



# Inala's Mongolia

**Search for the Snow Leopard: birds,  
mammals, culture and amazing  
landscapes**

**6-16 August 2023**

**with optional Pallas's Cat extension**

**3-5 August 2023**



**Snow Leopard. Photo H. Brehm**

This tour has specifically been designed for the best chance of seeing the near-mythical Snow Leopard, which has historically proved almost impossible to find in the vast, steep, rocky high mountains of Central Asia without the considerable effort of extended and difficult hikes in the thin, cold air of high altitudes whilst carrying all belongings. We will be travelling in relative comfort in purpose-built ger (yurt) camps with onsite cooks, drivers and support crews and most areas will be accessed by vehicle, allowing for greater accessibility for those with average fitness levels. The areas we will be visiting are also home to a fantastic selection of bird and rare or difficult to see mammal species, such as Saiga Antelope, Przewalski's Horse, Argali mountain sheep and Mongolian Gazelle. The scenery is spectacular and vast and covered in wildflowers. We will also experience some of Mongolia's unique and ancient culture, from nomadic Yak, Bactrian Camel, Cashmere Goat and sheep herding to performances by Tuvan throat singers and traditional dancers whilst living in traditional gers (yurts) which are provided by the local community.



Ger (Yurt) accommodation at the Altai Mountains Camp. Photo T Cochran

During this slow-paced 11-day adventure, we will be based in ger camps two main locations. On our first and last nights, we will be staying in a comfortable en suite hotel in Ulaanbaatar. We shall spend 6 nights in the foothills of the Altai Mountains in remote Western Mongolia, venturing into the deep rocky valleys and higher altitudes (maximum 3,000 metres or 10,000 feet, but usually below) searching for Snow Leopard and other wildlife. We have a good chance of seeing at least one of the estimated population of 10-15 individuals that live in this isolated mountain range. We will also look for the world's largest wild sheep, the Argali, and Siberian Ibex that roam the rocky slopes. A variety of rodents such as ground-squirrels, jerboas, gerbils/jirds, voles and Tarbagan Marmot are very common and easily seen, as are lagomorphs (close relatives of rabbits) such as hares and pikas. We may even be lucky enough to see Grey Wolf which are also possible, but even more difficult the find than Snow Leopard. We will also visit the nearby semi-desert area below our camp to search for other critically endangered mammals such as Saiga Antelope and the delicately built and pretty Black-tailed (Goitered) Gazelle. Our second base will be nearer to the capital, yet in another beautiful natural area, the famous Hustai National Park, home of the world's only wild horse species, the Przewalski's Horse or Takhi and Mongolian Gazelle.

## HIGHLIGHTS:

- We will be staying in remote camps in the vast Mongolian landscape where the only other humans (apart from our group and support crew) are herders.
- Iconic large mammals such as Snow Leopard, Saiga Antelope, Black-tailed and Mongolian Gazelle, Przewalski's Horse, Argali, Siberian Ibex, Tarbagan Marmot, Corsac Fox and a plethora of lagomorphs (Tolai Hare and pikas) and rodents (ground-squirrels, voles, gerbils and jirds).
- A spectacular list of bird species: Altai Snowcocks, Guldenstadt's Redstart, White-winged Snowfinch and Red-billed Chough can be found on the higher cliffs of the steep mountains, while the foothills are home to Mongolian (Henderson's) Ground-jay and Grey-necked Bunting. Desert Warbler, Pallas's Sandgrouse can be found in the nearby semi-desert steppes and a huge lake nearby is a refuge for breeding Pallas's Gull, White-headed Duck, Dalmatian Pelican and a variety of other waterbirds and shorebirds. Raptors will also be commonly encountered including Steppe and Golden Eagle, Saker and Amur Falcon, Upland Buzzard, Cinereous and Himalayan (Griffon) and Bearded (Lammergeier) Vulture. Other species that are likely to be seen on the tour include Daurian and Chukar Partridge, Demoiselle Crane, Eurasian Hoopoe, Mongolian Finch, Common Rock Thrush, Azure Tit and White-crowned Penduline Tit, as well as Isabelline, Desert and Pied Wheatear and a variety of larks. This area is sure to hold many as yet undiscovered secrets as few birders have ventured into this region before.
- We also aim to support volunteers from the local community who are collaborating with WWF to protect Snow Leopards by working with local herding communities. We are keen to help their work by providing funds for the purchase of camera traps (trail cameras) and telescopes that are vital for both understanding the biology of this little-known animal, as well as to report illegal hunting of Mongolia's large mammal species.

