



Giant Panda Expedition to Sichuan, May 2024

So, the big spoiler has been out: we got our **Giant Panda**! But before I start this one, I want to begin with thank-you's:

There are many good people in the Mammalwatching community who were so forthcoming with information, tips, and spent a good amount of their valuable time writing me emails, chatting with me over Facebook Messenger, and even had zoom meetings with me – all in response to my request to try to get as much info about maximizing my chances at finding a giant panda, and other animals as well.

So, in no particular order – **Ian Thompson**, **Lennart Verheuel**, **Christoff Scharf**, and **Jan Kelchtermans**, thank you so much for putting in the time, and writing me or in Ian's case – the helpful zoom chat! Thank you to **Coke Smith** for remotely guiding me through my short layover in Bangkok, and ensuring I don't miss my connection while running around between two separate airports. Additionally, thank you **Venkat Sankar** for trying to help me ID some of the rodents and giving me some leads on the Pikas!

Also, a huge thank you to **Royle Safaris** for organizing the trip, and of course to our dedicated, knowledgeable and all-around fun guide, who asked to remain anonymous even though his name is pretty well-known in the community by this point 😊. I will refer to him as Mr. A.

Oh, and how can I not mention the truly awesome group we had – every single one of whom found something amazing from Giant Panda (Monty!) to badgers and black bears! **Deb Bradley**, **Mark Langston**, **Elias Sadalla Filho**, **Monty Python** (sorry – **Monty Ross**) **Oleg Rozhko** and **Tatyana Ryabokon**. Thank you guys for all being fun, eagle-eyed, knowledgeable and altogether a great team!

Prologue

Who doesn't dream of seeing a wild Giant Panda? It's probably the world's most iconic mammal.

My story with Giant Pandas began around 2009. I was working at my first engineering job, and as much as I liked MedTech and Engineering (and still do!), I couldn't resist the urge to inquire about a potential mammalwatching guiding career – a concept that didn't really exist back then. I contacted Adam Riley, who was then the CEO of Indri Tours, the only company I knew of, that specialized in mammal-focused tours. He very politely explained they don't have an opening, but that if I'm young and ambitious, I should jump on the opportunity to see Giant Pandas, Ethiopian Wolves, and the wildlife of Madagascar, all of which he feared would be harder as time passes.

Being a 22-year old, living and working in the USA, I wasn't particularly convinced that time was against me, and I also wanted to make more visits to the neotropics which were closer, since there were still so many animals I needed to "clean up" on.

Well.. That was a 22-year-old version of me with a certain logic, which has changed since.

In 2013-2014 I had a summer off from my Master's degree. I read that Foping closed permanently, and supposedly it became impossible to see giant pandas in the wild. But being cocky, I thought: "Ok, maybe 'regular' companies can't go there, but I'll find a special company that still does. There are over a billion people in China, right? There's no way NOBODY can take me to see pandas". Alas, my arrogance was refuted, and I realized I was indeed fucked.

I had always regretted listening to Adam, and I promised myself that if the opportunity ever resurfaced, I would drop everything and go! I made the same vow only for Okapi.. And now Saola, following the MW podcast episode with Bill Robichaud.

I did visit China in April 2014 with my family for a sightseeing and cultural trip. We actually spent a week in Sichuan among other places, and visited some reserves that technically still host giant pandas, such as Jiuzhaigou and Huanglong. But of course, with millions of noisy and littering locals, and only during daylight hours, seeing anything rare was nothing more than a dream. We even managed to sleep inside Jiuzhaigou despite the official rules (my mom arranged it, somehow!), and our villager hostess told us stories of Pandas and Black bears that she has seen in the park. We weren't allowed to go outside after visitor hours, but I remember sitting and staring out the homestay window until it

was too dark to see across the valley, hoping and dreaming of anything from hog badger to Asiatic black bear to cross through the clearing, (this wasn't right elevation for giant pandas).

Fast-forward to 2019, when Martin Royle e-mailed me about the possibility of actually seeing a giant panda on a trip scheduled to March 2020. He wasn't finished with his sentence before I threw my money at him and got on all 4... ok, maybe just the money part.

This is my chance! The stars have finally lined up for me! But 2 weeks before the beginning of my trip, China and then the world closed down due to COVID. In fact, my personal story with giant pandas, being my literal top dream of all mammals, always had dramatic and unexpected hurdles:

So Covid happened, and then 4 years later when China finally opened, the war in Israel started and all the flights were cancelled. Even when the Ukraine-Russia war started, I feared that China would be on the Russia-Iran-North Korea side against the rest of the world, and it would close down for decades longer. Then, when people started posting pictures of Pandas on Facebook in early 2024, I thought the Chinese government would crack down on all parks and close them.

Then, I feared I wouldn't be let into China with my thermal scope, or that my direct flight from Bangkok would be cancelled and I wouldn't make it in time for pickup... but low and behold – all the stars lined up and I arrived in Chengdu at TFU on May 3rd around 2am (with my Pulsar thermal scope!) and made the extra hour-or-so drive to CTU to the VERY LUXURIOUS little airport hotel.



Itinerary:

Day 1 – Pickup from Chengdu and drive to Place X

Day 2 – All day at Place X

Day 3 – All day at Place X

Day 4 – Change of plans (thanks to satisfactory early panda sighting) - drive to Labahe

Day 5 – All day at Labahe

Day 6 – Labahe to Dujiangyan

Day 7 – Early morning birding in Dujiangyan and then to Ruorgai

Day 8 – All day in Ruorgai

Day 9 – All day in Ruorgai (with a visit to Baxing forest)

Day 10 – All day in Ruorgai

Day 11 – Ruorgai to Tangjiahe

Day 12 – Tangjiahe

Day 13 - (Royle Safari ends) - Tangjiahe – only Tomer and Deb

Day 14 – Tangjiahe to Pingwu area

Day 15 – Drive back to Chengdu

Day 1:

After a short, 3-hour nap I woke up for a hearty breakfast buffet which included both Western and Chinese cuisines. I also met Deb in person after having chatted over Facebook for months about the trip. We then met Oleg and Tatyana in the lobby, and finally, after a short delay due to a small confusion, we were picked up by the guide, who asked to remain anonymous. We will call him Mr. A. We also met the rest of the group: Elias, who I had briefly met in Madagascar, Monty and Mark – both of whom I had never met before.

We split into 2 cars and got on our way. We were told that the other guide, who we will call Mr. Z., who was initially supposed to also accompany us, just finished a particularly strenuous mammal tour, and would take a week's break. We would have his brother as a 2nd driver, and after a week, Mr. A and Mr. Z would switch. I must admit I was a little worried, because I had heard great things about each of these guides, and I thought that only having one of them at any time wasn't as good as having both. But as it turned out, we ended up seeing a lot of stuff, including our main targets, so it worked out!

I was in the car with Mark, Deb and Monty, as well as Mr. A, who is a real character, full of both mammal-related and non-mammal stories, lots of sarcasm and great laughs. This made for a fun and entertaining 5-6-ish hour drive up the mountains. It was also humbling to find out that, despite having been 'around the block once or twice' myself, literally everyone in my car has travelled to more countries and has seen more mammals than me! In all fairness, I'm also the youngest, but hearing everyone's stories, I could only be inspired and slightly envious by my new friends.

Lunch at a seemingly random restaurant along the way (but known by Mr. A) was surprisingly good. Especially considering my previous experiences in Sichuan. We finally reached our hotel around 16:00ish.

We checked in, got our gear on, and made a first expedition towards Giant Panda country. But as soon as we pulled out of the hotel, the first drops of rain greeted us, and even though it seemed light at first, it never let up and stayed consistent into the afternoon,

evening and night. This greeting turned to be perfectly consistent at each of our destinations. In fact, this repeated itself at every single place we visited (6 in total): it started raining as soon as we arrived and didn't let off throughout first night.

We did a little bit of roadside scanning before the rain became a nuisance. We then proceeded to the nearby nature reserve until it became dark, the temperatures dropped to below freezing, and everyone was



soaked. Other than *dippers* here and there, the place seemed overrun by domesticated cattle and horses. The rain continued through the night, and being freezing and wet, we did not venture out that first night.

Day 2:

We drove up the road into the reserve at 6:00, and enjoyed the amazing, scenic views of freshly-snow-covered forested mountains. The scene reminded me of those paintings in Chinese restaurants back in the States. This is the China I had been dreaming of – the wild, panda forests.

We parked at a trailhead, and had Mr. A's special breakfast, which was sufficient, fun, and recurring on as-needed basis throughout the trip. It gradually stopped raining, and the clouds started clearing. Still mammal-less, we hiked a trail that runs parallel to the road, where red pandas are frequently seen. Mr. A encouraged me to use the thermal scope since it was still very cold, and indeed within an hour, yaks aside, I thermal-scoped a **Chinese Goral** across the valley.

However, pretty birds aside, we didn't see anything during the 3-ish hour hike. After a picnic lunch, we made the first ascend to the mountain from where we would scan for the next several days for Giant panda and other animals. The ascent itself is very picturesque and we also saw some beautiful birds along the way, including *Mrs. Gould's sunbird*, which was on my "to see" list. The trail up at the top goes through almost fairytale-like meadows with the mountainous backdrop, with yaks and horses besides the trail, all to the omnipresent sounds of Lady Amherst's pheasants.





Passing by a pond with a resident *common redshank* and an occasional *Chinese pond heron*, we reached "Scanning Hill". It's daunting when you look at it: 5-6 ridges of forested mountains, most of which are over a kilometer away. A panda can be literally anywhere. And I haven't mentioned the bamboo... let's talk about the bamboo:

The entire panda habitat is completely covered with thick, dense bamboo that's about 1.8-2ish meters in height. It's SO thick that an animal can be only a few meters in and you'll never know! When you scan the mountains across the valley – scanning each tree from top to bottom, you suddenly realize that's actually not the base of the trees. It's just where they emerge from the 2m-tall bamboo carpet. So your only bet is to find a panda up a tree, or walking through a landslide. One can, completely by chance, come across a panda crossing the trail. But those are usually short and only experienced by the lucky individual/s at the right place at the right time.

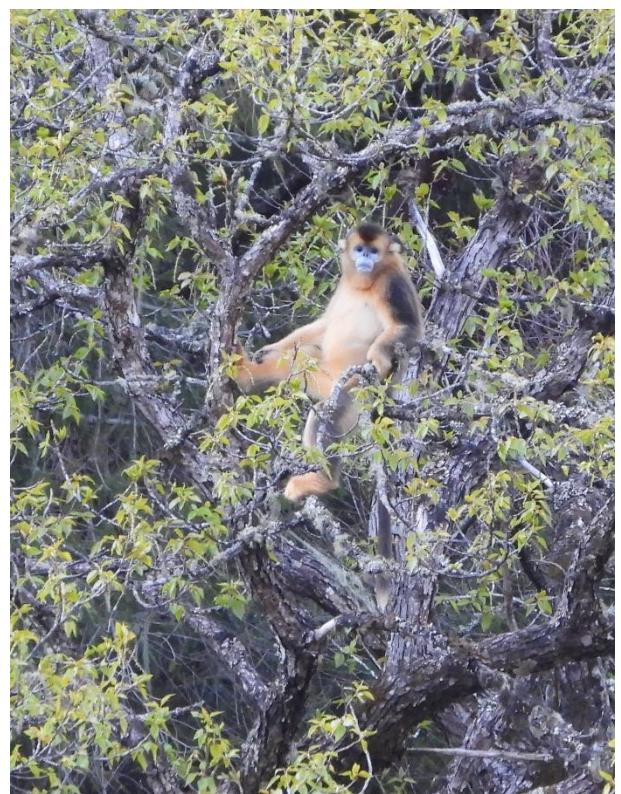
So all-in-all, the odds are not in your favor, and it's actually quite worrying when you first get acquainted with the place. How will we ever find one?

