



Mongolia's Snow Leopards

6-16 August 2022

with optional extension to see Pallas' Cat

4 & 5 August 2022



This tour has specifically been designed for the best chance of seeing the mythical Snow Leopard and other rare or difficult to see mammal species, such as Saiga Antelope, Przewalski's Horse, Argali sheep and White-tailed Gazelle as well as a fantastic selection of Asian bird species in the true wilderness of Central Asia without strenuous hikes, sleeping in tents, or being exposed to the cold in thin air at high altitudes. Funds generated from this tour will also contribute to the protection on conservation of Snow Leopards.



We will travel in relative comfort in some spectacular landscapes of Mongolia, one of the very few true wilderness areas of the World. During this slow-paced 11-day adventure we will be based in two locations only, using traditional Ger (Yurt) camps that are spacious and comfortable and set up in scenic locations. On our first and last nights, we will be staying in a superb hotel in Ulaanbaatar. Because Snow Leopard is an endangered species, we also aim to generate funds with these tours that directly contribute to their conservation and further understanding of their behaviour, as well as their protection from illegal hunting. We wish to support the work of the local grassroots organization run by very dedicated volunteer rangers who are keen to preserve the natural heritage of the land of their birth and will donate USD\$100 per person from the funds generated from the sale of this tour. This will also help to offset carbon emissions used by participants to travel. Further totally optional direct donations will also be welcome at the end of the tour if you should choose to contribute further.

In the West of the country, not far from the Chinese border, we shall spend 6 nights in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, venturing into the deep rocky valleys or higher regions (maximum 2,500metres, but usually below) searching for the “mountain cat” that has a healthy population of 10-15 animals in a limited range. On other days we will visit the nearby semi-desert area to see other critically endangered mammals: Saiga Antelope and the delicately built and pretty, Black-tailed or Goitered Gazelle. We will also look out for the world’s largest wild sheep, the Argali, that roams the rocky slopes, as does Siberian Ibex and Siberian Marmot. There is a population of Grey Wolf, which is even more difficult and less reliable to see than the Snow Leopard, so we need to be very lucky to see them. Our second base will be nearer to the capital, yet another beautiful natural area, the famous Hustai National Park, home of the world’s only wild horse species, the Przewalski’s Horse or Thaki, plus Mongolian Gazelle.



HIGHLIGHTS:

- We will be staying in the true wilderness. For the first 6 days we are likely not to meet any other human beings. The fascinating landscape makes for an unforgettable experience for any nature enthusiast.
- Iconic mammals such as Snow Leopard, Saiga Antelope, Black-tailed and Mongolian Gazelle, Przewalski’s Horse, Argali, Siberian Ibex, Siberian Marmot, Corsac Fox, Tolai Hare, Long-tailed Soudlik, Siberian and Northern Three-toed Jerboa, Pallas’s Pika, etc.
- A spectacular list of bird species: flocks of Altai Snowcocks roam the steep mountains, while the foothills are home to Mongolian Ground-jay and Grey-necked Bunting. Further down the desert area holds Desert Warbler, Pallas’s Sandgrouse, and a huge lake nearby is a fabulous wetland with breeding Pallas’s Gull, White-headed Duck, a few pairs of Dalmatian Pelican and a

huge variety of wildfowl and shorebirds. This area is sure to hold many as yet undiscovered secrets as few birders have ventured into this region before. The lower mountain area is a breeding site for an incredibly dense population of Chukar, but there are also Rock Thrush, Lammergeier, Steppe and Golden Eagle, Saker, Upland Buzzard, Cinereous and Himalayan Griffon Vulture present. The higher cliffs are home to Guldenstadt's Redstart, White-winged Snowfinch, Brown Accentor, Common Rosefinch. Asian Short-toed Lark, Isabelline Wheatear, Azure Tit, Long-tailed Rosefinch, White-crowned Penduline-tit, Meadow Bunting, Daurian Partridge, Citrine Wagtail, Demoiselle Crane, Amur Falcon are all likely to be seen during the tour.

- This tour also aims to support the local NGO that is working on protecting Snow Leopards and their habitat. We are keen to help their work by providing funds for the purchase of camera traps and a field scope that is vital for both understanding the biology of this little-known animal, as well as to report illegal hunting.

TOUR LEADER:

Dr Tonia Cochran, Inala Nature Tours and local guides

SUMMARY:

- 11 days in Mongolia's true wilderness
- Start & finish in great accommodation at Ulaanbaatar (capital & largest city of Mongolia)
- Visiting the Altai Mountains and Hustai National Park
- Staying in comfortable Ger camps and a superb hotel
- We visit two locations outside of the capital
- Support the local Snow Leopard conservation organization
- 2 nights optional extension in Manual Mountain in search of Pallas's Cat

ITINERARY OUTLINE FOR MAIN TOUR:

Day 1. Sat 6 Aug 22. Arrive Ulaanbaatar. Orientation and welcome dinner.

