 25 in Tangjiahe I saw another arboreal mouse species for a few seconds speeding down some branches. This may have been a Chinese Dormouse as well.

Blyth's mountain vole *Phaiomys leucurus* – we saw probably about 5-6 (definitely 4) of these voles between Budongquan and Qumalai. Thanks are due to pika and vole expert Andrey A. Lissovsky, who identified them as juveniles of very probably this species.



*Juvenile Blyth's Mountain Vole*

Glover's Pika *Ochotona gloveri* – a total of three on August 4 in the Kanda Shan area.

[Large-eared/Glover's Pika *Ochotona macrotis/gloveri* – one on August 1 that might have been either species. Our guide thought that it was a Large-eared Pika, I still lean more towards Glover's Pika, but unfortunately I didn't get any pictures to check again at home.]

[Chinese Red Pika *Ochotona erythrotis* – a roadkill on August 22 in the Huzhu Beishan area]

Black-lipped (or Plateau) Pika *Ochotona curzoniae* – common to abundant on the plateau



*Plateau Pika*

*Glover's Pika*

[Confucian Niviventer *Niviventer confucianus* – I am pretty sure that the rodent seen near the hotel while spotlighting was a Niviventer. We also saw a rodent cross that may have been this species. A couple of scientific papers on small mammals in Tangjiahe suggest that Confucian Niviventer is the most common Niviventer in the park]

[Chevrier/South China Field Mouse *Apodemus chevrieri/draco* – a smallish mouse with a relatively long tail may have been one of these two species (because the above-mentioned small-mammal studies found that these two are the most commonly encountered)]

Woolly (a.k.a. Tibetan) Hare *Lepus oiostolus* – fairly common on the plateau, 30+ individuals seen on 13 days of the tour

Pallas's Cat *Felis manul* – a female with two kittens on August 8

Masked Palm Civet *Paguma larvata* – only one on the night drive on Aug. 24 in Tangjiahe

Tibetan Fox *Vulpes ferrilata* – two on August 2, one on August 4 (Kanda Shan), 1-7 daily between August 6 and 12

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* – one on August 1, a single and a group of three on August 2, singles on August 19 and 20



Red Fox

Gray Wolf *Canis lupus* – one on August 7 and a pack of four animals on August 10

[Steppe Polecat *Mustela eversmannii* – a couple of road kills but did not write down the dates]

[Asian Badger *Meles leucurus* – a fresh road kill on August 2]

Kiang *Equus kiang* – 100+ on August 7 and 8, 70+ on August 11, seven on August 12, 13 on August 13, and one on August 14

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* – a female on August 24, a male was only seen by my wife on August 25, two females on August 25

[Bactrian Camel *Camelus bactrianus* – only domestic animals were seen in Wild Yak Valley and between Golmud and Dulan]

Alpine (a.k.a. Himalayan) Musk Deer *Moschus chrysogaster* – one near Qumalai on August 10

White-lipped (a.k.a. Thorold's) Deer *Cervus albirostris* – two males and a female near Gongsa monastery on August 6 and 7. On August 10 we saw a group of six spectacular males and another group of at least nine females and juveniles. Both groups seemed wild, at least not fenced in. In addition, about 25 females, young males and juveniles were seen on a deer farm just outside Qumalai (on the road to Budongquan/ Golmud).



Red Deer *Cervus elaphus* – a very pale gray-looking female was seen on August 4; in the same area but higher up on a mountain ridge we found a group of at least 13 females of varying colour. These animals were probably McNeill's Red Deer (*C. e. macneilli*). Two females were seen in the Rubber Mountains on August 16: these two probably were most likely the subspecies Gansu Red Deer (*C. e. kansuensis*).



*Gansu Red Deer*



*White-lipped Deer*

Reeves's Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi* – I saw a total of six animals in Tangjiahe, always early in the morning or on night drives. My wife saw a male in the afternoon on the trail across the bridge next to the hotel.

[Siberian Roe Deer *Capreolus pygargus* – heard only in Huzhu Beishan]

Tibetan antelope *Pantholops hodgsonii* – a total of about 40-45 was seen on August 11. Males, females as well as juveniles were seen.

Tibetan Gazelle (a.k.a. Goa) *Procapra picticaudata* – between 10 and 25 from August 2-4. 15+ on August 7 and 8, a male on August 9, three on August 10, between 30 and 50 in Wild Yak Valley on August 11-13



*Tibetan Gazelles*

Przewalski's Gazelle *Procapra przewalskii* – 40+ on August 17, 70+ on August 18. Males, females and juveniles were seen

Wild Yak *Bos grunniens* – 500+ in Wild Yak Valley but almost all of them high up in the mountains

Sichuan Takin *Budorcas tibetana* – 8+ on August 24 and 25 and at least 3 on August 26 in Tangjiahe, only seen early in the morning, around dusk and on night drives

Chinese (a.k.a. White-maned) Serow *Capricornis milneedwardensis* – a calf was seen next to the road on the morning drive on August 26

Chinese Goral *Naemorhedus griseus* – single animals were seen on the road between the hotel and Poolground Protection Station while spotlighting on the night drives on August 24 and 25 and on the morning drive on August 26. One seen at about 7 am in the valley that

leads to the Motianling ranger station on August 25. A female with a calf was seen on the night drive on August 25 at the “goral cliffs” from the road that leads to Motianling ranger station.

Argali *Ovis Ammon* – seven males were seen on August 12. At least two female type animals of what was probably this species were seen in poor light on August 13. A group of 11 adult males was seen well with the scope in excellent light on August 13 from our campsite.