Around what must have been 16:00, Monty announced he's seeing a Giant Panda. It was on the 3rd furthest ridgeline, out of 5 (see picture above – the last forested ridge before the 2 snowy ones). He was sure he saw it in a tree, but nobody else could see it, despite understanding exactly what tree he was talking about. To this day, Monty definitely thinks

it was a panda. My problem was that the mountain behind it was freshly covered with snow, and the sun's angle made it so bright. The dark trees against the white snow peeking through the spaces between the trees on the ridge, in combination with a little bit of wind to make it look like things are moving slightly, could be misleading. Add on the fact that this is all happening a good 2-ish kilometers away on a far-away ridge. And yet, Monty has super-sharp eyes, and ended up finding us the confirmed panda... so despite the few question marks, I believe him!

We had to start making our way down not long after, but the sun was fully out, and there were still 2 hours left of it. We saw the same individual Chinese goral across the valley. But nothing else. On our drive back, around 18:30, both Deb and I noticed movements in trees across the valley. I asked our guide to stop once we pass a group of trees, because I thought I saw something, and as soon as we got a clear view of the other side Deb announced: "I just saw a monkey!".

A few seconds later, everyone was out of both vehicles for a fantastic, 15 minute of viewing a large group of **Golden Snub-nosed Monkeys** across the valley, not very far away, around eye level. They were very active and it was entertaining to see them jumping, grooming etc., aware of our presence but unbothered. What an iconic and beautiful species! One of my top targets for the trip, and a true fortune to see them completely in the wild.



Further down, on the way toward the lodge, a **Sambar deer** crossed the road, then more were seen across the river. My eye was glued to the thermal scope as it started getting dark, and I asked to stop again when I thought I spotted strong heat on the other side of the river. My spotting turned out to be another Sambar, but when I went down the road to pee, I was summoned back by Mr. A who found our first **Red Panda** high in a tree across the valley, obscured by other trees, with no view of the face. In fact, this was quite anticlimactic, as this was my 2nd highest most-wanted species, and the view was so unsatisfactory.

With the panda not turning, and the light quickly fading, we left it, hoping we'd see more. After dinner, Deb, Elias and I ventured into the forest trail that starts behind the hotel restaurant. Almost immediately, Deb spotted what we originally thought was a hog badger, but what we now know is probably the abundant **masked palm civet**. We saw it well, but briefly, as it ran across the trail and up a steep hill. I then thermal spotted a large animal that I assumed was cattle, but with the light on it, it turned out to be a **deer**. I'm 99.9% sure it was a **tufted deer**, which would be a lifer, but we didn't get a picture. Luckily, we would see this species again. I thermal-spotted a smallish carnivore across the stream, which I thought might be a leopard cat, but we lost it before we had a chance to identify it. Finally, across the stream I thermal spotted another animal which was clearly a large-ish **rat**. But it, too, disappeared behind a log before we got a chance to take a picture.

Day 3:

We left the hotel at 6am again, and stopped at the location where we saw the red panda the night before. It wasn't there, but in the same tree I thermal-scoped a small animal, which turned out to be a **Swinhoe's striped squirrel** through the binoculars. It quickly ran back down the tree and not everyone got a look at it.

I thermal-scoped out the door on the left side of the vehicle the entire drive in, but we saw nothing. We made it straight to the regular parking spot, from where we hiked straight up the hill, after breakfast, to the same spot, from where we scan for giant pandas. When we arrived, I powered my thermal scope and immediately noticed a huge group of Golden snub-nosed monkeys on the nearest mountain across the valley on the left. The monkeys stayed in the area throughout the day, going on about their business and spreading out throughout the mountain-side forest.

When Mr. A arrived like 15 minutes after us with his spotting scope, he announced that he saw a couple of Swinhoe's squirrels at the top of the big staircase at the beginning of the trail. But other than that, despite both Mr. A and I finding several thermal signatures throughout the mountains, we didn't see any pandas for the next 8 hours. Yak and cattle were omnipresent, which can cause a little excitement when first spotted through the thermal scope, or far away in the forest, followed by the let-down. We also spotted a few locals picking what must have been mushrooms or leaves in the hills across the valley.

At one point, I noticed a single squirrel quickly running about in the trees next to the clearing, and noted it. Mr. A said it must be another Swinhoe's. Later in the afternoon, Mark also saw a squirrel in roughly the same place. Since none of us had a picture, Deb, Elias, Mark and I made an attempt to re-locate the squirrel but to no avail.

One thing that did happen, unfortunately, is that despite the relatively cold temperatures, I kept thermal scoping during the day, even directly in front of the sun, and noticed that my sensor – every time it re-calibrated (which it does automatically every minute or so) would have a negative image burned into the screen, of the last image before the calibration. So basically, my thermal scope is fucked.

I found away around it, which is to switch to manual calibration, and then cover the entire sensor with my hand every time I calibrate to block all light. This creates a "uniform" negative, which causes less distraction. I can deal with it for a little while longer, but unfortunately, I will need to buy a new thermal scope, soon.

It was also very unexpectedly sunny this day, and since I didn't put on sunscreen, I got mega-burned, with like 2nd degree burns on my forehead. Around 16:00 we called quits on the scanning, and hiked down to try for a better red panda. We hiked down the road and saw some pretty birds but no mammals.

Around 18:00ish we decided to drive up and down the main road and scan with the thermal scopes. I saw a big thermal shape in the thick bamboo and called "Stop!". It was just at the side of the road, not a meter into the bamboo, but we all looked at it and saw nothing. Until Mark announced "there's a deer there!". At that point the **Tufted Deer** stood up and walked into the bamboo abyss. I finally got a good look at it as it got up, turned its butt to us and disappeared. This further demonstrated how the bamboo hides animals, even at the edge. We drove back to the hotel for dinner and saw nothing but cattle at the roadside or mountain sides.

This night, Mr. A was super tired, having spent so many hours scanning through a thermal scope and a spotting scope. So, we encouraged him to rest, and had the other driver drive us back into the reserve after dark, drop us off at a parking lot near a gazebo, and just wait for us at the bottom entrance – which is around a 4.5km walk downhill.

Tonight we found a few sleeping birds, and had a great look at our first confirmed **masked palm civet**, spotlight by Deb. This guy looked huge at first, especially compared to the many, many masked palm civets I'd seen in both Sumatra and Borneo, and its coloration and markings were very different. At first, I announced it as a badger, and Elias immediately told me it was a palm civet. I was a little dismissive at first, I must admit, as I've seen masked civets so many times like I mentioned, that I was sure it wasn't one. But Elias was right. Deb also confirmed the ID, as we continued downhill. I found a rat in the thermal scope, but only have pictures of its back. According to our guide, the common rat in the area that fits the description is a **Confucius Niviventer**, a species we would see better, later on.



The rest of the hike I found additional rodent-sized thermal signatures that eluded our lights. Deb and Oleg found another Masked Palm civet and we got it crossing the road. Close to the parking lot, I found 2 thermal signatures in the spot where the red panda was seen yesterday. We couldn't see well but thought they were a couple of red pandas. It then hit me that they are probably flying squirrels. And since red-and-white giant flying squirrel aren't present in this area, they would only be the recently-split Chindwin Giant Flying Squirrels. It must have been this species, but with such unclear views, I couldn't put it down.

Day 4:

The 3rd full day of mammal watching started at 6am again. Despite the worryingly warming temperatures and the scary bamboo, I thought: "We'll probably see our big target today or tomorrow". I'm not sure where this rush of optimism came from, but as I always say – when mammal watching, you have to have some optimism. If you don't genuinely believe you stand a chance of finding your targets, then what the hell are you doing spending your vacation days and so much money on?

Elias saw a squirrel running through the forested playground at the lodge as we boarded the vehicles, but we couldn't find it again. We drove into the park directly to our breakfast gazebo without seeing anything on the way. I will say that Mr. A. did mention that apart from the "Big 3" (Giant Panda, Red Panda and Golden Monkeys), this area isn't as good for most other mammals. Labahe would be better. So, in case we can "nail down" those three a few nights ahead of the 7 nights scheduled there, we would move onto Labahe. Having said that – these "Big 3" are BIG FUCKING THREE. Being so iconic and a personal dream of mine, they're pretty much the reason I came all the way back to China, so to me they're worth more than many, many other species combined.

Today we would hike down in the valley in the morning, since Royle Safaris' March group saw a Panda from this trail. It's kind of a crap shoot, but hiking, rather than sitting at that same spot, sounded like refreshing change. As soon as we got onto the trail we saw a dead red panda on the riverbed, that must have drowned in the unseasonably strong stream due to the rains. As we hiked up the valley, we stopped to scan with the thermal scopes and binos whenever we had clear views of the other side of the valley, every few hundred meters.

We scanned every few minutes, and also stopped to refresh ourselves with water and remove layers of clothes as the temperatures rose. Then, at 9:47am the unbelievable happened: Deb, Mark, Monty, Elias and I were a little ahead of Oleg, Tatyana and the guide, as Oleg was photographing some birds. We stopped to scan for a few minutes, when Monty announced: "Holy Fuck, I got one!"

He continued "This is for sure one! Guys, this is it!"

WHERE?? WHERE??????

But Monty kept his cool. He stayed calm and tried to find identifiable landmarks to point out to us, so that we could see it.

"See that dip in the mountain? Start there, go directly down, and when you reach the obvious dead tree, go straight to the right". Deb and Mark saw it, but I was looking at the wrong dip. A few moments of near heart attack and Deb carefully explained to me the exact location.

And then I saw it.

A truly wild, fucking **Giant panda**. My biggest wildlife dream of all time. The species I've been beating myself over missing, not knowing when and if it would ever again become possible. And there it was, relaxing on a tree, in clear view, surprisingly clean-white, in all its glory, maybe 500 meters from me. I must have said "Oh my god, oh my god" like 10



times in a row. I just couldn't believe it. I know this is the reason I came here, and obviously they're around. But with all the thick bamboo, and with the entire backstory of Covid and the Chinese government not wanting people to see it, and the wars back home that closed airports, and the fact that they're literally needles in a haystack.... what are the fucking chances?