Day 2. Sun 7 Aug 22. Fly Ulaanbaatar-Khovd and travel to foothills of the Altai Mountains

Days 3-7. Mon 8- Fri 12 Aug 22. Altai Mountains

Days 8 & 9. Sat 13 & Sun 14 Aug 22. Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park

Day 10. Mon 15 Aug 22. Hustai National Park to Ulaanbaatar.

Day 11. Tue 16 August 22. Depart Ulaanbaatar.



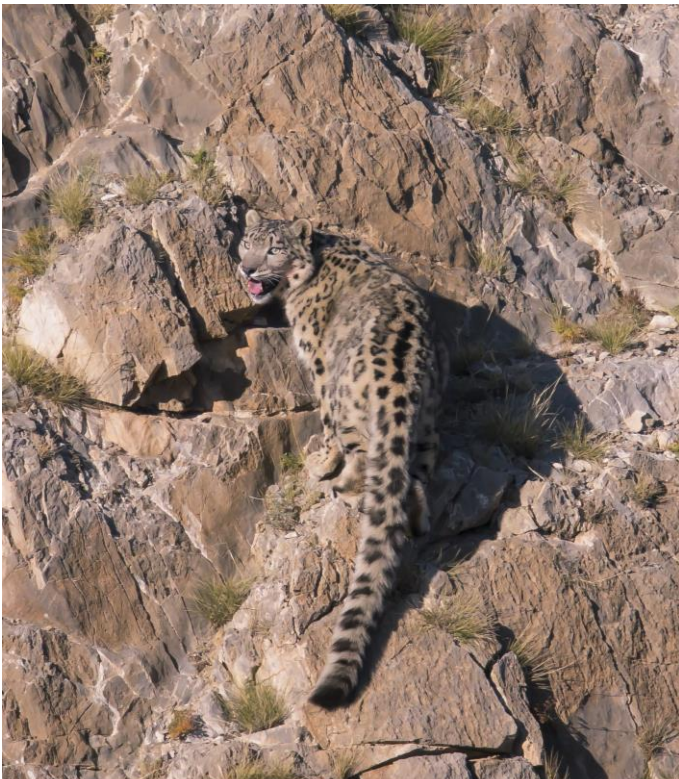
Pallas's Pika (left) and Chukar Partridge (right). Photos H. Brehm

DETAILED ITINERARY:

Day 1. Saturday 6 August 2022. Arrive Ulaanbaatar. Arrive at Ulaanbaatar and check into our comfortable hotel. Depending on the time of arrival we will do an introductory birding and wildlife watching walk in the east of the city. Dinner in a traditional Mongolian restaurant offering delicious local and regional cuisine. **Accommodation:** Ulaanbaatar hotel (en suite rooms) **Meals included:** D.

Day 2. Sunday 7 August 2022. Fly Ulaanbaatar- Khovd and travel to foothills of the Altai Mountains. This morning we will take a domestic flight to Khovd, from where we then drive to our Ger camp where we will stay for the next 6 nights. The camp is operated by a local wildlife protection community, which is a local organization with the single purpose of protecting the extremely rich nature and wildlife reserve, and which we aim to support with our tour. The camp is located by the foothills of Jargalant Mountain facing at the mountain chain on the one side and the semi desert and a huge lake on the other. The facilities here are shared and basic but bearing in mind the remoteness, it is very comfortable and clean. Our local team is keen to provide everything we need for the maximum comfort in the area where we will be literally on our own, most probably not meeting any other human being apart from our teammates and our local crew. **Accommodation:** Ger camp in the foothills of the

Altai Mountains near the Chinese border (shared facilities). **Meals included:** B, L, D.



Snow Leopard - H. Brehm

Days 3-7. Monday 8- Friday 12 August 2022. Altai Mountains. The next 5 days will find us searching primarily for the elusive Snow Leopard as one of our main priorities. We have timed our trip to match the period when the cats are most likely to be seen hunting or guarding their prey. It is difficult to say how good the chances are. There is no guarantee of sightings, but by working with the local conservationists to find the best location we hope to see this majestic animal. In past trips, two of our 3 groups had prolonged, fantastic, although distant views of a Snow Leopard for a day. The terrain here is considerably easier to negotiate than in their other habitats where the conditions are generally much harsher (high altitude, low temperature, difficult terrain, need of acclimatization, hikes, sleeping in tents, etc.).