Blue Sheep (aka Bharal) *Pseudois nayaur* – 150+ on August 3, 100+ on August 4, 25+ on August 5, at least 4 on August 7, two groups of 30+ animals on August 8, 10 males with massive horns on August 14 in Wild Yak Valley, four animals on August 16 near Telzong Monastery



*Chinese Goral female and calf*



*Blue Sheep female and calf*

## Bird List

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* – 50+ on August 18 at Koko Nor  
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* – 50+ on August 17 and 18 at Koko Nor, three birds en route on August 22  
Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea* – three on route on August 22  
Eastern Great Egret *Ardea modesta* – 3+ en route on August 26  
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* – seen en route on August 23 and 26  
Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* – singles seen en route on July 30 and August 26  
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – seen en route on August 1, 3, 5, 6, 22, 23 and 26  
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* – singles seen on July 30 and August 26  
Greylag Goose *Anser anser* – 5+ on August 18 at the eastern edge of Koko Nor  
Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* – seen on August 6-8 and 16-18, usually about 5-15, but 100+ at Koko Nor on August 17  
Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* – seen on August 3, 5, 7-9, 11-13, 16-18 and 21, usually about 2-10, but 50+ at Koko Nor on August 17  
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* – 100+ on August 18 at the eastern edge of Koko Nor  
Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca* – two on August 6  
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* – 20+ on August 18 at the eastern edge of Koko Nor  
Common Merganser *Mergus merganser* – two on August 1, guide-only sighting on August 3, and 3+ on August 9  
Black(-eared) Kite *Milvus migrans/lineatus* – fairly common, seen on 12 days of the tour. Most seemed to be *M. lineatus*, but at least one appeared to be *M. migrans*  
Bearded vulture/Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus* – two on August 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 16, and 17, and singles on August 5, 13 and 19. Adult, immature, and juvenile birds were seen.  
Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* – seen every day from July 31 to August 22.  
Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus* – one in Tangjiahe on August 24  
Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* – two sightings in the Huzhu Beishan area on August 22 (may have been the same bird but not sure)  
Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) burmanicus* – one on August 5  
[Long-legged/Upland Buzzard *Buteo rufinus/hemilasius* – two birds seen on August 15 about 100 km west of Dulan looked very much like Long-legged Buzzard, but when I studied the literature and reports at home, it appears that Long-legged Buzzard is unlikely, in particular in August. The most commonly seen raptor in the area is Upland Buzzard, so I think what we saw were Upland Buzzards that just looked very similar to Long-legged Buzzards.]  
Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* – common on the plateau, seen from August 1 to 12 and August 16 and 21. Particularly common (>30 daily) along the route Yushu-Zhiduo-Suojia.



*Ibisbill*



*Upland/Long-legged Buzzard?*



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* – a pair hunting over some low cliffs on August 1 while stranded due to roadworks, one on August 3, one in Wild Yak valley on August 13, one on August 15 and one in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* – one in Tangjiahe on August 24

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* – 1 or 2 on August 2-5, 12, 13, and 16-22

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* – single birds on August 18 and 19 in the Xinghai area

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* – locally common on the plateau, seen on August 2, 3, 6-14 and 19. Particularly common (>15 daily) along the route Yushu-Zhiduo-Suojia.

[Tibetan Snowcock *Tetraogallus tibetanus* – heard on at least four days, but not seen. Did not really look for this species since I had seen it well in April this year ]

Daurian Partridge *Perdix dauurica* – poor views of a couple that was flushed in fields just outside Dulan on August 15, excellent views of a female on August 20 at the desert finch site

Tibetan Partridge *Perdix hodgsoniae* – four on April 2, three on April 3, a pair with chicks on April 5, heard on August 6 and 17, poor views of another female on August 19 in the Xinghai area



*Tibetan Partridge*

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge *Bambusicola thoracica* – heard along the entrance road to Tangjiahe on August 23, one adult was seen quite well when it crossed the road on August 24, and a pair with chicks was seen well when they were feeding along the roadside on August 25

Temminck's Tragopan *Tragopan temminckii* – two juveniles were seen at close range on August 25 in Tangjiahe

Blue Eared-Pheasant *Crossoptilon auritum* – relatively poor scope views of a group of at least eight on a high mountain ridge in Huzhu Beishan

Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus* – single males were seen in Huzhu Beishan on August 21 and 22

[Yellow-legged Buttonquail *Turnix tanki* – a possible one on August 2, a rail-like bird was flushed and then had to run across open grassland for about a meter before it disappeared again. Jizz of the bird suggested a buttonquail, but views were just too short]

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* – four on August 3, three on August 6, two on August 7 and 8, five on August 9, four on August 11, and six at Chaka Salt Lake on August 17

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – three juveniles in pools just south of Gonghe

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* – seen on August 1, 17 and 18, with 100+ on August 18 at the east side of Koko Nor

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii* – a pair was seen very well on August 2. On August 4 an adult was seen along the small stream at the lower part of the road that leads up to Kanda Shan pass (i.e., the area before the stretch with the narrow gorge). An adult and a juvenile were seen along the same road just beyond the narrow gorge. Slightly out of character for the species they were feeding on a grassy meadow away from the river. A juvenile bird was seen in the Xinghai Canyon area on August 19.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* – at least two at Chaka Salt lake on August 17

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* – one at Koko Nor on August 17 and two on August 18 (Chaka)

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus* – one at Chaka Salt Lake on August 17 and one in the Przewalski Gazelle area near Gangcha on August 17

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* – two at the pumphouse pools at Chaka Salt Lake

Common Redshank *Tringa tetanus* – 18+ birds on eight days of the tour

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – one at the Longbatao wetland on August 6

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* – one in Wild Yak Valley on August 14 and one on August 17 (Koko Nor)

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – two in Wild Yak Valley on August 14, one on August 17 (Koko Nor), two on August 18 (Koko Nor)

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – one on August 6

[Stint spp – many at Chaka Salt Lake, but we didn't bother to check them out properly and there was too much heat haze to scope them from where we were standing]

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* – one on August 13

Little Gull *Larus minutus* – two on August 18 on the east side of Koko Nor

Great Black-headed (Pallas's) Gull *Larus ichthyaetus* – two on August 7 and 8, 3+ on August 11 and 12, 4 on August 17 and two on August 18

Brown-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus* – scattered sightings on the high plateau, also a few sightings at Koko Nor

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* – 1-10 seen on August 4, 6-10, 17 and 18

Pallas's Sandgrouse *Syrhaptes paradoxus* – 30+ on August 16, 10+ on August 17

Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris* – common, seen almost every day between July 31 and August 22

Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota* – only two seen on August 3 in the first canyon area between Yushu and Nangqian

Speckled Wood Pigeon *Columba hodgsonii* – one on August 1

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* – common in cultivated areas, seen on July 31, August 1, 22, 23 and 26

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* – common in cultivated areas, seen on August 15-23 and 26

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* – 5+ on August 1, 3, and 4. Single birds on August 9, 19, 21 and 22.