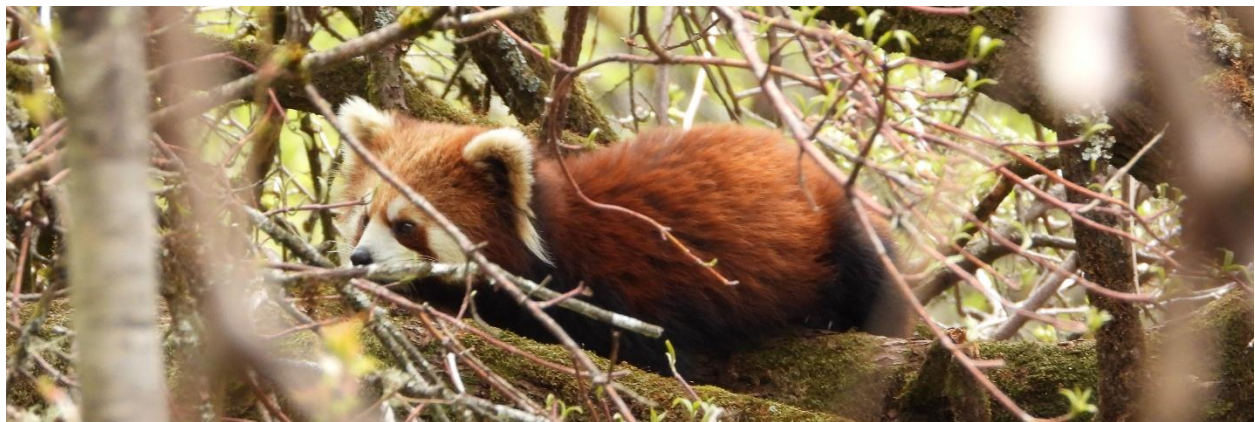


And yet, against all the odds, here is a beautiful, wild giant panda, only my 3rd species of wild bear (I need to get on that!) in the middle of the picturesque mountainous forest scene straight out of a painting – I just couldn't believe my eyes. Wars, another pandemic, the Chinese government going apeshit – nothing will ever take this away from me. This Pokémon is mine! I was in such disbelief, I had an almost out-of-body experience mixed with an adrenaline rush, I just started questioning why I deserved to be ever so lucky. This is a feeling I've only felt when I saw my first wild gorillas and my first pangolin (both in the C.A.R) and my marbled cat in Borneo. I'm pretty sure I even had a few tears.

The rest of the group quickly caught up, and we all had amazing views through binoculars, spotting scope, our camera lenses, and just admiring the distant black-and-white figure with our bare eyes. At one point, it climbed down the tree and we could barely see it. But as we discussed how lucky and happy we were, it climbed back up, and gave us a final show, before going back down for good. This sighting provided the most epic 20-30-minute mammal encounter in my life. My hands were still shaking several minutes later as I dared type into the mammal list on my phone: "**9. Giant Panda**".

Even as I'm writing down this report, I'm pinching myself, again.

Elated, we turned around and started going back down toward the parking lot. We would try to find a red panda, so that we can move to Labahe tomorrow. Most of the group did a little bit of relaxed birding on the way down, while the quick-and-hasty duo that was Mark and I, were always ahead. We were talking about previous and future mammal trips when suddenly I stopped mid-sentence and said "Oh my god, there's a **Red Panda** right there!". Mark asked "where", but didn't wait for my answer, as the animal sat at eye-level on a branch that must have been 2-3m away from us. Since the trail was steep downhill from the trail, it was actually pretty high up the tree it was in, but for us, it was in near-perfect position.



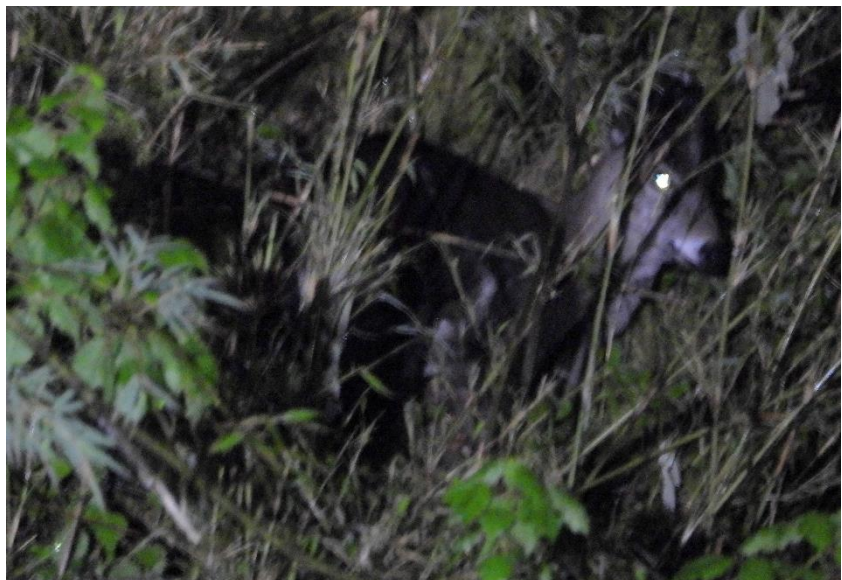
I quickly took a video and a couple of pictures, but then, since the rest of the group were too far back, I decided to run back up the trail and get everyone before the panda leaves – a gesture which everyone appreciated. But luckily, the panda was just lazily resting on the branch, allowing us as much time with it as we want as long as we kept relatively quiet.

Everyone was happy – Such great views of both pandas, less than an hour apart. My god. Mr. A now knew for sure we would move to Labahe the next day. So he left us with the panda and hiked back down to the car, to where he would get reception to make arrangements. We spent a good half an hour with the red panda, and Deb also mentioned to me how surreal this experience is, and how this is exactly how she had dreamed of seeing this animal. Everyone was so happy, and we were all happy for each other as well.

We saw no further mammals on the way down, but the usual *redstarts* and *white-throated dippers*. Since we had the rest of the afternoon in the park, Deb, Mark, Monty Elias and I hiked all the way back up the hill, to the Panda scanning spot, but for a different reason. The calls of Lady Amherst's pheasant were omnipresent there, and considering the lack of further diurnal mammals in the area, we tried calling it. As a bycatch, we would also try to get better looks at Swinhoe's squirrels as we had seen them there the day before. Meanwhile, Oleg and Tatyana tried their luck with just general birding along the road.

0Long-story-short, we didn't find the pheasant nor the squirrel, and the monkeys were also gone from across the valley. But one cannot be "disappointed" on a day such as today. When we got back to the car, Mr. A. told us that another red panda just ran down the trail in front of the car. We spent a good 20 minutes looking for it but to no avail. On the hike, we saw *Mrs. Gould's sunbird* again, which was cool, but no mammals.

After dinner, Mr. A came led us on a night hike, but we only saw tufted deer, Masked palm civet, and a few unidentified rodents. Finally, at the same place as the night before, we found the thermal shapes and with the guide's spotlight plus everyone else's together (like Power Rangers' Megazord) we



were able to vaguely identify the animals as **Chindwin Flying Squirrels**, a recent split from gray-headed flying squirrels. Personally, I didn't love putting that one on my list since I didn't get a great look at it, but we would see it again...

Back at the lodge, Deb, Oleg and I ventured out by foot to the trail that starts behind the lodge/hotel. We walked for another hour and a half, but didn't find anything of note. I did see a thermal signature right at the edge of the thick bamboo that seemed cat-sized to me, but I'll never know for sure.

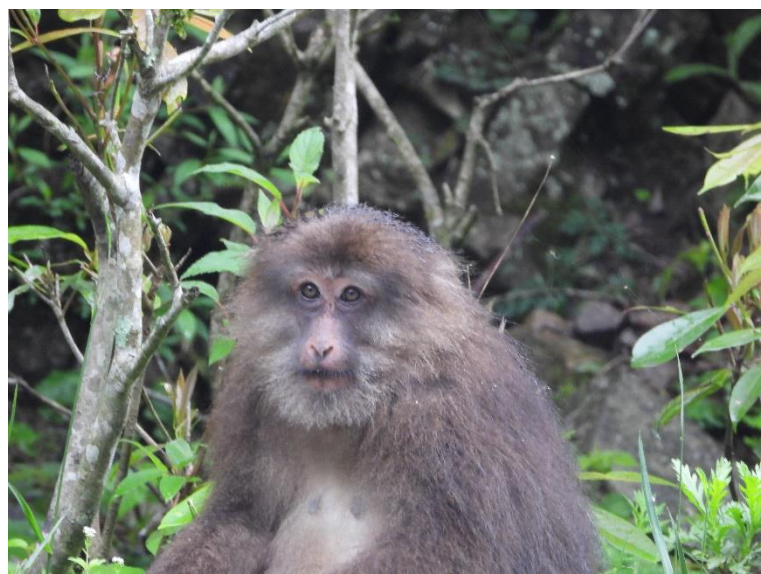
Day 5:

We had a leisurely start with an 8am breakfast at the lodge restaurant, then drove to Labahe. Let me explain this change of plan:

We originally had 7 days in this area, dedicated to finding a giant panda. However, as I mentioned earlier, this area is best for the "big 3", and not much else. Technically, there are also serows, leopard cats, black bears, golden cats and other species in this place. But according to Mr. A, all of those are easier at either Labahe or Tangjiahe.

So, since we had very satisfying views of the main 3 targets, and still had 3 nights left to spare, we decided to continue onto Labahe. The main targets there are the iconic Red-and-white Giant flying squirrel which occurs nowhere else on our itinerary, plus Chindwin Giant flying squirrel, Forest musk deer which should be "gettable" there, as well as mainland leopard cat, hog badger, and chances for additional red pandas, giant pandas and golden snub-nosed monkeys. In fact, Mr. A insists that Labahe is actually better for Giant Pandas than the previous place, when scanning nearby slopes from the top of the road only accessible by buses. Except he says these slopes are too often covered with clouds. This is the only reason that apparently makes Labahe inferior to the other area. In fact, Giant pandas are seen there occasionally: even from the bus that takes you to the top, or from the cable car that takes you up the mountain, where it was seen less than a month prior to our arrival.

So with all that info, lots of excitement and enthusiasm, we arrived at Labahe around 18:00. We stopped at a parking lot near a lake, where several cars were stopped next to a large troop of **Tibetan macaques**. I had seen those in Emei Shan a decade ago, but took a few pictures and



enjoyed, as the rest of the group got all close and personal with the monkeys. We then continued to the hotel, which is actually quite a luxurious looking hotel, with a grand lobby, and rooms with Western toilets and showers!

We settled in quickly and got out for our first pre-dinner "game drive". But as happened at every single site we visited, as soon as we got into the vehicles for our first drive it started raining. Again, it wasn't pouring, but just enough to be annoying, and make it so that you can't stand outside with your camera and gear without getting everything wet.

We drove up to the other hotel all the way at the end of the "main" road. There are some exposed slopes where Sambar deer can be seen very frequently, as well as the occasional **Reeve's muntjac**. We saw both on the drive, as well as the Red deer, which is introduced from another province in China.



We had a pleasant dinner in the hotel restaurant, with a window which overlooks a kind of mineral clay lick

that attracts Sambar deer. No other species, though. We then left for our night drive, but the rain wouldn't let off. It was a light drizzle at first, so we started going and saw Masked palm civets and Sambars. Then, I spotted a pretty large thermal signature on an exposed rocky cliff across the steep, narrow valley. I was sure it would be a sleeping macaque, as it was large. But upon inspecting with the spotlight, Mr. A announced: "Squirrel!".



I'm sorry, a squirrel? The size of a medium-sized monkey? Sure enough, this was our highly-wanted **Red-and-white Giant Flying squirrel**, licking minerals off the cliffside rocks.