Our experienced drivers will take us as close as possible to the observation sites. At times walking will be limited to a few meters. At other times we will have to take a short or medium length walk that will demand basic fitness and ability to walk on rocky, uneven or steep terrain. However, many of the typical observation points can be reached by a 4X4 vehicle or a short walk. As we have plenty of time, we will be able to proceed at a speed that is comfortable for everyone. This tour is planned to be a very slow paced one with plenty of time for everything. Our local guides will be on the mountain most of the time looking for a Snow Leopard. They successfully locate one or more Snow Leopards during almost

each tour, and we hope one will be in an easily accessible area. We are also in contact with local shepherds and if one of their animals was killed by the leopards, they will immediately report it to our local team. It is very important for conservation reasons and for us it is a great help. While our local helpers are scouting, we might opt to locate ourselves in a key area to scan the mountainsides where animals occur regularly during hunting or patrolling their territories.

To find a Snow Leopard needs patience, but it is in fact a special aspect of the holiday: it is a very slow-paced activity that allows us to admire the breath-taking scenery, incredible alpine flora and the highlights of the avifauna without haste. There will always be things to look at; the soaring raptors above us, the playful Siberian Marmots that keep whistling to each other signalling danger, or the grazing herds of Argali sheep or Ibex with their amazing ability to climb almost vertical cliffs. There will be many White-winged Snowfinches flying around us, as well as the local race of Horned Lark. Those with sharp eyes will be able to spot the beautiful Guldenstadt's Redstart that inhabits the highest peaks, and we will surely have time to track down some of the flocks of Altai Snowcocks by scanning the cliffs. Lammergeier, Steppe Eagle, Black-eared Kite, Saker Falcon, Cinereous and Himalayan Griffon Vulture are often seen as they scan the pastures for prey or carcasses, the latter most probably left by the Snow Leopards. Our hosts are volunteer rangers recognized by the local authority, partners of the WWF Snow Leopard project, and will willingly share their knowledge of the ecology of the area, the difficulties preserving the wildlife, their struggle with illegal hunters. They will also show us the many signs of the activities of these secretive animals.

The Saiga Antelope is probably one of the oddest-looking animals of its kind, and now it's critically endangered due to various factors. Mongolia has two populations; one of them is actually a few kilometres from our base, in a flat semi desert area. The local subspecies is called "*Saiga tatarica*" which is sometimes considered to be a separate species. They can run at a very high speed and are easily identifiable as they always keep their head down, even while running.

Another possible highlight here is strictly an after-dinner activity just in and around our campsite. We will walk in the flat rocky desert area scanning with our torchlights for small "jumping, glowing eyes". The tiny kangaroo-like rodents are most likely Northern Three-toed Jerboas, which with luck and with some skill can be approached and observed as they feed on insects just a few meters away, sometimes even jumping between our shoes. Their long ears and tails that end in a fluffy ball of fur make them very special, unique animals to watch.

We shall also visit a huge lake and the adjacent wetland nearby which offers a lot to see, perhaps less "furry things" but equally special. Pallas's Sandgrouse might come to drink on the shore, Whooper Swan and Dalmatian Pelican breed amongst the vast expanse of reedbeds, Pallas's Gulls, Whiskered and Gull-billed terns are also here. Massive concentrations of hundreds of White-headed Ducks are usual and Red-crested Pochards are also found on the lake. The nearby grasslands seem to be perfect for many passerines including Asian Short-toed Lark, Richard's Pipit, Western Yellow and Citrine



Bearded Vulture (left) and Brown Accentor (right) – photos H. Brehm

Wagtail, and Pallas's Bunting was found here. Another avian highlight of Mongolia, the Henderson's Ground-jay is living very near to our campsite, and a short walk should produce one if not more of these wonderful birds.

On one of the evenings we will organize a local cultural group to visit our Ger camp for a short performance: we feel this is a great addition to our tour and allows us to appreciate the region's ancient and rich cultural and spiritual heritage. **Accommodation:** Ger camp in the foothills of the Altai Mountains near the Chinese border (shared facilities) each night. **Meals included:** B, L, D each day.

Days 8 & 9. Saturday 13 & Sunday 14 August 2022. Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park.

Leaving this magical place behind, we drive to the airport and fly to Ulaanbaatar, where our vehicles are waiting for us. In less than two hours we will find ourselves in Hustai (also known as Kustain Nuruu) National Park, home to the successfully reintroduced wild horse, the Thaki or Przewalski's Horse. Short walks along the rolling hills will bring us Long-tailed Squirrel and Siberian Marmot but most probably we will spend quite some time admiring the beauty of the world's only true wild horse species. 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. Some spots are productive for Daurian Partridge. This is our chance to add Mongolian 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. On the agricultural fields bordering the park we will search for the large Mongolian Lark and other passerines. **Accommodation:** Ger camp in Hustai National Park (shared facilities) each night. There are limited number of en suite Gers available here at an additional cost*. **Meals included:** B, L, D both days.