Tawny Fish-Owl *Ketupa flavipes* – an adult and juvenile on August 24, and only the juvenile on August 25

Little Owl *Athene noctua* – 1-5 seen on August 1-3, 6-7 and 17

Common Swift *Apus apus* – 10-30 daily from August 16-19

Salim Ali's Swift *Apus salimali* – small numbers (<5) seen on August 1-5 and 17-19, 10+ on August 25 in Tangjiahe

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* – two birds seen in Tangjiahe on August 24 and one on August 25

Dollarbird *Eurystomus orientalis* – two along the entrance road to Tangjiahe. Apparently rarely recorded in Sichuan.

Hoopoe *Upupa epops* – common to very common on the plateau, migration movements were seen on several days, notably on August 11 and 12 with several tens of birds seen

Gray-capped Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus* – two at Motianling Pass on August 25

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* – heard on August 20, 21 and 23, one seen on August 19

Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima* – four on August 7, 2+ on August 8, 5+ on August 9 and singles on August 17 and 18

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica* – several seen in flight from the road, but good albeit quite short views of what was probably an immature on the ground on August 21. Even this bird had large white markings on the wings. We found them in sandy steppe south of Gonghe. If coming from Gonghe, look for an area on the right side of the road with sand dunes. The sand dunes are marked on one of those brown signs as a scenic spot for tourists so it's quite easy to find. There are also some remnants of mud houses (lots of hoopoes, little owl, etc.); the dunes are only a couple of kilometres from the main road (G214).

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* – two on August 12 at the lake called West Queen Jade Pool, also a few in Przewalski's Gazelle areas near Gangcha and Ha' ergai.



*Greater Short-toed Lark (I think)*

Hume's Lark *Calandrella acutirostris* – 5-15 daily from August 13-18

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis* – 5-10 daily from August 13-18, best views in the Chaka area

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* – one in a degraded area just south of Gonghe

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula* – often heard and singles seen three times seen between August 1 and 9, 5+ daily from August 16-19 and two on August 21

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* – between 1 and 15 seen almost daily between August 1 and 21

Pale Martin *Riparia diluta* – fairly common, seen on at least 14 days of the tour, about 5-25 daily.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* – locally common, seen on August 1, 3-5, 16-20 and 22

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – a few en route on August 1

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* – seen on August 1-6 and 23

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* – seen on August 1-5 and 18-19



White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* – 70+ individuals seen on at least 18 days of the tour. Various subspecies were seen including .

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* – 50+ individuals seen on at least 9 days of the tour.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* – one on August 4

Gray Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* – common in Tangjiahe and 10+ on July 31

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* – one on August 15 in fields on the edge of Dulan town and two in Tangjiahe on August 24

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* – one on July 31, one on August 3, 5+ on August 16 and 17 at the Przewalski's Pinktail site, five in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus* – one on August 17

[Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus* – a minivet in Tangjiahe was probably this species]

Collared Finchbill *Spizixos semitorques* – one seen on July 31, and several every day in Tangjiahe

Brown-breasted Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthorrhous* – seen on July 31, August 23 and 26

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* – singles on August 2, 3, 19 and 24. Heard on August 22 in Huzhu Beishan.

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* – common in Tangjiahe, one en route on August 2

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* – one in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* – one at Er La Pass

Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides* – 5+ on August 2 and 3, one on August 5, four on August 7, one on August 9, 5+ at the Pinktail site on August 17, 10+ on August 19

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiatea* – two on August 1, two on August 5, one on August 20

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens* – 2+ on August 2, guide only sighting on August 3, 10+ around Dulan on August 15, 10+ at the Pinktail site on August 16 and 17

Blue Whistling-Trush *Myophonus caeruleus* – a young bird on the road at dawn in Tangjiahe on August 25

Chinese Blackbird *Turdus merula mandarinus* – only seen on July 30

Chinese Thrush *Turdus mupinensis* – one on the road in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* – seen in double digit numbers from August 1-6, one on August 9

Chestnut Thrush *Turdus rubrocanus* – two at Erlangshan on August 1, one in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

[Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys* – heard only in Tangjiahe]

[Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata* – heard only in Tangjiahe and Erlangshan]

Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler *Cettia fortipes* – one on July 31

White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae* – one pair on August 1, at least two on August 16 and 5 on August 17 (Pinktail site)



White-winged Grosbeak



White-browed Tit-warbler

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* – singles on August 2, 3 and 16 and two on August 17, heard on August 22

Yellow-streaked Warbler *Phylloscopus armandii* – one on August 1, heard on August 3

Alpine Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus occisinensis* - singles on August 2 and 15 and two on August 16 and 17



*Alpine Leaf Warbler*

*Tibetan Lark*

Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher* – (at least) two on August 5 and two on 22 (Huzhu Beishan)

Gansu Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus kansuensis* – one in the Xinghai Canyon area on August 20, common in Huzhu Beishan (at least ten were seen)

Sichuan Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti* – one on August 1

Claudia's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus claudia* – heard on July 31 and August 22, seen in Tangjiahe on August 24

[Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* – heard on July 31]

Kloss's Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus ogilvie-grantii* – one on August 25 in Tangjiahe

Sulphur-breasted Warbler *Phylloscopus ricketti* – two on August 1

Marten's Warbler *Seicercus omeiensis* – one on August 1

Zappy's (Blue-and-white) Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* – two in Tangjiahe on August 25

Gray-headed Canary-flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* – 3+ in ERL on July 31, several seen in Tangjiahe