In fact, there were at least 2 different animals in separate places on the cliff. This is definitely the largest squirrel I've ever seen, it's huge! Much larger than the Red, Thomas's or Spotted giant squirrels I've seen all over Southeast Asia.

Throughout the drive, I also spotted many rodents at the steep roadside slopes. I've managed some videos and pictures of at least 1 individual of each: **Confucius Niviventer** and **Chevrier's field mouse**, which Mr. A. confirmed and said that research has been conducted on both of those species at Labahe, and they are the most common small rodents in the park.



As the rain picked up, Mr. A. took us to a concrete tunnel, where he frequently sees bats. Roosting. Sure enough, we found 2 individuals of **Sichuan Myotis** and a single **Japanese Horseshoe bat**. I'm not a bat expert, but our guide was very confident about these species based on research done in the area. He even went as far as to say that people who listed different myotis and horseshoe bats from this tunnel have it wrong. So who am I to argue?



Other than another Masked Palm civet, on the drive back we didn't find any new species, and the rain got heavier. Despite arriving back around midnight, we were going to have an early morning at 6ish to try our luck.

Day 6:

Arriving at the lobby just before 6am, I saw what is most likely a house mouse running from behind the counter to the little area of earth and plants inside the lobby. Monty and I were the only ones who got up, as everyone else slept in. We had an hour-ish long hike in the steady rain which yielded very wet shoes and more sleep deprivation.

After breakfast at 7:30, we drove across the river to the bus station. Mr. A. told us you used to be able to drive up and down the road independently, but now only buses are allowed. It's an 8.5-ish kilometer road to the upper bus station, where a restaurant, bathrooms, a cafe, and a cable car station can be found. About half-way through the bus road you enter panda land, with thick bamboo again. At one point, the bus driver pointed out to our guide in Chinese that only a few days ago (May 2nd if I remember correctly) a Giant Panda crossed right in front of the bus. This was about 2 kilometers before the top. However, when we got to the top, it was still raining. We decided we would hike down the main road, then if the weather improved, we may hike all the way down. However, instead of improving, the weather only worsened, and after less than 45 minutes we decided to turn around and hike back up the hill to the restaurant. There was also no visibility to any of the slopes around, so trying to scan for either panda was not possible.

The best thing that happened this morning is that right above the restaurant, and in the middle of the observation platform, was a small cafe called Hug Cafe. When you enter this cafe, you leave all your worries behind: it's far warmer than any other place in upper Sichuan province, including our own hotel rooms and all restaurants. It's got pleasant

Chinese music playing, complemented by the smell of incense mixed with the smell of coffee and hot chocolate. There is, of course, a big panda Teddybear on one of the chairs next to one of the cafe's low-to-the-ground tables. And the cafe is overlooking the forest at on the side of the road. It is much more pleasant than the restaurant downstairs. Mark and I came up here and he got hot cocoa for both he and I without



even telling me – a small gift, which made this little piece of heaven just perfect, inside an otherwise rainy and cold reality outside.

After a chicken burger lunch downstairs, we decided to take the bus down and sleep until it hopefully clears out. Elias said he read that the rain should stop by 19:00, so we had hopes. Deb was the only maverick who decided to traverse the rain and hike all the way downhill, which could take a few hours. She left before we gathered our stuff and waited for the bus. During the bus drive down, we came across Deb, who was clearly looking at something. The bus driver honked in a traditional Eastern-Asian tradition, which apparently scared a male Lady Amherst's pheasant out of the clearing, where she was getting ready to photograph it. We all got out of the bus quickly to see what was going on but had missed the bird. It was a shame with the timing, as she was just watching it come out into the clearing, and would have gotten nice pictures of it, if it wasn't for the bus honking and scaring it.

We got to the hotel around 14:30ish and just then the sun was starting to peak out. But I was so tired and preferred to save my energy for this evening and night. Around 17:00 we went out for an afternoon drive, while Oleg and Tatyana went birdwatching on the riverside trail. Shortly after we



started our drive, Deb texted and said she was getting to the lower bus station, so we picked her up before continuing our drive. We then drove up to the upper hotel, where a troop of Tibetan macaques were hanging out, as well as Sambar deer, Red deer and a pair of Muntjacs, but nothing else. However, on the way back down toward the hotel, while all of us scanned the roadside slopes for wildlife, Elias called out a pheasant on the road. This happened to be a beautiful male *Lady Amherst's pheasant* which we saw briefly crossing the road and climbing up the hill, then disappearing into the forest. It was really a nice bird, and one I had hoped to see.



We went out around 20:30 for our night drive after dinner, and the rain indeed stop, finally. On this drive, I thermal-scoped a **Chindwin giant flying squirrel** on the rocks on the opposite side of the stream. Finally! A great and prolonged view that I'm happy counting.

The next spotting was a bit unexpected, as I found another thermal signature in a tree on the opposite side of the valley. It took us a few minutes of combined spotlight power for me to understand what I was looking at – it was brownish, like a flying squirrel, but then had a bright blue feature. I zoomed in and realized we were looking at a *Temminck's tragopan*! Not a mammal, but a super great bird to see, and yet another species I had dreamed of seeing someday. It was a little far, but we got decent, clear and prolonged views which was great.

We saw more Chinese gorals, Red-and-white Flying squirrels and another Masked palm civet at the roadside. I skipped most of the thermal-scoped rodents on the roadside upwards slopes. But one we stopped for looked different than the others, as I saw it running clearly on top of a straight rocky area. It was more grayish-uniform in color, and I'm almost certain it's a Chinese birch mouse, but I can't put it down on the official list because I didn't get any evidence for confirmation.

But then we saw another animal at the roadside, disappearing into the bushes. Deb jumped out and tried to re-locate it. I was convinced it was just another palm civet, but luckily Oleg and Monty from the 2nd vehicle behind, spotted it further back than we had expected. It turned out to be a confused but unconcerned **Northern Hog Badger**,



put up a show by slowly climbing up the rocks, back down, and getting too close to Oleg, before continuing down the ditch. Boom! Another big target for me.

Later on, we saw the myotis again, another Tufted deer, and a rat on the road, which we initially identified as another Chevrier's

field mouse, but based on a Facebook Messenger Conversation with Venkat Sankar, I now believe this is a probable **Edward's long-tailed Giant rat**.



We ended the night drive around midnight, to start back out at 4:00 until 6:00 for another attempt to find new mammals.

Day 7:

Only Mark, Deb, our guide and I got up for the 4am shift. We had high hopes, but at the end we only ended up seeing Sambar and Muntjacs, Red deer, and another Hog badger that didn't stick around long.

Today we would make the long drive to Dujiangyan, in the outskirts of Chengdu, to break the very long drive to Ruogai. So we're "losing" a night at Labahe, but gaining some time on the plateau tomorrow. So it made sense to everyone, plus we don't have to leave Labahe for Dujiangyan until around 15:30ish, meaning the morning is up for grabs.

We all split up, between sleeping, birdwatching and going back up the hill with the bus. But we were all in touch via a WhatsApp group I created. The only requirements were: 1. to have our luggage in Sid's room if we weren't coming back to the hotel before checkout time (noon), and 2. Meet back around the hotel by 15:00 or in the bus parking lot by 15:15.

My personal story was that I slept from 6 to 9, took a leisurely shower and packed, then took the bus back up to the top station. I put my stuff in Sid's room, and walked the 10-ish minute downhill and across the river to the bus station, where I ran into Elias, who was waiting for the same bus. God himself must have put Elias there, because he offered me a banana, which was the perfect snack, since I slept through breakfast in the hotel.

The weather indeed cleared up, and the drive to the top was extra scenic! The views there on the odd clear day provide serious WOWs, not to be overlooked. We ran into Monty on the platform at the top, who was scanning the slopes since this morning. He told us he had already seen 2 red pandas this morning, and in fact was looking at a 3rd one as we speak. He pointed in the middle of a slope that looks like it was cleared out, right near the cable cars. Upon closer looks, the entire surface was covered with the typical thick bamboo carpet that covers everything above a certain elevation. And in the middle of the uniform, otherwise open slope, was a single tree stump with a cut-off top, that had a red panda sleeping on top of it. Monty pointed it out to some local birders, who were over-the-top appreciative that he showed them their first wild panda, even though they've lived their entire lives in the region.

Additional interesting news came from Oleg and Tatyana, who appeared from the cable car station. Apparently, they took the cable car to the top of the mountain and said it was useless... well, except for a pika they saw. This would be a lifer for sure, and a new order for the trip, so Elias and I contemplated going up there to search for it. The other option



My picture of Swinhoe's Striped Squirrel from Jiuzhaigou, 2014

was to look for Swinhoe's squirrels around the bus parking lot, where it is seen sometimes, and we still hadn't gotten a picture of. But while contemplating, I remembered that in fact I have a picture of this species, from Jiuzhaigou in 2014. This was one of only 6 mammals I saw on that trip. I quickly looked up my Facebook album and confirmed: This species is both on our current trip list AND I have a picture of it in my "repertoire", and so the decision was easy for me: Pika it is! Elias didn't need convincing, and kindly offered

to chip in for my ride up, since I had no more Yuans on me. In return, he made me promise I'd find him a pika.

The ride up was extremely scenic, and I truly, again, felt like I was in one of the Chinese restaurant paintings. The cable car would also slow to an almost complete stop each time someone got on or off at either station. This happened at an especially good timing, as both Elias and I simultaneously located the same Red Panda we had seen from the observation platform below. But this time, we were much closer to it, and just about eye-level. To see a wild Red panda from a freaking



cable car with one of the most amazing scenic views in the background – was yet another surreal experience. Keep in mind that as of now, both giant and red pandas have been seen from this cable car in the past 2 months!

When we got to the top, it was very cloudy and cold again. Visibility wasn't great, but we followed Oleg's directions of where he found the pika. I busted my thermal scope out, and we started hiking up the metal staircase trail. It didn't take long before Elias called out: "There's a Pika!". I just saw the back of it as it ran into a burrow, and we spent some

time trying to locate it. But then, hiking a little bit up the trail we were able to find a couple more. These are **Moupin Pikas**, according to Mr. A.

Deb, who woke up just before noon, texted me and I had told her about the panda and the pikas. It was cutting it close, but she also managed to take the bus up to the top, after waiting 30 minutes for it. Her bus driver also slightly nudged a Muntjac, which luckily came out uninjured. It was REALLY cutting it close with the cable car, but thankfully she was able to go up and find the pikas as well! We even passed each other on the cable car ride.



Mark, on the other hand, didn't go up that day, but instead he hiked along the river and found a **Perny's long-nosed squirrel**, which only he saw.

Elias and I slowly hiked down the bus road, scanning the hills, mountains, and roadside forest for any surprises, until finally the bus that Deb and Monty were on picked us up on the way down, and we arrived back just a little behind schedule around 15:20.

The rest of the day involved mostly driving, until we got to our fancy resort in Dujiangyen, which, just like everything in China, was very elegant, luxurious and fine on the outside, but the showers were leaking, the balcony doors wouldn't close all the way, etc. However, I can't complain because it was nice, and the bed was comfortable. Deb and Monty had a little night hike on the hotel/resort grounds for an owl, but I opted to get some sleep for tomorrow's long day.