**TOUR LEADER:** Inala Nature Tours leader with local guides

**SUMMARY:**

- 11 days in Mongolia's wilderness
- Start & finish in great accommodation at Ulaanbaatar (capital & largest city of Mongolia)
- Visit the Altai Mountains and Hustai National Park
- Stay in comfortable ger (yurt) camps in the field and an en-suite hotel in Ulaanbaatar
- Support local Snow Leopard conservation volunteers
- 2 nights optional extension in Gun Galuut Nature Reserve in search of Pallas's Cat (see below)



TOP: Pallas's Pika (left) and Tarbagan Marmot (right). Photos K Campbell  
BOTTOM: Black pelage Red Squirrel (left) and Tolai Hare (right). Photos M Campbell

**ITINERARY OUTLINE FOR MAIN TOUR:**

**Pre-tour extension: Fri 4 & Sat 5 Aug 23 (Details below).**

**Day 1. Sun 6 Aug 23.** Arrive Ulaanbaatar. Orientation and welcome dinner.

**Day 2. Mon 7 Aug 23.** Fly Ulaanbaatar-Khovd and travel to foothills of the Altai Mountains

**Days 3-7. Tue 8- Sat 12 Aug 23.** Altai Mountains

**Days 8 & 9. Sun 13 & Mon 14 Aug 23.** Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park

**Day 10. Tue 15 Aug 23.** Hustai National Park to Ulaanbaatar.

**Day 11. Wed 16 August 23.** Ulaanbaatar.

# DETAILED ITINERARY:

**Pre-tour extension: Friday 4 & Saturday 5 August 2023** (Details below).

**Day 1. Sunday 6 August 2023. Arrive Ulaanbaatar.** Arrive at Ulaanbaatar and check into our hotel. We will have our welcome dinner in a traditional Mongolian restaurant offering delicious local and regional cuisine.

