

Mongolia

Mammal-Watching

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1
Depart Europe

Day 2
Arrive Ulaanbaatar then transfer to Gun Galuut Nature Reserve

Arriving at Ulaanbaatar at breakfast time we'll start driving towards Gun Galuut Nature Reserve. On the way we may stop at the huge statue of Genghis Khan. Shortly before arriving at the camp there will be some very productive shallow lakes and marshes where we should encounter suites of common shorebirds including Pacific Golden-Plover and both Long-toed and Red-necked Stints. The lakes have yielded many surprises in the past including Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck, Little Curlew, Asian Dowitcher and Grey-tailed Tattler. Our camp is situated in a beautiful river valley surrounded by steppe and rocky hills and offers en suite chalets and delicious cuisine in the middle of the wilderness.

Day 3
Gun Galuut Reserve

Gun Galuut protects a range of mountain and steppe habitats along with some varied and exciting wetlands. The rocky hills are home to Pallas's Cat and Argali Sheep. We will scan the rocky outcrops during late afternoon for the cats hunting Brandt's Voles, their favourite prey. Argalis are usually seen in small groups grazing on the mountainside in the early morning. After some thirty minutes driving and scanning we should be able to find them. Other mammals of the area include Corsac Fox, Daurian Pika, Mongolian Jird and the nocturnal Siberian Jerboa.

The birdlife of Gun Galuut is very rich. We will explore the vegetation along the river near our campsite for migratory songbirds. In the past, these have been quite rewarding, producing a variety of warblers including Pallas's Grasshopper, Greenish, Two-barred, Dusky and Thick-billed, as well as Olive-backed Pipit, Taiga Flycatcher, and Black-faced and Pallas's Buntings. White-naped Cranes nest in the marshes and we should find this magnificent bird in family groups along with other crane species including Common and the daintier Demoiselle. The lakes also attract numerous water birds including grebes, swans, ducks, gulls and as many as five species of terns. We may see Bar-headed and Swan Geese, Whooper Swan, Ruddy Shelducks and Stejneger's Scoter. As we drive across the shortgrass steppe we may find several species of larks including Horned and Mongolian Larks, as well as Blyth's Pipits. We will particularly be on the lookout for the sandy coloured Pere David's Snowfinch that inhabits the steppes. Raptors will be represented by Upland Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, and both Saker and Amur Falcons.

Day 4 – 6(am)

Gorkhi-Terelj National Park

Terelj National Park has fantastic rock formations, coniferous and riparian forests, incredible wild flower meadows teeming with butterflies, and is home to many birds. Over fifty species of mammal inhabit Terelj including many species associated with the main forest zone further north such as Brown Bear, Red Squirrel and Elk. We'll look for Asian Badger, Siberian Chipmunk and Eastern Roe Deer. Eurasian Lynx and Wolf are possible though a sighting would be a bonus, and we'll search for the elusive Siberian Musk Deer. Eastern Buzzard is usually seen patrolling the mountains and Lammergeier is also often seen. Rocky outcrops are home to Rock Thrush and Godlewski's Bunting. There are many woodland birds found in the coniferous forests including chances for Siberian Rubythroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Daurian Redstart, Taiga and Dark-sided Flycatcher, Red-throated Thrush, Dusky, Hume's and Two-barred Warbler, Nutcracker and Black Woodpecker. After lunch in Terelj we'll drive back to the capital.

Day 6(pm)

To Mandalgobi

After a final morning in the Terelj area we'll spend the afternoon driving south towards the Gobi.

Days 7-14

Looking for Snow Leopard in the Southern Gobi-Altai Mountains. Yolin Am and Dalandzadgad, Gurvan Saikhan National Park and the Khongoryn Els sand dunes and saxaul forest

In the remote and beautiful Gurvan Saikhan National Park in the Southern Gobi-Altai Mountains a truly remarkable assemblage of mammals awaits us. And amazingly they can be seen with relative ease and in relative comfort! For here researchers have discovered a healthy population of Snow Leopards (as dense as 1 Snow Leopard per ten square kilometres) in a limited range and at altitudes of between only 2000m and 3000m which means that from our carefully sited and comfortable Ger Camp we can reach them after short drives and only short walks! During the seven days we'll spend in this true wilderness we'll be unlikely to see humans except for our camp staff and the local researchers who will be helping us to observe mammals that include not just the iconic cat, which we'll hope to see on more than one occasion, but also Argali, Siberian Ibex and Black-tailed Gazelle.