Day 8:

So today we met Mr. A for the final time, for an "optional" pre-breakfast birdwatching session in the forest at the edge of the city. Some chose to sleep a little longer before the very long drive to Ruoergai. I must admit I contemplated sleeping in, but then convinced myself to go since I didn't come to China to rest.

As soon as we arrived in the car park we saw our first **Pallas's squirrel**, which was a nice new species for the day. Mammal-wise, we only saw another Pallas's squirrel or two, but bird-wise we actually had a good time with *collared owlet*, which, owls are always fun, a *great barbet*, *orange-bellied leafbird*, plus some *tits*, *finchbills*, etc. Apparently, the leafbird was a first-ever record for the greater Chengdu metro-area, so our guide was very excited. I confirmed from eBird that there are no records anywhere near Dujiangyan.

After breakfast, it started raining (as in every place...) and we made a very long drive to Ruoergai. We drove up the mountains as the scenery started changing. Around 3pm I noticed something moving in a mustelid-like fashion on the opposite side of the road. I quickly had Mr. Z, our new guide for the second half of the trip, stop at the roadside. This turned out to be a **Himalayan marmot**. The first of infinitely many. While watching the marmot, I also noticed a *Ring-necked pheasant* in a small grassy area below the road.



We reached the grassland area around 17:00 but didn't reach our hotel until about an hour or so later. While driving on the plateau, it was apparent that the fence construction and the train track construction would put a damper on this area in the future. A note about Ruoergai before we "dive in": it's wide-known that Pallas's cats are "no longer" reliable in Ruoergai, where it used to be guaranteed. Spoiler: we also wouldn't see them. But I refuse to believe that they're gone from the entire Ruoergai area – there are plenty of rocky outcrops or quarries in areas further from the road and not near the train track construction. They just need to be found, work needs to be put-in, and then it will go back to being a findable species there.

Another thing about the logistics of Ruoergai, is that unlike all the other places, the hotel is about an hour from the core mammal watching areas. Granted, there can be mammals and birds here and there along the highway, mostly behind the fence, but it's basically highway and you barely stop for anything.

We went out for dinner at a typical Chinese restaurant in the town of Zoige, after which we went for a night safari drive. Since we had a long drive earlier of almost 11 hours, Mr. Z was understandably tired, and suggested we would visit a place that's closer to town. Then we would start early the following morning.

We all agreed, and off we were. Of course, as in literally every place we visited, it started raining – first lightly, but then a little more heavily. There was also a tiny bit of communication bump when we got on the side road and Mr. Z informed us that since we're too close to town, we can't use the spotlight. We negotiated starting to spotlight when we're a little further from the main road, and of course we would be able to use my thermal scope.

It didn't take long before we started spotting mammals, starting with a couple of **Woolly hares**. The next animal I spotted in the thermal scope happened to be an **Asiatic badger**, another species I had hoped to see on this trip! I have a horrible video of it, and I think Oleg got a slightly better photo. We then either spotted either the same badger or a 2nd individual further down the road on the same side, but lost it quickly. We then saw a **Plateau Pika**, before turning around and driving back towards Zoige. On the way back we spotted a fox, which we noted down as a Tibetan Fox, but upon reviewing my really shitty video of it, I think it's actually a **Red Fox**. Finally, we spotted yet another Asiatic badger before calling it a night. The temperatures plunged to below freezing, it was wet and miserable outside, and a good time to call quits.



Day 9:

We woke up early morning and left the hotel by 6:00. We drove close to an hour, straight to a place where Pallas's cat used to be seen, but hasn't been seen by any of Mr. A's safaris or Royle Safaris since before COVID. I've spoken with another contact in China who swears they're still there just harder to see.

Regardless, we saw Plateau Pikas everywhere – so much that Mark picked one up that walked underneath his feet. It was snowing quite heavily and visibility wasn't great. Monty then called out Pallas's cat! There was a burst of excitement as we saw a hazy shape in the snowy and snowing field, but which turned out to be a Woolly hare in the binoculars. Meanwhile, Mark, Oleg and Deb pointed out some **Tibetan Gazelles** on a hill nearby. Next, Oleg found a lone **Tibetan Fox** that was sitting a little further away in the open, just hanging out in the snow. The only other thing to note was a *Saker falcon* which some of the guys got excited over, so I took a couple of pictures.



It started snowing heavily and became extremely cold. We went back to the cars, and drove to another area. This is the main area where we would mammal and bird watch for most of our time in Ruergai. This road goes off from the main road (G213), and drives through grasslands, some rocky hills, and then down into a valley. It's extremely scenic, and somewhat reminiscent of Yosemite in some ways, when you get into the valley.

It was snowing heavily but as soon as we got off the main road, and after the huge train track construction, we started seeing wildlife again. *Black-necked cranes* and *shelduck* greeted us first, later joined by *Himalayan griffons*, *Lammergeiers*, *Upland buzzards*, and *golden eagles*, as well as smaller, pretty birds such as *white-browed rosefinches*, *Blue-fronted redstarts* and others. We stopped for breakfast near a herd of Tibetan gazelles before continuing down the road. As the road starts descending into the valley, the dramatic snow-and-cloud-covered mountains gradually change into mountainous forest. In the midst of all of this snow and beautiful scenery, a pair of the beautiful *Blue-eared pheasants* turned up on the road. Only several kilometers down the same road did we finally get a new mammal. We turned around in kind of a farmland area, and walked for a little bit, as the snow started to slow down, before turning around. We saw more

Himalayan marmots, and a new species of pika that's neither black-lipped nor Moupin. Based on a little research on GBIF, IUCN, iNaturalist, Google photos and a little bit of "connecting the dots" and extrapolating from the existing data, my best guess is that the 3 "unknown" pika species we saw are all **Gansu Pika**, as opposed to Thomas's Pika or something different. While watching the Pikas, Elias spotted a pair of **Sika Deer**. We watched them for a little bit before continuing back up the road. I was thermal-scoping the entire time, and at one point I stopped us for something small near the road. I got out of the car to inspect, and found an awesome little **Siberian Chipmunk** hiding away in the forest. This is something



we would have never seen if not for the thermal scope.

Further up the road, we saw more Woolly hares, and Himalayan marmots

started getting out of control, potentially overtaking Plateau Pika as the most frequently-observed



^mammal. Mr. Z stopped near a cliffside area to scan, and found us an **Eastern Roe deer**, while I spotted some **Blue sheep** higher up the same mountain. We were also on the lookout for Alpine musk deer, which we never found.

We had lunch at a restaurant in seemingly the middle of nowhere (but with good food!), and then drove through some farmland area where Mr. Z. sometimes sees interesting mammals including Chinese mountain cat, but we only saw more of the usual including some Tibetan foxes close to the road.



We drove all the way back to the hotel for an afternoon nap and relaxation until dinner, after which we drove back out to the “main area”. That evening we saw many Tibetan foxes again, as well as a (Tibetan) red fox, a couple of **Gray wolves**, and another Asiatic badger, which Oleg got some decent record-shots of.

Day 10:

We started with an awful breakfast at the hotel and went South toward a different area, on the way to Baxi forest. The hotel was its own story: as in many hotels in China, it's elegant and grandiose, but the devil is in the details. In this hotel's case, smoking is allowed everywhere, even inside the elevator!! 🤢 The rooms are clean upon first glance, but if you accidentally look under the beds or in other slightly less-accessible places, you may find previous guests' chop sticks or food leftovers. They had heated toilet seats, a hot watered shower and sufficient heating in the room, which is all I can ever ask for, so I wasn't complaining. Well, except for that breakfast...

In retrospect, I'm not sure why we didn't start the day earlier. We got to the grassland area around 9am, where we stopped and scanned every few 100 meters for mountain cats and other wildlife. But all we saw that morning were pikas and marmots, and the odd pairs of roe deer, among mostly cattle. In the late morning, we drove to the Baxi forest per Elias's suggestion. We saw more ring-necked pheasants, and yet another **Pika** that upon a little bit of an investigation through GBIF suggested by Venkat again, I think that with



high probability this is a **Gansu pika** as opposed to Thomas's Pika.

Then, instead of driving back towards Ruoergai, we drove another hour away, toward a forest where Mr. Z has seen Alpine Musk deer. We hiked a short trail recommended by Mr. Z. As soon as we got out of the car, we heard a blood pheasant and so most of the group tried to call it in using a playback. Even as a mammal watcher, all these pheasants in China are pretty

spectacular to look at, plus this was middle of the day so there was not much to do, except look at another trio of Roe deer uphill from the parking. While everyone stayed and waited for the blood pheasant, I had to go pee, so I went back on the main trail and walked just a few meters up. I then decided to venture out by myself quietly for just a few minutes to look for mammals before returning to the group. As soon as I turned around to go back, I actually saw the male *blood pheasant* walking on the main trail, and I thought it was walking towards the group (and the sound), but it turned out they never saw it. It was a quick sighting and I never got a photo, nor was it very close, but I did see it clearly, albeit briefly.

We drove back for an afternoon nap again, and after dinner we were back out. We first drove to 2 small areas where Pallas's cat used to be seen before the train construction, but couldn't find it. We did get a somewhat prolonged sighting of a Tibetan fox munching away on something, in the fading light. For some reason, despite how common these guys were, they were pretty skittish and almost never stopped long enough for a good picture. We told Mr. Z we were all very keen on finding either of the cats, so he took us straight to the "main" area again, but focused on a very specific section of the road with high rocky outcrops where a mountain cat practically every night on the previous tour, in March. The thing is – every time we drove that area, a dog would run up to the car and bark at us. 2 Separate dogs, actually, on 2 adjacent farms, on the opposite sides of the road from where the rocks are. Apparently, these guys moved in only a few weeks prior. We felt like this would put a damper on our chances on one hand. But on the other hand, Tibetan and Red foxes, wolves, hares and badgers were obviously still around at night, along with infinite Pikas, marmots, deer, etc. during the day. So, we had reasons to stay optimistic.

The other thing to note about Ruorgai in general is how you drive at night in a van with both front windows open, as well as the 2 large doors, so that everyone can spotlight and/or thermal scope. The below-freezing temperatures combined with the windchill intensified by the driving speed – really makes this an experience that only the most determined of mammal watchers can withstand for long hours...

We ignored several Tibetan foxes on both sides of the road at high speeds to get straight to the rocky section. As soon as we got there, Deb called out eyeshine, which everyone on her side of the car saw – this was Elias and Mr. Z, along with Oleg in the back vehicle. It looked the right size and "situation" for the mountain cat, but never re-located it as it disappeared behind a ridge-fold in the middle of the slope. After several minutes of quiet

and dark thermal-only attempts, we had Mark hike up alone to try to either re-locate it or scare it in our direction toward the road. Alas, we did not find it, and decided to leave the area for a while and continue down the valley in hopes it would be back when we drove through on the way back. But long-story-short we did not find any new species this night, which was a little discouraging.

Since this was already a long day, and approaching midnight, Mr. Z recommended we head back to the hotel, and head back out here pre-dawn. We agreed, and as usual, almost everyone fell asleep on the 1-hour drive home except myself, who was hoping something would cross the road. Indeed, a Tibetan and then a Red fox were just at the side of the road, looking initially cat-like to the tired eye in the headlights.