**Accommodation:** Ulaanbaatar hotel (en suite rooms) **Meals included:** D.

**Day 2. Monday 7 August 2023. 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

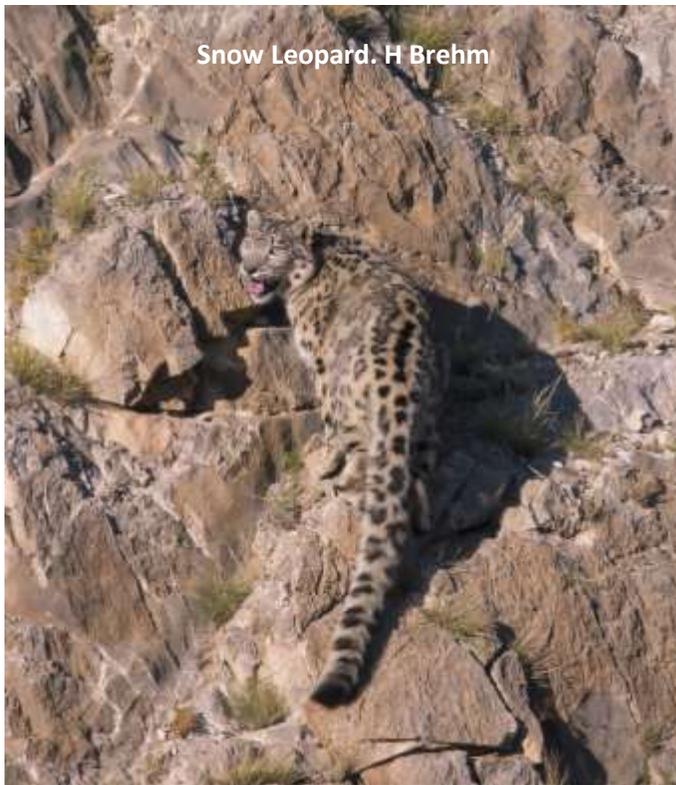


Interior of ger Altai camp. T Cochran

the next 6 nights. Our camp is located in the foothills of Jargalant Khairkhan Mountain (an isolated extension of the Altai Mountains) overlooking semi-desert steppes. The facilities here are shared and basic, but considering the remoteness, are very comfortable and clean. The camp is operated by members of the local community and our hosts are volunteer rangers recognized by the local authority and partners of the WWF Snow Leopard project. Our local support team are keen to provide everything we need to maximise our comfort here. During this time, we probably won't meet any other human being apart from our teammates, our local crew and perhaps a few herders.

**Accommodation:** Ger camp in the foothills of the Altai Mountains, western Mongolia (shared facilities). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Days 3-7. Tuesday 8- Saturday 12 August 2023. Altai Mountains.** The next 5 days will find us searching



Snow Leopard. H Brehm

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. There is no guarantee of sightings, but by working with the local support crew in the best locations, most tour groups are fortunate to see at least distant views of this majestic animal during their visit.

The terrain here is considerably easier to negotiate than in their other habitats, where the conditions are generally much harsher (higher altitude, lower temperatures, difficult terrain and limited access involving long hikes carrying all gear and sleeping in tents).

Our experienced and skilful drivers will take us as close as possible to the observation sites in 4x4 vehicles, which provides access for those with average mobility and fitness (although some of the terrain is rocky, uneven and steep). There will also be opportunities to take short or medium length walks in the valleys and steppes. 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 slow paced with plenty of time for everything. A team

of local scouts will be on the mountain most of the time looking for 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 for us all to see.

They are also in contact with local shepherds and if one of their animals is killed by leopards, they will immediately report it to our local team. This is important for conservation reasons and a great help to us. We will also scan the mountainsides during visits to the summit. 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 such as the flocks of White-winged Snowfinches and Red-billed Chough, the beautiful Guldenstadt's Redstart, Tarbagan Marmots and Argali sheep or Siberian Ibex with their amazing ability to climb almost vertical cliffs. Raptors are common here and include Golden and Steppe Eagle, Black-eared Kite and Saker Falcon and Cinereous, Bearded 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.



Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier). H Brehm



Demoiselle Cranes. T Cochran

The odd-looking Saiga Antelope is now critically endangered, and the Mongolian subspecies (*Saiga tatarica mongolica*) can be found in the flat semi desert steppe a few kilometres from our base. Another highlight is the abundance and variety of rodents and lagomorphs in and around the campsite. Pallas's Pika are abundant around the campsite; Midday Jird and Mongolian Gerbil are also common, and at night, tiny kangaroo-like Jerboas can be seen jumping around the campsite. Their long ears and tails make them very special, unique animals to watch. We will also visit a huge lake and the adjacent wetland nearby where we will see a large range of waterbirds and shorebirds such as Whooper Swan, Dalmatian Pelican Pallas's Gulls, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, White-headed Ducks, Red-crested and Common Pochards. The nearby grasslands provide perfect habitat for many passerines including Asian Short-toed Lark, Richard's Pipit, Western Yellow and Citrine Wagtail, and Pallas's Bunting. Other avian Mongolian highlights include Pallas's Sandgrouse and Mongolian (Henderson's) Ground-jay which also occur very near to our campsite.

On one evening, we will also organize a short performance by a local cultural group who will demonstrate their mastery of Tuvan throat singing and traditional instruments. This is a highlight of the tour and allows us to appreciate the region's ancient and rich cultural and spiritual heritage. We will also visit the site of some ancient Petroglyphs. The Petroglyphs of the high mountain glacier-carved valleys of the Mongolian Altai represent the most complete and best-preserved visual record of human prehistory and early history of the region at the intersection of Central and North Asia. The earliest images that we will view date back to the Late Pleistocene 11,000+ years ago), when the paleoenvironment shifted from dry plains to forested steppe and the valleys provided an ideal habitat for hunters of large wild game. **Accommodation:** Ger camp in the foothills of the Altai Mountains as for day 2 (shared facilities) each night. **Meals included:** B, L, D each day.