Himalayan/White-tailed Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis* – two juveniles seen well on August 2 en route, two at Kanda Shan on August 4 wouldn't show properly

[Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* – heard only in Tangjiahe]

Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus* – a juvenile at Huzhu Beishan on August 22

[Golden Bush-Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus* – heard only in Tangjiahe]

Przewalski's/Ala Shan Redstart *Phoenicurus alaschanicus* – at least five at a site northwest of Chaka on August 16, a possible one (juvenile plumage) at Kao Xiao Tu Scenic Spot on August 15

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* – common to very common, seen from August 1-23

Hodgson's Redstart *Phoenicurus hodgsoni* –two males on August 1, a female on August 3, a male on August 4, two males on August 5, a pair on August 19, and 15+ in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps* – 4+ in a forest area beyond Kanda Shan pass and at least two in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus* – one on July 31

White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* – three on August 8, 7+ on August 9, two on August 11, 4+ on August 19 and a male at Er La.

Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* – single birds on August 5, 15, 16 and 22

White-capped Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* – seen on August 1, 3-5, and common in Huzhu Beishan and Tangjiahe

Plumbeous Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* – very common in Tangjiahe

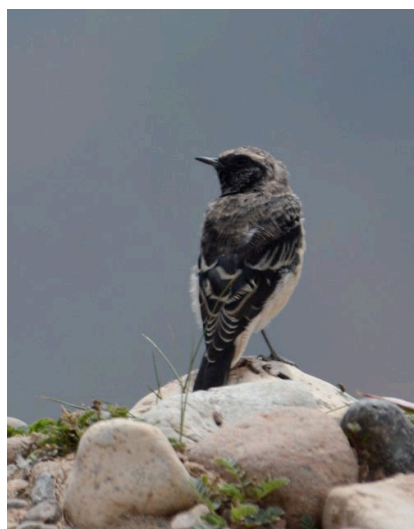
[White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phaenicuroides* – heard at Erlangshan]

[White-tailed Robin *Cinclidium leucurum* – heard at Erlangshan]

Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri* – two sightings in Tangjiahe

White-crowned Forktail *Enicurus leschenaultia* – two on August 25 and one on August 26 in Tangjiahe

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* – between 2 and 5 from August 18-20 in the Xinghai area



*Pied Wheatear*



*Brown Accentor*

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* – seen from August 12 to 17 including in Wild Yak Valley, Chaka and Xinghai area

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* – seen on August 12 and from August 15 to 21 including in Wild Yak Valley, Chaka and Xinghai area

White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis* – good views of 8+ in Tangjiahe on the Motianling Trail

Pere David's (aka Plain) Laughingthrush *Garrulax davidi* – Two on August 18, four on August 19, 2+ on August 20, one on August 22

[Barred Laughingthrush *Garrulax lunulatus* – heard in Tangjiahe on the Motianling Trail]

[Hwamei *Garrulax canorus* – heard only]

Elliot's Laughingthrush *Garrulax elliotii* – one en route on July 31, one on August 3, 5+ on August 4 and 5, four in the Huzhu Beishan area on August 22, two on the Motianling Trail in Tangjiahe on August 26, regularly heard in the right habitat

[Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis* – heard only at Erlangshan and Tangjiahe]

[Pygmy Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla* – heard only at Erlangshan and Tangjiahe]

[Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps* – heard only at Tangjiahe]

Chinese Babax *Babax lanceolatus* – two on July 31

Tibetan Babax *Babax koslowi* – at least five on August 4 in the Kanda Shan area

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* – 5+ on July 31, between 2 and 4 daily in Tangjiahe

White-browed Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis* – one at Erlangshan on July 31



David's Fulvetta *Alcippe davidi* – a total of three on August 24 in Tangjiahe  
 Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis* – one at Erlangshan on July 31  
 White-collared Yuhina *Yuhina diademata* – one at Tangjiahe on August 25  
 Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* – one en route on August 23  
 Songar Tit *Poecile songara* – common in Huzhu Beishan on August 22  
 White-browed Tit *Poecile superciliosa* – one seen well in a forest area beyond Kanda Shan pass on August 5, at least two at the Przewalski's Pinktail site on August 16 and 17



*Pink-rumped rosefinch*

*White-browed Tit*

Great Tit *Parus major* – seen on July 31 (Erlangshan), August 1, 22 (Huzhu Beishan) and 23 (en route)  
 [Sichuan Tit *Parus weigoldicus* – heard only on August 3]  
 Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* – a few seen in Tangjiahe and Erlangshan  
 Yellow-browed Tit *Sylvia prus modestus* – 2+ on August 1  
 Hume's Ground Tit *Pseudopodoces humilis* – common to abundant on the plateau  
 Chestnut-vented Nuthatch *Sitta nagaensis* – one in Erlangshan on July 31  
 Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* – one on Aug. 4 in the Kanda Shan area, one seen at the Kao Xiao Tu Scenic Spot by Anja on August 15, one at the Ala Shan Redstart site on August 16, one on August 19  
 Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicas* – one on August 1  
 Tibetan Grey Shrike *Lanius spherocercus giganteus* – three birds on August 3  
 Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* – one in Tangjiahe on August 24 and 25 (probably the same bird)  
 Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* – one on the way to the airport on August 27  
 Gray-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus* – common  
 Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* – 3+ in farmland areas on August 1  
 Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* – one on Aug. 22 in Huzhu Beishan  
 Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyana* – only seen from August 18-23  
 Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* – daily about 3-5 in Tangjiahe, a few seen en route on July 30  
 Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* – common but seemed absent/scarcely on the highest/remotest parts of the plateau, seen on July 30-31 and August 1-5, 15-17, 20-23 and 27  
 Henderson's/Mongolian Ground-Jay *Podoces hendersoni* – 10+ between Golmud and Dulan, two east of Dulan on August 16  
 Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* – 5+ on August 24 and 25 in Tangjiahe  
 Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* – common on the plateau

Daurian Jackdaw *Corvus dauuricus* – seem localized, 50+ on a remote road beyond Kanda Shan pass

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone* – locally common, seen on July 31 and August 1-3 and 5

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* – locally common but decreasing, seen on July 30-31 and August 23-26

Collared Crow *Corvus torquatus* – only a juvenile on August 26

Common Raven *Corvus corax* – seen on most days between July 31 and August 21. 20+ on August 6 and 7

Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus* – several en route on July 30 and August 26

Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* – a juvenile was seen on August 12 about 150 km west of Qumalai

White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus* – flight views en route on August 22 and 23

Plain Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola* – seen on August 2, 3, 5, 9 and 19

Brandt's Mountain-Finch *Leucosticte brandti* – seen on July 31, August 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 12 and 20. Usually in small numbers (1-5).