Day 11:

We started out at 6, and drove straight to the rocky area. It's over an hour drive to get there, and the light was coming out before we got there. That may or may not have had anything to do with the fact that we did not see the mountain cat or any new mammals this morning. After breakfast on the road in front of the rocks, Mark, Oleg and I decided to hike up the rocky hills while Deb, Elias,



Monty and Tatyana hiked the road. Hiking up the mountain revealed another virgin plateau-like grassland with rocky outcrops and an amazing snow-covered mountain backdrop. It was very pristine, and I could imagine this being a productive place to scan at night, but which requires a little bit of uphill hiking. On the hike up, I found an *upland buzzard* in its nest in the thermal scope. But no new mammals, just pikas and marmots. We also spotted a few herds of Tibetan gazelles grazing on some further hills.

We drove down into the valley and the forest again, where the group kind of split. Some people played the sound of the blood pheasant again, I hiked down the road to try to find musk deer or anything else, and some people just went birdwatching. We did see some pretty *rose-finches* and other birds, and Deb saw another Sika deer in the forest while waiting for the pheasant which never showed up. I saw *Blue-eared pheasants* again in roughly the same spot they were a couple of days prior, but no new mammals. I can

hardly complain after having seen my life's biggest target within 4 days of getting to China, plus a nice supporting crew – but you know how us Mammalwatchers go – I needed something new, and good!

On the way back up towards the main road, we stopped to scan and found a single Gray wolf, and more Tibetan gazelles. We went back for rest before venturing back out in the



afternoon until the night. Mr. Z. gave us the option to spend all night looking for the cats, but that would mean waking up later in the morning, and resulting in not getting to Tangjiahe in time for a night drive. But the Royle tour included only 2 nights in Tangjiahe to begin with, so we decided to take the other option: to go all afternoon until night, and be back in the hotel by 23:00-23:30ish.

In the afternoon we went back to the farmland area where we had been 2 days ago, and Mr. Z had showed us pictures of Chinese mountain cats from there crossing the road and hunting Pikas. But when we arrived, the rain was coming again – we saw it rolling down from the surrounding mountains, and for several minutes we found ourselves in the midst of a violent hail storm. But it passed just as it came. But except for pikas, marmots and the odd Tibetan fox, we found only a single wolf being chased by two tiny, cute dogs, which was funny.

At night we went straight to the rocky place where we saw the eye-shine the previous night. Before we got there, when it was still light out, I spotted a *Little owl* on the side of the stream near the road. We waited in the dark, me with the thermal scope on the mountains, but saw nothing. It was coming up to 22:00ish, and after hours of waiting without any results, Mr. Z switched on the car, but literally as soon as we started driving, I saw something running in the thermal scope. We put our lights on it, but there weren't enough lights and it was sneaky – very mustelid-like. I was thinking "polecat," but didn't dare say it out loud. We lost it too quickly to identify for sure. Deb did say: "didn't it look like a polecat?" and I immediately agreed, but we had no proof. We dismissed it as a "probable badger", before driving off. But almost immediately, the second car re-located it and signaled to us with the high beams and the walkie-talkie to come back. With a

concentrated effort, we all shined our lights on it. Oleg inspected one of his pictures and called "**Steppe polecat!**" Luckily, it was cooperative and ran around in the open, then peeked its head out of a burrow for several long seconds. Enough for Mr. Z to set up his spotting scope onto it. Several seconds later, it ran downhill again, and into another burrow, never to be seen again. I was pretty damn happy – this went straight up to the top 5, if not top-3 trip mammals for me! I love mustelids, and I've actually yet to have seen any species commonly named "polecat" (I need to catch up!)



Excited about the sighting, we started driving back. On the way back, as I thermal-scoped and Oleg spotlit, among many foxes and hares, I found another polecat in the flat grasslands, but a little further from the vehicle and we never stopped, as it ran off pretty quickly. Finally, on the highway on the way back, a cat-like animal jumped onto the otherwise empty road, causing Mr. Z. to slow down abruptly. He called out a mountain cat, but it materialized as yet another Tibetan Fox. And with that, our night was over.

Day 11:

Today we started with the awful breakfast at our hotel again. We met downstairs at 8:00, and left for the very long drive to Tangjiahe. On the way there, we drove through Baxi forest again but didn't stop, to the location where we stopped 2 days ago to look for the musk deer and the blood pheasant. We hiked for an hour, but didn't see any mammals, only birds. No blood pheasants, but we did see a bunch of cool stuff like *rosefinches*, *grosbeaks*, *treecreepers* and *tits*, mostly. Back in the car parking lot, Monty spotted a hare which I really wanted to turn into a Tolai Hare, as we were kind of on the border of its distribution range, but re-inspection of the photos revealed just another woolly hare.

The scenery was spectacular the rest of the way, with snowy mountain peaks that look like they could host anything from snow leopards to lynx (well, that's not a wide range, but you get it 😊). At one point, Mr. Z stopped the car for a pika that was on the road. It was clearly a baby pika, and it's really hard to determine exactly which species this is. Based on distribution range maps, it's most likely another Gansu Pika.



As we kept driving and stopped for lunch, the scenery changed as did the birds. Again, it started raining on-and-off. Lunch was at a nice, riverside restaurant with a great view of mountainous forests with rocky cliffs and caves. I could imagine bears and other animals coming out of the caves at any moment – especially as the rain stopped and sun was coming out. Alas, we only saw *kingfishers* and *woodpeckers* along the stream.

When we finally got to Tangjiahe, it was close to 18:00, meaning 2 more hours of light. I announced my prediction that we would see at least two Takins before dinner. It took a long time, filled with mostly Chinese Gorals, but we finally found a herd of at least 15 **Sichuan Takins**, which was also one of my big targets. It's such an iconic species! We made it to the hotel and settled in quickly before dinner. At dinner, Monty told us he found muntjacs, masked palm civets and wild boars on the hotel grounds. After dinner, Elias, Mark and I walked a little bit around



the lodge and onto the road, and found a Reeve's muntjac and a Masked Palm civet very close to the lodge. We then met at 21:00 with the rest of the group by the cars.

On the night drive, we saw so many Chinese Gorals and Reeve's muntjacs, I can't even begin to count either species. We were still missing our mainland leopard cat and Mainland Serow, so we had our eye out for both of those, neither which should be difficult. Failing to turn any goral into a serow, we did find our first **Wild boars**, an animal which would prove extremely common in the park. Further down we found our first **Malayan porcupine**. After we turned around, we stopped for some thermal images which revealed our 2nd, 3rd, 4th and later 5th porcupines. We also saw a rat on the road, which I think is another Chevrier's field mouse.



We got back at midnight, and Mr. Z suggested we leave for a morning drive at 8:30, but I negotiated we start at 6:00.

Day 12:

I started on my own at 4:30, since we only had 1 more full day as a group, followed by just 1 additional full day and night for Deb and I, and we still had some targets to see.

Around the lodge area, I saw another pair of porcupines, a single masked palm civet, and several wild boars on the grounds of the lodge. I then walked down the road with my thermal scope, but as daylight started to slowly creep in, I walked back to parking lot where I met everyone at 6:00 for our morning drive.

Apparently, opposite of me starting up an hour and a half earlier, Deb stayed out an hour and a half after our night drive was finished, and saw the same species as I did except the porcupines. We started our drive and saw a couple of muntjacs.

A few minutes into the drive, I asked Mr. Z: "Where did Ian Thompson see his Asiatic black bear? Or, where would one try to find a---" I wasn't even finished with my sentence when Mark, who's turn it was in the passenger seat this morning interjected: "STOP! Bear! Right there! This is where you'd find one!" Even before we halted abruptly, I saw the bear right near the side of the road, just a couple meters up the slope. Mr. Z backed up quickly and we all jumped out of both vehicles. What a sighting! A second bear species, and my now 4th wild bear – **Asiatic Black Bear!!!** With all the excitement on our part, the bear quickly



climbed up and around a big rock in the middle of a clearing uphill from the road.

We all enjoyed the sighting for several seconds. In the early morning low light, I took a failed photo. So I just decided to video, hoping my camera would focus. I only caught a few seconds of it before it disappeared into the dense foliage. But then I noticed we can

still see it through the dense foliage, so I got another poor quality but recognizable video before it disappeared for good. The entire sighting must have been 2 minutes, but it was sufficient to enjoy, and take in the fact that I had just seen what was probably my 2nd or 3rd most wanted "Wishlist" mammal species of the trip – and one I didn't think I was going to see! Fucking Asiatic black bear – a species that turns up occasionally on trip reports,

but other than in Japan – not one that’s generally very easy to see! It also made me realize – thank god I insisted on the 6am drive!

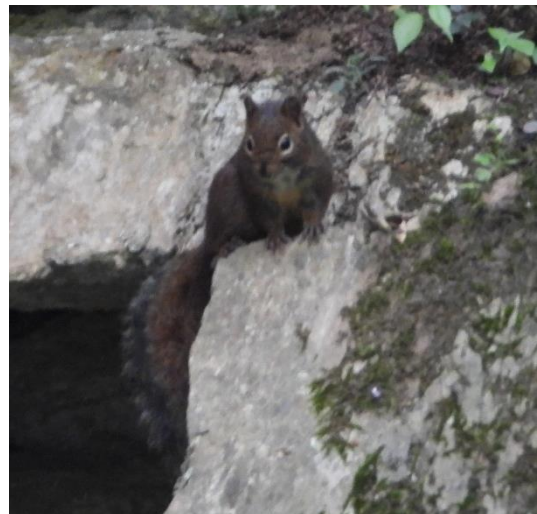
If that wasn’t surprising enough – Mark then exclaimed: “This is now the second time this morning that I saw this bear”. I’m sorry – what?!

Yeah – it turned out that Mark, who also walked down the road pre-dawn just behind me, saw a bear – most likely the same individual – crossing the road ahead of him. When he got closer to where it crossed, he didn’t see it again. With sleep deprivation and low light, he convinced himself that it must have been a goral (or a serow)! So he actually wouldn’t have known he saw a black bear had we not seen it again!

Only a few minutes later we continued driving down the road, when Elias yelled: “Squirrel!”. We pulled over, and for a few minutes we watched a trio of **Pere David’s Rock squirrels** frolicking about at the riverside, below the road.

But from that point, we saw no additional mammal species in Tangjiahe, which was disappointing. And it wasn’t for lack of trying! We put in long hours at night, afternoon, evening, early morning, etc. Almost at any given hour of the day, at least someone was out on a trail, driving, or exploring the lodge area. We would see all the same species over and over, including the macaques, squirrels and takins during the day, and the muntjacs, gorals, porcupines, boars and Takins at night.

The second night we did see an additional hog badger at the riverbed, close to where Mr. Z often sees leopard cats. It was quite disappointing not to see any leopard cats, or serows – both of which are



usually seen, between all the sites we've visited. Also, our main additional target for Tangjiahe was Chinese Ferret badger, which isn't terribly uncommon in this park. But again



Wild Boar (Least horrible photo I have)

– after the bear, luck just wasn't on our side for some reason.

Just to note that the bus-only road up to where people go to try to look for golden monkeys and red pandas was under construction, and unlike Labahe, it was strictly forbidden to hike on it. There was also a dirt road up past the hotel, which is a continuation of the main road. I'm not sure if

it was just a hiking trail before, but now there's a road being constructed there as well. We hiked there after breakfast but saw no mammals except Tibetan macaques.