Day 10. Monday 15 August 2022. Hustai National Park to Ulaanbaatar. Today we might visit a wetland about an hour's drive further west where White-naped Crane is possible along with Swan Goose, Black Stork, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Citrine and Eastern Yellow Wagtail before making our way back to the capital where we spend the last night of our tour. **Accommodation:** Ulaanbaatar (en suite rooms) each night. **Meals included:** B, L, D.

Day 11. Tuesday 16 August 2022. Depart Ulaanbaatar. This morning we transfer to Ulaanbaatar airport for our departure to onward destinations. **Accommodation:** none. **Meals included:** B.

Tour Price: To be advised. (2021 prices US\$8,700 per person twin share and single supplement US\$685 (subject to availability).

* Please enquire about the additional price of en suite Ger at Hustai NP (subject to availability).

Based on a group size of 6-12 participants + Inala leader Dr Tonia Cochran + local guides.

ITINERARY OUTLINE FOR PRE-TOUR EXTENSION:

Days 1 & 2. Thu 4 & Fri 5 Aug 22. Arrive Ulaanbaatar and travel to Manul Mountains

Day 3 (= day 1 of main tour). Sat 6 Aug 22. Manul Mountains to Ulaanbaatar to start main tour.

DETAILED ITINERARY:



Days 1 & 2. Thursday 4 & Friday 5 August 2022.

Arrive Ulaanbaatar & travel to Manul Mountains

After arriving at the airport, we drive about an hour to Manul Mountains. We will spend 2 nights here at the remote Ger camp that was purpose-built for this tour. The habitat is comprised of low mountains with sparse rocky outcrops surrounded by steppe grassland. This is the favourite habitat of the sought-after Pallas's Cat.

These secretive animals can be seen during the day here with the help of the knowledgeable local expert who studied these cats for a long time. The mountains also hold several packs of Grey Wolf and we'll look for them from vantage points in the early morning or late afternoon. Corsac Fox is fairly common in the area preying on the abundant Long-tailed Souselik, Daurian Pikas and Brandt's Voles. Argali Sheep inhabits the craggy areas while herds of Mongolian Gazelle roam the grasslands. Red Deer is very common in the mountains and Siberian Roe Deer is possible. The birdlife is also rich, especially the raptors. Cinereous Vulture, Steppe and Golden Eagle, Upland Buzzard, Hen Harrier and

Saker Falcon are commonly seen hunting the steppes. The few bushes and trees may hold many migrating passerines including Siberian Rubythroat, Red-flanked Bluetail, Pallas's and Yellow-browed Warbler, Black-throated Thrush, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Pallas's and Pine Bunting.

Accommodation: Ger camp at Manul Mountains (shared facilities) each night. **Meals included:** D on day 1 and B, L, D on day 2.

Day 3 (= day 1 of main tour). Saturday 6 August 2022. Manul Mountains to Ulaanbaatar to start main tour. **Accommodation:** none (provided on main tour). **Meals included:** B, L.

Tour Price: To be advised. 2021 price is US\$2,450 per person twin share and single supplement US\$115 (subject to availability).

Based on a group size of 6-12 participants + Inala leader Dr Tonia Cochran + local guides.



INCLUSIONS & EXCLUSIONS FOR BOTH TOURS:

Inclusions: Accommodation in Gers/hotel rooms for each night of the tour as described above, specialist guiding and transport in a private vehicle with specialist licensed English-speaking local guides as outlined in the itinerary, airport transfers, meals (B, L, D snacks and bottled water), activities outlined in the itinerary including National Park entry fees. Also includes domestic return Ulaanbaatar-Khovd flights and US\$100 per person donation to Snow leopard conservation on main tour.

Exclusions: International and domestic airfares (except the return Ulaanbaatar-Khovd flights mentioned above), alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and expenses of a personal nature (snacks, travel and medical insurance, internet, laundry, discretionary tips etc.). Also excludes extra charges due to factors beyond the control of the tour company such as natural disasters and governmental policy changes

Please note:

Because this tour is the very first of its kind, and the specific locations of the species mentioned are obviously changing to some degree year after year, there is certain flexibility in the daily programme's timing, but this will be kept to a minimum and will not significantly alter the itinerary. Depending on individual trip circumstances, weather, and local information, the exact itinerary may not be strictly adhered to. The guides reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary as they see fit.