Crimson-browed Finch *Pinicola subhimachalus* – relatively poor flight views of two at the Pinktail site on August 17

Przevalski's Pinktail *Urocynchramus pylzowi* – an adult and a female at the site about 25 km west of Heimahe on August 17

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* – 5+ on August 2, 4 and 5

Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus* – a pair on August 16 (Ala Shan Redstart site) and a female on August 17 (Pinktail site)

Pink-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus eos* – 2-4 seen on August 1, 2 and 5

White-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus thura* – 4+ in Huzhu Beishan on August 22

Tibetan (aka Roborowski's) Rosefinch *Carpodacus roborowskii* – a male and at least 4 females at Er La on August 20

Streaked Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilloides* – three on August 1, 4+ on August 2, a pair on August 3, two on August 16 and 17



*Streaked Rosefinch*

Spotted Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi* – a male on August 16 in Qumalai town

Red-fronted Rosefinch *Carpodacus puniceus* – a male on August 16 at the Ala Shan Redstart site

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* – a female on July 31

[Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica* – only flight views en route]

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris* – common to abundant on the plateau

Gray-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca* – 3+ on July 31, a pair on August 22 in Huzhu Beishan

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carripes* – a pair on August 15 at the Kao Xiao Tu Scenic Spot

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* – common to abundant

Rock Petronia *Petronia petronia* – one on August 17, two on August 18, and 5+ on August 19

Henri's (aka White-winged) Snowfinch *Montifringilla henrici* – uncommon, usually at high altitude, 2+ on August 2, one on August 7, 1+ on August 9, 10+ at Er La

Tibetan (aka Black-winged or Adam's) Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi* – fairly common, seen on August 2, 3, 5-8, 16, 17 and 19

White-rumped Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda taczanowskii* – fairly common, seen on August 1-11, 13, 19 and 20

Pere David's (aka Small) Snowfinch *Montifringilla davidiana* – uncommon, 2+ on August 18

Rufous-necked Snowfinch *Montifringilla ruficollis* – fairly common to common, seen on August 1-4, 6-11, 16, 17, 19 and 20

Blanford's Snowfinch *Montifringilla blanfordi* – only seen in Wild Yak Valley, 5+ on August 12 and 14, 25+ on August 13. They can be anywhere in the valley, we saw them from the bottom of the valley to all the way up to West Queen Jade Pool Lake, both on walks and from the car.

Slaty Bunting *Latoucheornis siemsseni* – a female and a probable male in Tangjiahe on Aug. 26

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos* – one seen well at the Przewalski's Pinktail site on August 17 and a probable one at the Kao Xiao Tu Scenic Spot on August 15



Record shot of a Pine Bunting



Tibetan (a.k.a. Kozlow's) Bunting *Emberiza koslowi* – two on August 4 at the “well-known” site several kilometers below Kanda Shan pass and at least two near Kanda Shan pass on August 5

Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii* – between 1 and 3 on August 1-5 and 5+ daily in the Xinghai area (August 18-20)

Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides* – a male and a female on August 18, a male on August 20, all were seen in the canyon areas near Xinghai town

Yellow-throated (a.k.a. Elegant) Bunting *Emberiza elegans* – singles seen on July 31 and August 1



*Tibetan/Kozlow's Bunting*



*Godlewski's Bunting*

### Other Wildlife

Przewalski's Toadhead Agama *Phrynocephalus przewalskii* – one in Wild Yak Valley on a walk roughly near the 60 km mark (I don't think it's *Phrynocephalus vlangalii*, see also <http://creagrus.home.montereybay.com/Chinalizards.html>)

Keelback Snake species – one in Tangjiahe



*Przewalski's Toadhead Agama (I think)*

## Maps

The screenshots below were all taken in Google Maps or Google Earth. I realize that the maps are a little low in resolution (to cram in as many photos and screenshots as possible). Please contact me if you need a version with higher resolution.

## Xinghai Town



1 = Xinghai city centre (35 35' N and 99 59' E); 2 = Road to Desert Finch Site; 3 = road to Telzong monastery and the Canyon area; 4= road back To the G214; 5 = 3- or 4-star hotel called something like Xinghai New Business Hotel (impossible to miss from the road), pretty much next door there is also a petrol station.

### Xinghai and Desert Finch Site



1 = Xinghai town; road between 2A-2C = desert finch, rock sparrow, meadow bunting, Daurian partridge; 2A and 2B = Pied wheatear, Godlewski's bunting and if lucky partridges; 3 = road to Telzong monastery; 3A is a bridge where the road leads into a narrower canyon



## Zhiduo (aka Zhidoi) Area



*Zhiduo area: 1 = Gongsa Monastery; 2 = road to Suojia; 2A = turn-off to Gongsa monastery and Suojia; 3 = Road to Yushu; 4 = Road to Qumalai; 5 = Check areas for white-lipped deer (and Tibetan fox); the higher mountains in the top left corner of the image should be good for blue sheep and possibly argali*