When everyone turned around, Mark and I kept walking a little further up the road. On the way back we saw an immature *Beauty Rat Snake*, which was cool. And bird-wise, we saw a *Tawny fish owl* in the morning alongside the river, and an *Oriental Scops Owl* at night.



Day 13:

Today we would part ways from the

rest of our awesome group, which was sad, but I'm sure I will travel again with each of them in the future. In our 6 o'clock morning drive we did get a great sighting of a herd of Sichuan Takins crossing the river in a very National Geographic-like scene. We also heard *Golden pheasant* very close to the road, but didn't see it. I noted that I had seen a *golden pheasant* in 2014 in Jiuzhaigou in a clearing by the road, and to my dismay, not only did the bus not stop – nobody seemed to notice or care! What a shame.

After breakfast we parted ways with everyone, and as luck would have it, Deb and I, who paid extra money to spend an additional night in Tangjiahe didn't see any new mammals today, whereas the rest of the group, on the way out of the park came across a **Yellow-throated Marten** hopping across the road – too quickly for a picture. Both Deb and I had



seen this species, but the local subspecies is a little different than the Bornean one, and quite pretty.

Deb and I were chatting with an Italian naturalist group who adopted us for a couple of hours. Their guide, whose name I forget, actually had a hand-held, phone-attaching thermal scope which he held up with his phone the entire time. They took us to "Snake Island", which was a place along the road where we saw our first porcupine. But aside from an *Indian Skink*, we didn't see much. Though their guide explained to us that "Moon bears" (Aka Asiatic black bears) are seen in that area quite often, across the river. Eurasian otter is another species that can be found in Tangjiahe, and we also kept our eyes on the stream among everywhere else, but didn't see any.

After lunch, we met our driver for the next 2 nights. He didn't speak English but apparently knows where along the road to find Leopard cats and Chinese ferret badgers. However, despite our persistent attempts late into the night, we found neither.

After a late game drive, Deb and I even hiked for an additional hour and a half up that road that's under construction behind the hotel but saw no mammals except another palm civet. We were back by 2:00ish

Day 14:

Another early morning drive yielded no new mammals. We took a nap and left after lunch to Pingwu. It took around 3 hours, as the monkey park is further into the valley from Pingwu itself, down a semi-paved road that goes through tiny villages.

We reached our hotel, which was pretty basic. A little disappointing compared to the nearby semi-luxurious hotel with terraces and a swimming pool – where we would have dinner and the following breakfast. After dinner, I asked to be taken to the entrance of the Golden Monkey park, just to see the habitat and situation, and assess whether it's worth to try to spotlight/thermal scope the area. I didn't realize the park is another 45 minutes up the road, which goes through seemingly pristine habitat, dotted by farms. When we got there, Deb and I hiked up the metal trail, not realizing that this was illegal, as the park is closed for visitors after like 10 or 11am.

But we saw no mammals. We requested to go on a night drive up and down the same road starting at 21:00. But on our drive we realized that these seemingly innocent and remote farms had domesticated cats and dogs, which would be the only 2 species we would see all the way to the monkey park and back. On the way back, just before reaching the hotel, I saw a thermal signature in a tree and called it. We put our light on it, and I thought it was a sleeping bird, but Deb called out: "Squirrel!". Then, for a couple of minutes we had a viewing of a **Complex-toothed Flying Squirrel** – which was quite unique in its coloration compared to the other 2 species we saw earlier on, and was of course a lot smaller. We were back by 23:00.



Day 15:

We started out at 6:00 and went to a patch of forest that was almost walking distance from our hotel. Our guide asked a local where one could see Golden pheasant and that's where they pointed to. Deb and I hiked up the steep-sloped metal trail. As it got just light

enough to see, I notice a squirrel in a tree. Taking a shot-in-the-dark photo with a flash on, it turned out to be **Perny's long-nosed squirrel**, which I was happy to see!



Around 7:15ish we gave up on the pheasant and walked back down for breakfast at the nice hotel, then drove straight to Golden Monkey Park. When we got there, the staff informed our driver that on the way up around 6:15 they saw 3 Golden pheasants on the way up. Bummer, but I will take the new lifer squirrel over the pheasant 😊

The park itself is cool, on the way up we saw several Pere David's Rock squirrels along the trail. Then, we reached the place "interactive" platform. There are signs requesting visitors to not feed or touch them, but guess what people don't NOT do...

The monkeys are completely wild, and there are MANY of them. But they are clearly very habituated. At first, there were 5-10 monkeys already close to the "interactive" platform. They were mostly going on about their business. Around 9am the staff started feeding them, and they came down right to us. It was like a typical monkey park – they climbed on us, took things from our hands, interacted with each other... but they are fucking **Snub-nosed Golden monkeys**, so all-in-all that's still very unique! It's endless entertainment, and



they're fun to look at, this close. After an hour and a half or so we started hiking back downhill, and that concluded our Mammal tour of Sichuan. It took roughly 5 hours to reach Chengdu, where both Deb and I treated ourselves each to a room at the mega-comfortable-yet-not-terribly-expensive Shangri-La hotel.

Things Missed and Final Thoughts:

I certainly can't complain. To be honest, almost any species other than the Giant Panda can be seen elsewhere in Asia, or on a repeat trip. So first of all – let me say I wouldn't change anything and I'm not disappointed with anything.

We did miss several species that could have been great additions to our trip list: First of all, Pallas's Cat: This is the only species out of our missed species that may have probably ended up on the "top 5" species for the trip. This species used to be practically guaranteed in Ruoergai. But since COVID and the train track construction, and filling-in of rocky quarries where it was seen reliably, it became effectively absent from all trip reports to Ruoergai. Note it's still easy to find in other areas of the Tibetan plateau in China. And of course in Mongolia and now India. Personally, I don't believe it disappeared from the entire Ruoergai grassland, and am sure that in the next couple of years, a new, reliable location will pop up, further from the road and construction.

Chinese Mountain Cat: This was just a dip. Not for lack of trying nor looking in the wrong places. Ian Thompson in October, and Royle Safari's March group all saw anywhere from 1-3 individuals on any given night. But Lennart's and Jan's group in December-January missed it completely, as we did. And with Lennart's cat fetish 🐾 you know it's not for the lack of trying and focusing almost exclusively on this species. So it may be a seasonal thing, as the difference between 1-3 every night to 0 over 4 nights is quite drastic.

Mainland Leopard Cat: Most trips see more than a single individual over the course of a few nights between Labahe, Tangjiahe or even the Giant Panda area. Specifically, for me, this would have been a lifer, so we tried hard – especially at Tangjiahe where we had specific points. Thermal, determination, and time didn't yield this species, but I'm not worried, as I'll see it elsewhere.

Asiatic Golden Cat: Other than Asiatic Black Bear, this was my 2nd highest wishlist species for Tangjiahe. I know of at least 3 trips that saw this it there, including this year. This place is probably as good as any other to try to find it, comparable only maybe to Eaglesnest

Reserve in Northern India, where several recent, golden cat-focused trips showed that it may be more difficult there than we used to think. We know it exists in Tangjiahe, but I have no stats or data about the population density.

Eurasian Lynx: Technically, this species may occur in Ruoergai, at least as a passer-by if not as resident. But I haven't heard of anyone seeing it there.

Chinese Ferret Badger: This species is not uncommon in Tangjiahe, and is sometimes seen at night or even early morning just at the roadside. The stats are about 50%-50% at Tangjiahe, and we were definitely on the lookout. In fact, considering Golden cat is more of an accidental lucky find, this was our biggest dip in Tangjiahe, and probably our highest missed target for the trip.

Eurasian Otter: One clearly doesn't come to Sichuan to see Eurasian otter, but they are possible and apparently not uncommon in Tangjiahe, but mostly at night as it turns out, despite being equally diurnal or crepuscular in other places.

Forest Musk Deer: Apparently, it shouldn't be too hard to find in Labahe, and Mr. A was surprised we didn't see any.

Alpine Musk Deer: Supposedly not uncommon in the forest areas just below Ruoergai: the same forest where we saw the Blue-eared pheasant and the Siberian Chipmunk, and the Baxi forest. Had we seen the cats and dedicated more time to it, we may have been able to find it. But we were out on the lookout on a few different occasions, for a cumulative 5-6 hours, and still dipped.

Mainland Serow: A plain dip for the trip. We were confident we'd see one, between all the different sites we visited except Ruoergai. Perhaps we spent too much time examining every last Goral to see if it was a serow – that in retrospect we wasted a few good hours cumulatively – time that could have been spent looking for our other targets.

There have also been camera trap photos of Mainland Clouded leopard in Sichuan (Labahe and maybe Tangjiahe) but that would be an absolute glitch in the matrix. Always a nice dream when you're there, though. Additionally, Ian Thompson got pictures of Chinese Giant flying squirrel in the forest where we saw Siberian Chipmunk, but we didn't dedicate time to spotlight in the right areas as we were still chasing the 2 cat species and a little bit of musk deer, which we never found.

Other species of Pika exist in the general area, but one would have to do more research on where to find specific species. Same with some voles and other rodents, as well as Chinese Zokor which would be great to see. And There are also bats.. 😊

The biggest "disappointment" was that we ended up being the only mammal trip to the region that turned up 0 cat species. But as much as I like cats (and I do!) and despite the considerable list of missed species above, I have to say that I wouldn't trade any of the big finds for any equivalently-desired species we didn't find. Also, other than maybe the Pallas's cat, none of the missed species would have pushed down the top 3 observed mammals (for me), which were of both bears and the red panda. So, I reiterate the fact that I'm super fucking happy and feel like I can't complain.

My final thought, a question I find myself asking occasionally is: is a Thermal Scope both a blessing and a curse?

I've thought about this numerous times, and in various ecosystems. Being a mammal watcher, I want to find everything! Yes, including bats and rats... they are just not my biggest targets. So, naturally, when in a new ecosystem I call everything, and then we stop and try to identify it. The problem is that not everything that comes through the thermal scope is identifiable due to: distance, level of obscureness by foliage, and just running away or moving out of sight when we reverse and shine our light at it. I can go into how many long hours we wasted in Paraguay, looking for thermal-found mouse opossums, all of which turned out to be a single species. The first night at Labahe we spent way too much time looking at every rodent, most of which ended up being Confucius Niviventers and Chevrier's field mice. I had to bluntly ignore small roadside rodents the second night to try to find our Hog badger, which we finally saw in the car's headlight. On the opposite end, there's of course things like the Steppe Polecat and every Asiatic badger – all of which we would have missed if it weren't for the thermal scope. Same with Red-and-White and Chindwin flying squirrels, maybe except a single individual of the former. And of course the Complex-toothed flying squirrel, which was in a tree we would have never shined our light at, and even if we did, its eyes were hidden when we first spotted it. I called out a sleeping bird at first, and Deb corrected me. So, there are countless examples of when the thermal scope was useful and yielded good species. Of course when one wants to stake out a species at a specific place without drawing attention to oneself, a thermal scope is irreplaceable. But I was wondering what people's opinions were, of using the thermal scope specifically on game drives. One can't help but wonder how many

serows, leopard cats and musk deer we missed but “wasting” too much time on trying to identify every last muntjac and goral found in the scope, making sure they’re not serows or musk deer.