11,000+ year old Petroglyphs

T Cochran

**Days 8 & 9. Sunday 13 & Monday 14 August 2023. Altai Mountains to Hustai National Park.** Leaving this magical place behind, we will drive to the airport and fly back 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



Przewalski's Horses. M Campbell

the successfully reintroduced Mongolian wild horse, the Takhi or Przewalski's Horse. We will take short walks in the rolling hills searching for Long-tailed Ground-squirrel (Souslik) and Tarbagan Marmot, but the main focus will be to admire the beauty of the world's only true wild horse species. We may also see Mongolian Gazelle, Argali and Red Deer today. Amur Falcon may be found in the trees in the valleys, while Lesser Kestrels hunt on the hillsides and Golden Eagles patrol the skies. Some places are productive for Daurian Partridge, and the wildflowers we may see here include Edelweiss (*Leontopodium*

*ochroleucum*) and Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*). **Accommodation:** Ger camp in Hustai National Park (shared facilities) each night. **Meals included:** B, L, D both days.



Edelweiss. T Cochran



Clustered Bellflower and Aster T Cochran

**Day 10. Tuesday 15 August 2023. 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. Wednesday 16 August 2023. Depart Ulaanbaatar.** This morning we transfer to Ulaanbaatar airport for our departure to onward destinations. **Accommodation:** none. **Meals included:** B.

**Tour Price:** US\$9,100 per person twin share and single supplement US\$685 (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:**

**Day 1. Thu 3 Aug 23.** Arrive Ulaanbaatar.

**Days 2 & 3. Fri 4 & Sat 5 Aug 23.** Ulaanbaatar to Gun Galuut.

**Day 4 (= day 1 of main tour). Sun 6 Aug 23.** Gun Galuut to Ulaanbaatar to start main tour.

## **DETAILED ITINERARY:**

**Day 1. Thursday 3 August 2023. Arrive Ulaanbaatar.** We will arrange our flight arrivals for today to maximise our time in Gun Galuut over the next 2 days. We will organise airport to hotel transfers and there may be time for a short walk along the river in a local park depending on flight arrival times. **Accommodation:** Ulaanbaatar hotel (en suite rooms) **Meals included:** D.

**Days 2 & 3. Friday 4 & Saturday 5 August 2022. Ulaanbaatar to Gun Galuut Nature Reserve.** This morning we



Pallas's Cat – H. Brehm

will travel to the Pallas's Cat camp at Gun Galuut, 130 kms south-east of Ulaanbaatar. We will spend 2 nights at this remote Ger camp situated in a scenic river valley that has been purpose-built for this tour.

Gun Galuut has a great diversity of ecosystems including mountain ranges, steppes, rivers, lakes and wetlands. Sixty-three mammal species, 61 bird species, 3 amphibian species and 38 fish species have been recorded in this area, including several nationally and globally-threatened species. The sought-after Pallas's Cat occurs here and we will search for these secretive animals during the day here with the help of the knowledgeable local expert who has studied these cats for a long time. Grey Wolf, Corsac Fox, Long-tailed Ground-squirrel (Souslik), Tarbagan Marmot and an assortment of pikas, voles and jerboas are also found here, as is the globally threatened Argali mountain sheep.