## Close up of Zhiduo:

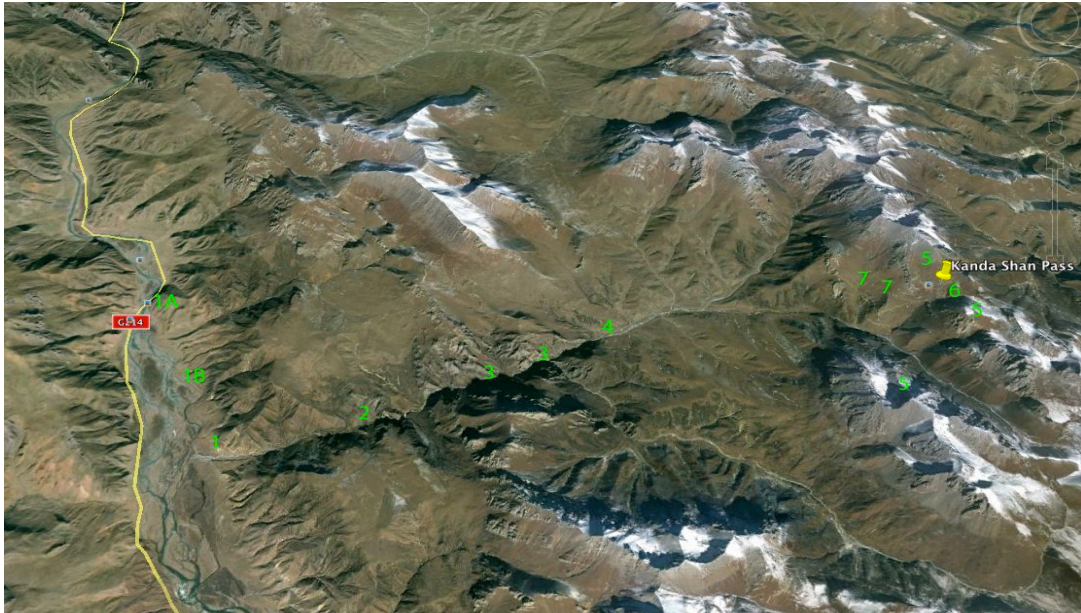


*1A = Signposted turn-off for the Gongsa monastery (and road to Suojia). The turn-off is only several tens of meters from the petrol station just north of the river bank (1); 2 = road to Gongsa and Suojia; 2A-2B = main drag with shops; 3 = Zhiduo hotel (around 350-400 Yuan) is in this area, many government buildings in the area; 4 = Road to Qumalai; 5 = Road to Yushu;*



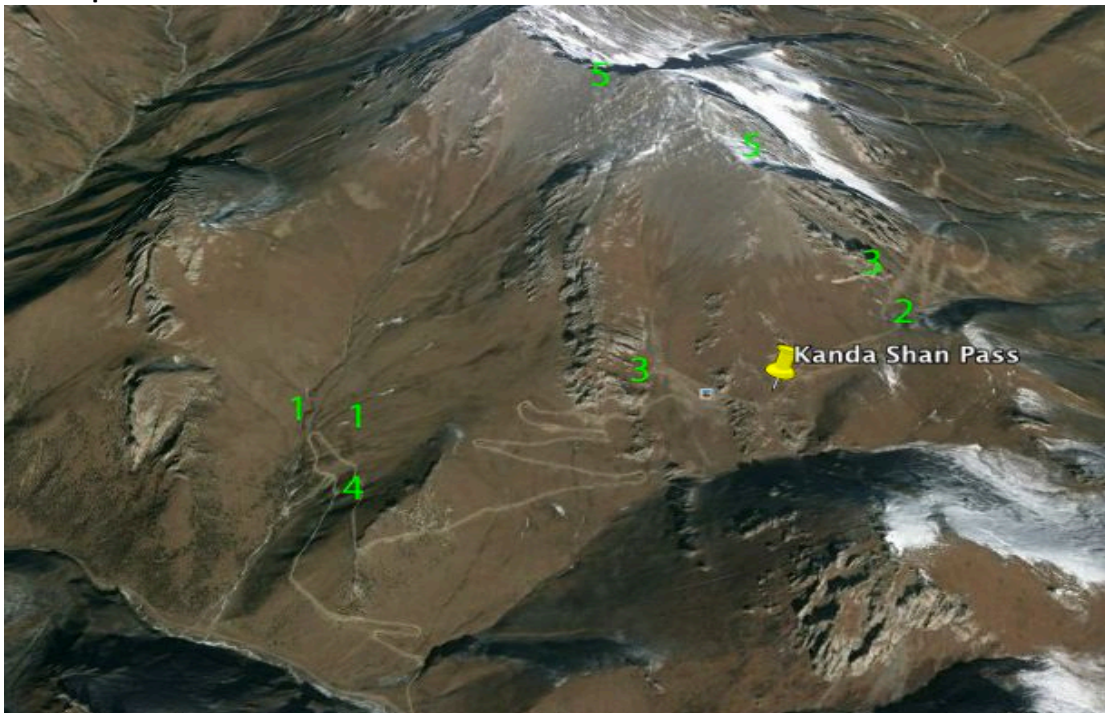
### Kanda Shan Area

To find 1A on the map, start from Nangqian, drive north on the G214 for about 15 kilometres until you have to cross the river over a major bridge. Directly after the bridge there is a turn off to the right; this turn off is 1A (Google Earth is blurred here but I am pretty sure the coordinates are 32°18' 54" N and 96°27'12"). See also George Wagner's map in his report.