List of Mammals:

List of Observed Mammals		Panda Area	Labaha	Dujiangyan	Ruoergai	Tangjiahe	Pingwu	Comments
1	Tibetan macaque	<i>Macaca thibetana</i>	X			X		
* 2	Golden snub-nosed monkey	<i>Rhinopithecus roxellana</i>	X				X	
3	Malayan porcupine	<i>Hystrix brachyura</i>				X		
* 4	Red and white giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista alborufus</i>		X				
* 5	Chindwin giant flying squirrel	<i>Petaurista elegans</i>	X (?)	X				
* 6	Complex-toothed flying squirrel	<i>Trogopterus xanthipes</i>					X	
7	Pallas's squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>			X			
* 8	Perny's long-nosed squirrel	<i>Dremomys pernyi</i>		X <---- Mark only			X	
9	Swinhoe's striped squirrel	<i>Tamias swinhoi</i>	X					
* 10	Himalayan marmot	<i>Marmota himalayana</i>			X			
11	Père David's rock squirrel	<i>Sciurotamias davidianus</i>				X	X	
* 12	Siberian chipmunk	<i>Tamias sibiricus</i>			X			
* 13	Chevrier's field mouse	<i>Apodemus chevrieri</i>	X	X		X		Confirmed by our guide, who relied on papers from research that was conducted in the area. But with that said, actual confirmation is best with DNA testing
* 14	Edward's Long-tailed Giant Rat (P)	<i>Leopoldamys edwardsi</i>		X				A "Proable" ID assessment from pictures of an individual on the side of the road, based on a conversation with Venkat Sankar followed by a little bit of self-research
* 15	Confucius niventent	<i>Niviventer confucianus</i>		X				Also known as Chinese white-bellied rat. Confirmed by our guide, who relied on papers from research that was conducted in the area. But with that said, actual confirmation is best with DNA testing
* 16	Gansu pika	<i>Ochotona cansus</i>			X			Almost certain, but open to discussion
* 17	Plateau pika	<i>Ochotona curzoniae</i>			X			AKA Black-lipped pika
* 18	Moupin pika	<i>Ochotona thibetana</i>		X				
19	Woolly hare	<i>Lepus oiostolus</i>			X			
* 20	Sichuan myotis	<i>Myotis altarium</i>		X				Sometimes spelled Szechwan myotis
* 21	Little Japanese horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus cornutus</i>		X				
22	Masked palm civet	<i>Paguma larvata</i>	X	X		X		
* 23	Chinese red panda	<i>Ailurus styani</i>	X	X				Sometimes still considered conspecific with <i>A. fulgens</i> , depending on the source
24	(Himalayan) gray wolf	<i>Canis lupus chanco</i>			X			
* 25	Tibetan fox	<i>Vulpes ferrilata</i>			X			
26	Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			X			
* 27	Giant Panda	<i>Ailuropoda melanoleuca</i>	X					
* 28	Asiatic black bear	<i>Ursus thibetanus</i>				X		
* 29	Northern hog badger	<i>Arctonyx albobularis</i>		X		X		
30	Yellow-throated Marten	<i>Martes flavigula</i>				X <---- Everyone except Deb and Myself.. (but it's ok, because I've seen this species before)		
* 31	Asian badger	<i>Meles leucurus</i>			X			
* 32	Steppe polecat	<i>Mustela eversmannii</i>			X			
* 33	Tibetan gazelle	<i>Procapra picticaudata</i>			X			Also apparently called Goa (I never heard this being used while on the trip)
* 34	(Sichuan) takin	<i>Budorcas taxicolor</i>				X		Sometimes treated as a full species (<i>Budorcas tibetana</i>), distinguished from the other takin
* 35	Chinese goral	<i>Naemorhedus griseus</i>	X	X		X		
36	Blue sheep	<i>Pseudois nayaur</i>			X			AKA Bahral
37	Red deer	<i>Cervus elaphus</i>		X				
38	Sambar deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	X	X				
39	Sika deer	<i>Cervus nippon</i>			X			
* 40	Tufted deer	<i>Elaphodus cephalophus</i>	X	X				
* 41	Reeves's muntjac	<i>Muntiacus reevesi</i>		X		X		
* 42	Siberian roe deer	<i>Capreolus pygargus</i>			X			
43	Wild boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>				X		



List of birds (Thanks to Oleg!):

1	Chinese blackbird	<i>Turdus mandarinus</i>	36	Coal tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>
2	Light-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>	37	Claudia's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus claudiae</i>
3	Oriental magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	38	Eurasian sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
4	Yellow-billed grosbeak	<i>Eophona migratoria</i>	39	Plumbeous redstart	<i>Phoenicurus fuliginosus</i>
	White-browed		40	Chestnut thrush	<i>Turdus rubrocanus</i>
5	laughingthrush	<i>Pterorhinus sannyo</i>	41	Gray-headed woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>
6	White wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	42	Olive-backed pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
7	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	43	Elliot's laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron elliotii</i>
8	Eurasian tree sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	44	Stripe-throated yuhina	<i>Yuhina gularis</i>
9	Bearded vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	45	Tickell's leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus affinis</i>
10	Yellow-throated bunting	<i>Emberiza elegans</i>	46	Slaty-backed flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hodgsonii</i>
11	Gray-crowned warbler	<i>Phylloscopus tephrocephalus</i>	47	Verditer flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassina</i>
	Rufous-gorgeted		48	Eastern cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
12	flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophinata</i>	49	Himalayan griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
13	White-capped redstart	<i>Phoenicurus leucocephalus</i>	50	White-bellied redstart	<i>Luscinia phoenicuroides</i>
14	Blue-fronted redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	51	Chinese leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus yunnanensis</i>
15	Daurian redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	52	Martens's warbler	<i>Phylloscopus omeiensis</i>
16	Buff-throated warbler	<i>Phylloscopus subaffinis</i>	53	Slaty-blue flycatcher	<i>Ficedula tricolor</i>
17	Blyth's pipit	<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>	54	Great spotted woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
18	White-throated dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	55	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
19	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	56	Emei leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus emeiensis</i>
	Rufous-bellied		57	White-breasted waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
20	woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos hyperythrus</i>	58	Fujian niltava	<i>Niltava davidi</i>
21	Long-tailed minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	59	Red-billed blue-magpie	<i>Urocissa erythroryncha</i>
22	Green-backed tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>	60	Gray wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
23	Mrs. Gould's sunbird	<i>Aethopyga gouldiae</i>	61	Rosy pipit	<i>Anthus roseatus</i>
24	Yellow-browed tit	<i>Sylviparus modestus</i>	62	Citrine wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
25	Gray-headed bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula erythaca</i>	63	Blue whistling-thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
26	Himalayan buzzard	<i>Buteo burmanicus</i>	64	Wood sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
27	Sichuan leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus forresti</i>	65	Rufous-vented tit	<i>Periparus rubidiventris</i>
28	Black-browed tit	<i>Aegithalos iouschistos</i>	66	Yellow-bellied tit	<i>Periparus venustulus</i>
	White-backed		67	Ferruginous flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ferruginea</i>
29	woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	68	Collared finchbill	<i>Spizixos semitorques</i>
30	Large-billed crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	69	Lady Amherst's Pheasant	<i>Chrysolophus amherstiae</i>
31	Little bunting	<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	70	Temminck's tragopan	<i>Tragopan temminckii</i>
32	Common redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	71	Asian house-martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
33	Rufous-breasted accentor	<i>Prunella strophinata</i>		Yellowish-bellied bush	
34	White-collared yuhina	<i>Parayuhina diademata</i>	72	warbler	<i>Horornis acanthizoides</i>
35	Chestnut-vented nuthatch	<i>Sitta nagaensis</i>	73	Eurasian nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>

74	Bianchi's warbler	<i>Phylloscopus valentini</i>	115	Carrion crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>
75	Gray nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus jotaka</i>	116	Pink-rumped rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus waltoni</i>
76	Great barbet	<i>Psilopogon virens</i>	117	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
77	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>	118	Upland buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>
78	Orange-bellied leafbird	<i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>	119	Salim Ali's swift	<i>Apus salimalii</i>
79	Collared owl	<i>Taenioptynx brodiei</i>	120	Himalayan swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus brevirostris</i>
80	Black-chinned yuhina	<i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i>	121	Buff-barred warbler	<i>Phylloscopus pulcher</i>
81	Swinhoe's white-eye	<i>Zosterops simplex</i>		Chinese white-browed	
82	Gray-winged blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>	122	rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus dubius</i>
83	Brown-breasted bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus xanthorrhous</i>	123	Himalayan bluetail	<i>Tarsiger rufilatus</i>
84	Ring-necked pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	124	Eurasian coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
85	Black-necked crane	<i>Grus nigricollis</i>	125	Northern pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
86	Ruddy shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	126	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
87	White-rumped snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla taczanowskii</i>	127	Whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>
88	Saker falcon	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	128	Blood Pheasant	<i>Ithaginis cruentus</i>
89	Eurasian kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	129	Little owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>
90	Horned lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	130	Eurasian wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
91	Black redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochrurus</i>	131	Russet sparrow	<i>Passer cinnamomeus</i>
92	White-throated redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>	132	Eastern buzzard	<i>Buteo japonicus</i>
93	Blue eared-pheasant	<i>Crossoptilon auritum</i>	133	Red crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
94	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	134	Crested kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>
	Snowy-cheeked		135	Tawny fish-owl	<i>Ketupa flavipes</i>
95	laughingthrush	<i>Ianthocincla sukatschewi</i>	136	Brown dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasi</i>
96	Ground tit	<i>Pseudopodoces humilis</i>		Gray-headed canary-	
97	Golden eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	137	flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
98	Snow pigeon	<i>Columba leuconota</i>	138	Eurasian jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
99	Black-rumped magpie	<i>Pica bottanensis</i>	139	Sooty tit	<i>Aegithalos fuliginosus</i>
100	Steppe eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	140	Black-bibbed tit	<i>Poecile hypermelaenus</i>
101	Oriental skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>	141	Eurasian nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
102	Rufous-necked snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla ruficollis</i>		Gray-capped pygmy	
103	Black stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	142	woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus canicapillus</i>
104	Graylag goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	143	Oriental scops-owl	<i>Otus sunia</i>
105	Isabelline wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	144	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
106	Brown-headed gull	<i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>		Chestnut-flanked white-	
107	Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>	145	eye	<i>Zosterops erythropleurus</i>
108	Red-billed chough	<i>Pyrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	146	Amur paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone incei</i>
	Pere David's		147	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
109	laughingthrush	<i>Pterorhinus davidi</i>	148	Red-billed starling	<i>Spodiopsar sericeus</i>
110	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	149	Crested myna	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>
111	Gray-backed shrike	<i>Lanius tephronotus</i>	150	Vinous-throated parrotbill	<i>Sinosuthora webbiana</i>
112	Crested tit-warbler	<i>Leptopoecile elegans</i>	151	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
113	Sichuan jay	<i>Perisoreus internigrans</i>	152	Oriental turtle-dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
114	Gray-crested tit	<i>Lophophanes dichrous</i>			