We will also explore the vegetation along the river near our campsite for migratory songbirds. In the past, these have been quite rewarding, rendering 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 Pine buntings. Surprises are a possibility and may not be limited to

passerines. In 2017, Mongolia's third record of a Schrenck's Bittern was found along this stretch of riverside. The lakes near our ger camp that dot the vast steppe are situated in a beautiful river valley. These lakes have yielded many surprises in the past including Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck, Gray-headed Lapwing, Asian Dowitcher and Gray-tailed Tattler. We may also encounter suites of common shorebirds including Eurasian Curlew, Long-toed and Red-necked stints, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden-Plover and Marsh Sandpiper. White-naped Cranes nest in the marshes of this region and we should find this magnificent bird in family groups along with other crane species including Common and the daintier Demoiselles. The lakes also attract numerous water birds including loons, grebes, swans, ducks, scoters, gulls and as many as five species of terns. We may see Bar-headed and Swan geese, Whooper Swan, Common and Ruddy shelducks, Eurasian Wigeon, Garganey, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and "Siberian" White-winged (Stejneger's) Scoter. Eared and Horned grebes and Arctic (Black-throated) Loon are often spotted in these waters. Mongolian Gull and Black-Headed Gull are most common here, and Common and Gull-billed Terns are regularly observed in these realms; we may also find larger Caspians and all three marsh terns: Whiskered, Black

and White-winged. As we drive across the shortgrass steppe we may find several species of larks including Asian Short-toed, Horned and Mongolian larks, Isabelline and Northern wheatears, and Richard's and Blyth's pipits. We will particularly be on the lookout for the sandy colored Pere David's Snowfinch that inhabits the steppes. Raptors will be represented by Upland Buzzard, Steppe Eagle, Cinereous Vulture, Black-eared Kite, Eastern Marsh Harrier, and Saker and Amur falcons. The rocky slopes are home to Rock Sparrow and Twite, while Pallas's Sandgrouse could be skulking anywhere in the area. **Accommodation:** Ger camp at Gun-Galuut (shared facilities) each night. **Meals included:** B, L, D each day.