1A turn off for Kanda Shan at the bridge; 1B = road follows the foot of the mountain for several kilometres; 1A-1B = Glover's Pika in rocky areas, esp. near 1A; 1 = actual entrance to the valley; road between 1 and 2 = Ibisbill, Kozlow's Babax; 3 = Canyon area, pikas, perched vultures; 4 = Ibisbill near the river in summer; 5 = blue sheep; 6 = Kanda Shan Pass area; 7 = Kozlow's/Tibetan Bunting

### Close up Kanda Shan Pass Area



1 = Tibetan/Kozlow's Bunting; 2 = the actual pass, also has Tibetan/Kozlow's Bunting; 3 = blue sheep; 4 = Himalyan rubythroat; 5 = Tibetan snowcock (heard only)

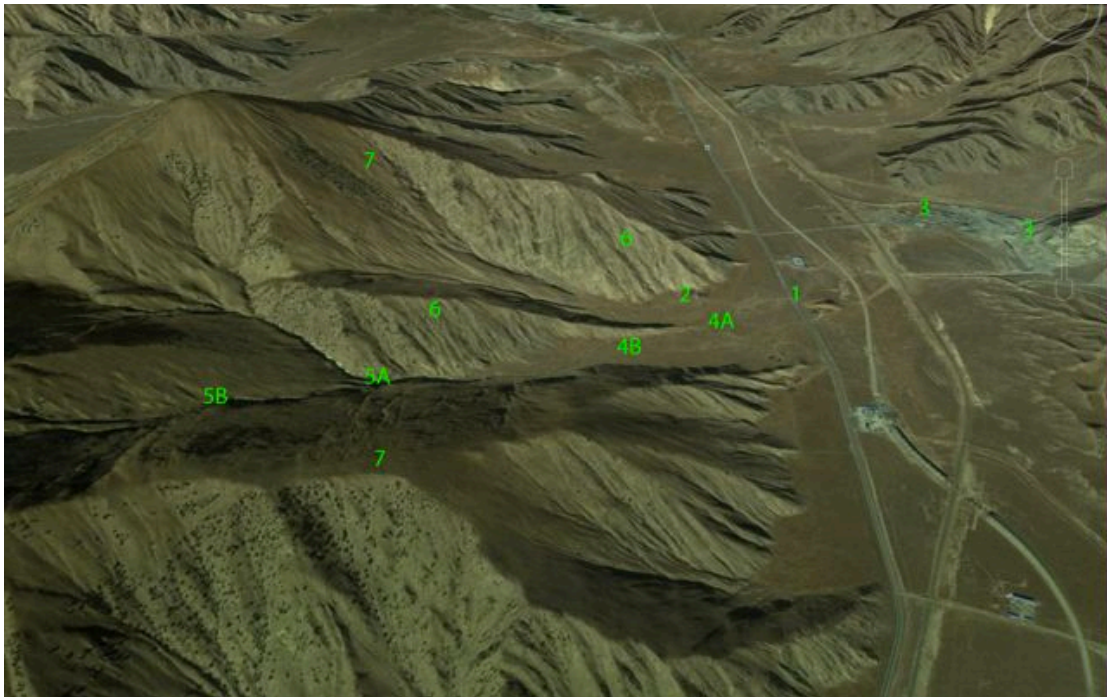


### Przewalski's Pinktail Site



1 = Heimahe town; 2 = Koko Nor Lake, south west corner; 3 = Entrance to Przewalski's Pinktail site, see photo on page 31; 4A= obvious trail into the mountains; 4 = Przewalski's pinktail and Gansu Red Deer

### Ala Shan Redstart Site



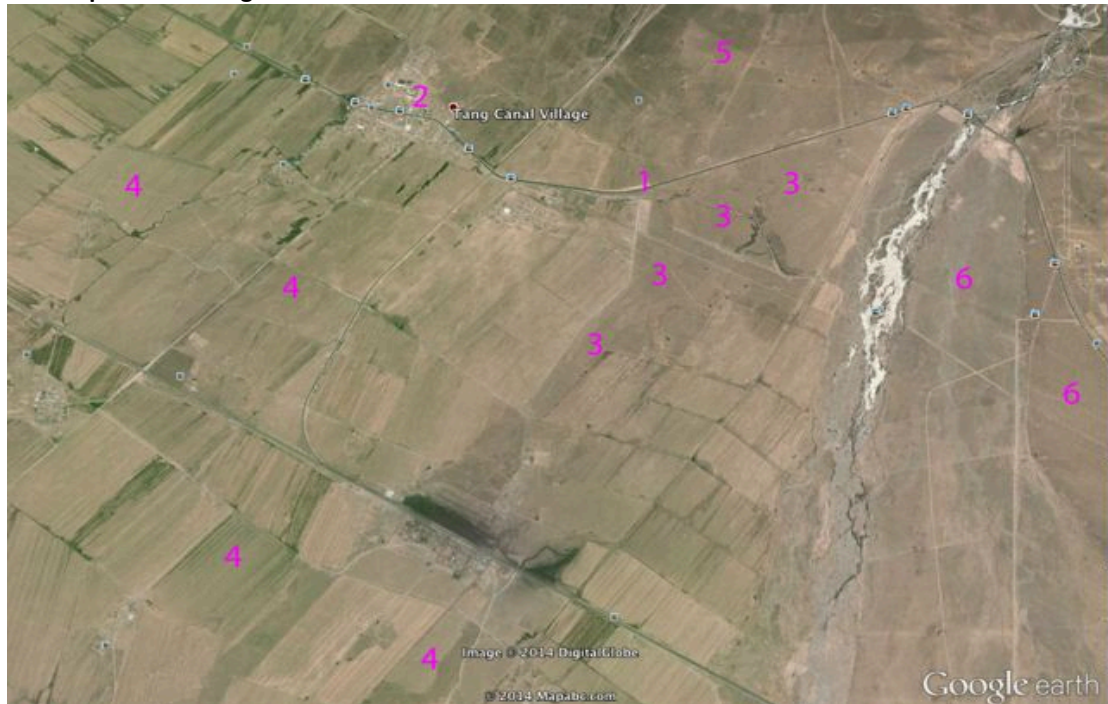
1 = Entrance gate (coordinates 36°58'17" N and 98°53'30"E) 2= Farm of the owners – **you must ask permission here first!!**; 3 = Quarry; 4A and 4B = follow the trail along here up to 5A; between 5A and 5B is fairly steep terrain (even if the screenshot suggests otherwise); 5A-5B = Ala Shan Redstart Coordinates between 5A and 5B are approximately 36°57'32"N and 98°53' 01"E and 36°57'16" N and 98°52' 54"E (according to Google Earth); 6 = partridges; 7 = Blue Sheep (and possibly Gansu Red Deer) and vultures

## Sites for Przewalski's Gazelle



1 = Gangcha town; 2 = Ha'ergai village; 3 = site where we saw the gazelles; 4 = rape fields (it appears that fluorescent green areas in Google Earth in this area correspond with rape fields); 5 = entrance to the first site (37°16'59"N and 100°14'09"E); 6 = area where we got stranded; 7 = areas that looked good for gazelles but didn't or couldn't visit because we didn't find a good access road. If you can't find the gazelles at sites labeled 3 I would focus on the area marked with 7s in the lower right corner of the image, because this area is one of the official reserves according several maps. I would skip the area around entrance 5, because seeing the gazelles there didn't seem very reliable.