We have timed our trip to match the period when the young Snow Leopards are still together with their mother, but spend plenty of time outside of the den playing, practicing their hunting skills assisted by their mother who sometimes brings birds or smaller mammals to help this learning process. Our experienced drivers will take us as close as possible to the observation sites. At times walking will be limited to a few metres, other times we will have to take a short or medium length walk.

One morning we will explore the magical Yolin Am - the 'Valley of the Lammergeier'! Here, in the Gobi-Altai, a small stream at the bottom of the gorge draws in many resident and migrating bird species including Mongolian Finch, White-winged Snowfinch, Eastern Black Redstart, Common and Chinese Beautiful Rosefinch, Wallcreeper, Mongolian, Brown and Alpine Accentors, while Himalayan Griffon and Lammergeier soar overhead. Siberian Ibex is often seen on the cliffs, and the valley is full of Pallas's Pikas and Long-tailed Ground Squirrels.

The Gurvan Saikhan National Park also protects the remarkable giant sand dunes of Khongoryn Els. Here the largest sand dunes in the Mongolian Gobi are found, surrounded by wildlife rich Saxaul-desert. Great Gerbils are common. We'll search for the elusive and chronically shy Bactrian Camel, they visit a known water hole, so we'll hide ourselves and wait! Night-time excursions into areas close to the camp will reveal Tolai Hare and hopefully Corsac Fox and we'll enjoy the bouncing glowing eyes of Northern Three-toed and Gobi Jerboas. We may also encounter Long-eared Hedgehog and we've a decent chance of spotting a Marbled Polecat or two. Here are such avian delights as Mongolian Ground-jay and Grey-necked Bunting, Saxaul Sparrow and Pallas's Sandgrouse.

Several plantations in the desert around Dalandzadgad act as magnets for migrating birds. As we walk through the rows of bushes and trees dozens or hundreds of warblers, thrushes, buntings, pipits and finches might be around hiding and feeding in the vegetation. We will also look for the sought-after Oriental Plover in the desert steppes around Dalandzadgad.

Days 15 & 16

Hustai National Park

In the morning we take a flight from Dalandzadgad back to the capital and then drive eastwards and in less than two hours we will find ourselves in Hustai Nuruu National Park, home to the successfully reintroduced wild horse, the Thaki or Przewalski's Horse. Short walks along the rolling hills will allow us to watch Long-tailed Soursliks, but most probably we will spend quite some time admiring the beauty of the world's only truly wild horse species.

Rocky areas are home to Pied Wheatear, Meadow Bunting and Siberian Lesser Whitethroat. The elm trees along the valleys hold a small population of the elegant Amur Falcon, while Lesser Kestrels hunt on the hillsides and Golden Eagles patrol the skies. This reserve is particularly productive for Daurian Partridge. This is our chance to add Mongolian (White-tailed) Gazelle to our list of mammals. We shall drive a few kilometres away from the central part of the national park to find them in the lowlands. Should time permit we can reach the meandering Tuul River, where we will hopefully find Azure Tit in the riparian woods. On our way towards the river we will stop to search for the impressively large Mongolian Lark.

Grey Wolf is a good possibility here. We just need to scan and scan and scan the gently rolling hillsides, grasslands and shrubs as the relatively small area holds at least two packs of Wolves, and early evening is when they start hunting for

Marmots or some unwary Red Deer. Local rangers may try to lure them closer to us, imitating their distinctive howling.

We will return to Ulaan Baator by evening time of Day 16

Day 17

Return to UK/Europe

We've a breakfast time departure for the flight home.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the trip report from our previous similar tours to Mongolia to look for Snow Leopards. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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