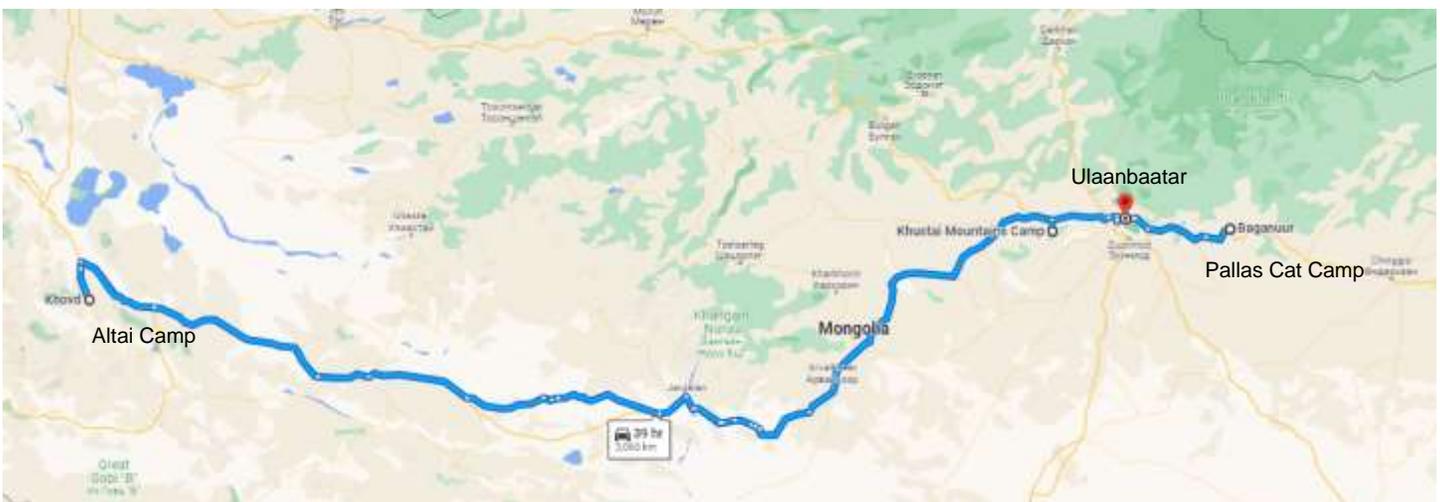
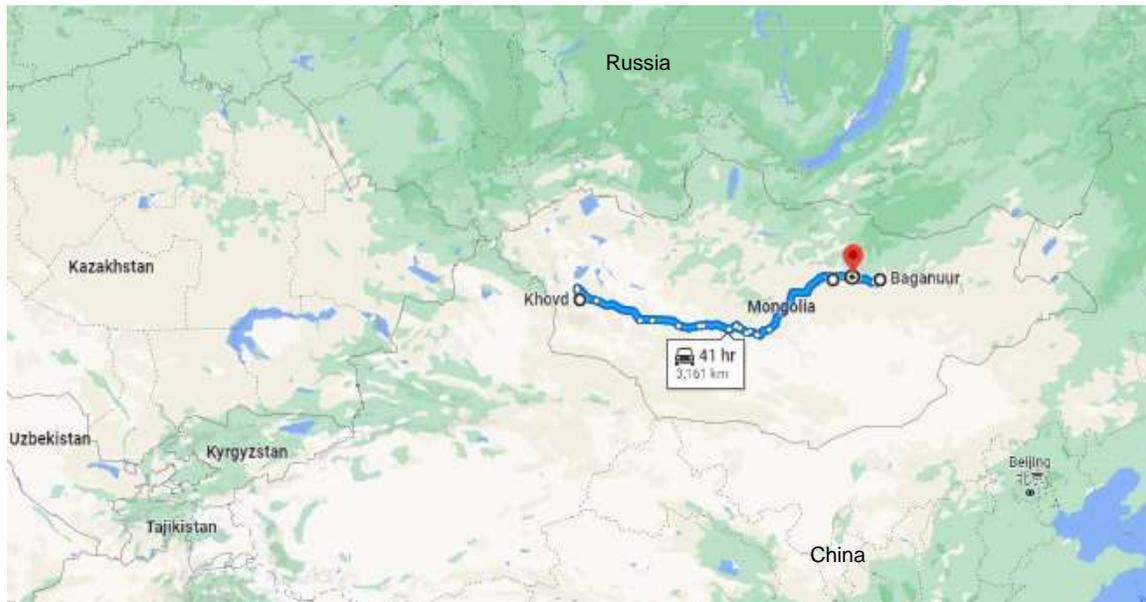
**Day 4 (= day 1 of main tour). Sunday 6 August 2022. Gun-Galuut to Ulaanbaatar** Today we travel back to Ulaanbaatar to start main tour. **Accommodation:** none (provided on main tour). **Meals included:** B, L.

**Tour Price:** US\$2,450 per person twin share and single supplement US\$120 (subject to availability).

**Based on a group size of 6-12 people**

**Participants + Inala leader Dr Tonia Cochran + local guides.**

## Map of areas we will visit on these two tours:



## **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 private vehicles with specialist licensed local guides and English speaking interpreters, airport transfers, meals and activities outlined in the itinerary including National Park entry fees. Also includes domestic return Ulaanbaatar-Khovd flights.

**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, etc.) and tips for local guides and support crew. Also excludes extra charges due to factors beyond the control of the tour company such as natural disasters and governmental policy changes.

### **Please note:**

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 and there may be some flexibility in the daily programme's timing, but this will be kept to a minimum and will not significantly alter the itinerary.

Flight changes on the domestic Ulaanbaatar-Khovd flight sometimes necessitate a change from ger accommodation near Hustai on days 8 and/or 9 of the main tour to en suite hotel at Ulaanbaatar. The itinerary and meals will be adjusted to best suit these to maximise wildlife viewing time.

Please bear in mind this primarily is not a dedicated photography tour and many of the larger mammals may not be seen at close range. However, during the tour we will have several occasions to photograph the wildlife, scenery and wildflowers from the vehicles and on foot throughout the tour. Small mammal viewing at close range and birdwatching opportunities are excellent.



Altai ger camp T Cochran



Wildflowers Jargalant Mountain Valley T Cochran



View near Pallas's Cat camp. A Steiner



Bar-headed Geese. A Steiner