## Close-up of the Ha'ergai area



1 = entrance to the unpaved road where we saw the gazelles (coordinates 37°12'52"N and 100°26'19"E); 2 = Ha'ergai village; 3 = areas where we saw the gazelles. 4 = rape fields; 5 and 6 = habitat looked interesting enough to check for gazelles.



## Qinghai Scenery 1



*First row (left/right): Xinghai Canyon Area, Huzhu Beishan; Second row: Kanda Shan Pass, Chaka Salt Flats; Third Row: Temple at Telzong Monastery west of Xinghai, Unknown monastery about 100km southeast of Yushu; Fourth Row: prayer flags*



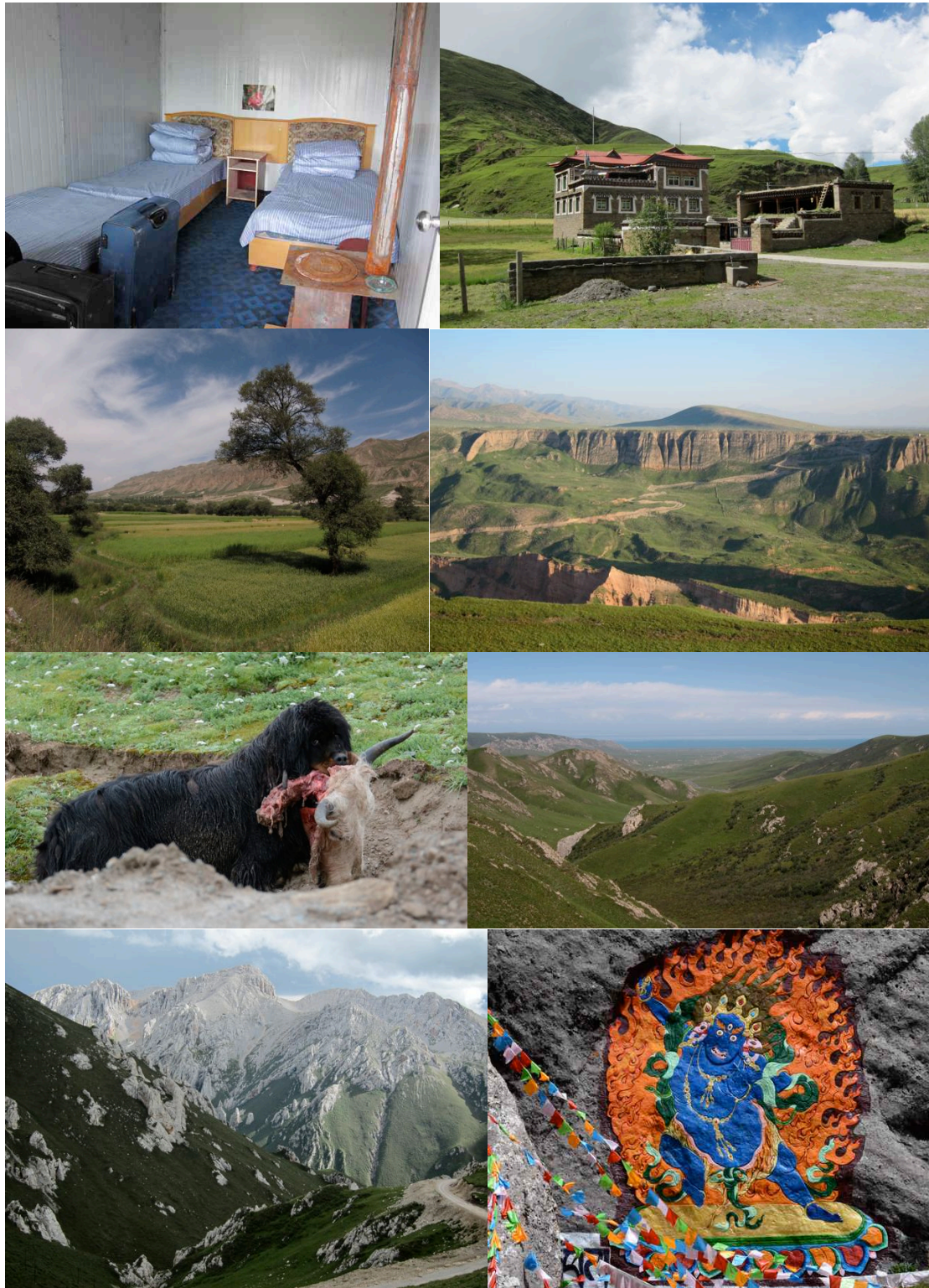
## Qinghai Scenery 2



*From top to bottom: view across the wetland on the sand dunes in Wild Yak Valley; East Of Kanda Shan Pass; House of Tibetan farmers in Daofu County*



### Qinghai Scenery 3



*First row: the Sheraton in Budongquan; Farm house in Luhuo County; Second row: Xinghai Canyon area; Third row: Tibetan Mastiff with Yak head and view towards Koko Nor and Heimahe from the Przewalski's Pinktail site in the Rubber Mountains; Fourth row: Kanda Shan mountains and artwork on the rocks on the way up to Kanda Shan Pass*



#### Qinghai Scenery 4



*First Row = valley in the Yushu area; Second Row = Mountains south of Er La and Wild Yak Valley; Third Row = Xinghai area; Fourth Row = Flowers in the Kanda Shan area*