



**MONGOLIA:  
STEPPES & GOBI DESERT BIRDING**

**13 – 26 JUNE 2023**



*Henderson's Ground Jay is always a top target on this trip (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia)*

Mongolia is one of the most exciting and remote birding destinations in Asia and this small-group tour (without real camping like some operators) will allow you to see a wide variety of birds in spectacular natural landscapes. We will traverse the country visiting the Siberian taiga forests, the vast seamless steppe grasslands, a range of fresh and brackish lakes, the Gobi Desert, and impressive mountains. We will stay in local-style comfortable yurts (here called gers) offering an incredible and authentic Mongolian experience.

The country has been made famous worldwide by Genghis Khan (Chinggis Khaan) and the Mongol hordes but the draw of numerous highly sought and poorly known bird species has also kept birders and wildlife enthusiasts enthralled in the country for years.

This Mongolian birdwatching tour offers the ultimate adventure to find an array of dream birds from the Eastern Palearctic. We will start (and end) our Mongolian birding adventure in Ulaanbaatar (also widely known as Ulan Bator). We will visit several different areas and key habitats in the region where we will look for a range of important target species. On arrival in the city some of our target birds should be waiting for us near our hotel, such as **Azure Tit**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Amur Falcon**, and **Long-tailed Rosefinch**.



*The beautiful **Amur Falcon** is an incredible long-distance migrant – this is a male.*

We will first travel to Jargaltkhaan into the steppe grassland habitats where we will search for **Saker Falcon**, **Steppe Eagle**, **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Cinereous Vulture**, **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Golden Eagle**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, **Meadow Bunting**, and **Pied Wheatear** to name a few possibilities. Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve will be our next birding spot and will offer some spectacular avian treats (as well as scenery) including **White-naped Crane**, **Demoiselle Crane**, **Black Stork**, **Swan Goose**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Stejneger's Scoter**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Asian Dowitcher**, **Pallas's Reed Bunting**, **Lanceolated Warbler**, **Citrine**

**Wagtail**, and **Red-throated Thrush**. With luck we may even encounter the Critically Endangered (BirdLife International) **Siberian Crane**.



***White-naped Crane** is one of our big target species on this tour. This huge bird stands at between 47 and 59 inches (1.2 and 1.5 meters) tall and has a wingspan of over 78 inches (2 meters) (photo Gomboo).*

Our third stop on the tour will take us to some incredible Siberian taiga forest where we will look for **Black-billed Capercaillie**, **Hazel Grouse**, **Ural Owl**, **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Chinese Bush Warbler**, **Black Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, and many more high-latitude forest birds along the way. After the forests of the taiga we will do something totally different, birding the famed Gobi Desert! Here, yet more targets await us, with mouthwatering prospects of breeding-plumaged **Oriental Plover** and **Greater Sand Plover**, along with **Pallas's Sandgrouse**, **Henderson's Ground Jay**, **Desert Wheatear**, **Asian Desert Warbler**, and **Saxaul Sparrow** to name a few.

The final stop of the tour (before returning to Ulaanbaatar) will be in the high mountains where we will look for Mongolia's sole endemic, **Kozlov's Accentor**, the monotypic **Wallcreeper**, and the secretive **Altai Snowcock**. Other specials here include **Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **Eversmann's Redstart**, **Asian Rosy Finch**, **Brandt's Mountain Finch**, **Mongolian Finch**, and **White-winged Snowfinch**.

In addition to these exciting birds we might also see an assortment of interesting mammals such as **Pallas's Cat**, **Grey Wolf**, **Mongolian Gazelle**, **Siberian Ibex**, and **Argali** (mountain sheep).



## Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

### Day 1. Arrival in Ulaanbaatar

You will be met at the Chinggis Khaan International Airport after your morning arrival in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, and you will be transferred to your hotel nestled on the banks of the Tuul River. If you cannot arrive on this morning or would like to arrive earlier to acclimatize or explore the city please try to arrive a day or two ahead of the tour starting, we can arrange extra accommodation for you in this case.

We will have a welcome lunch together and then we will visit some woodland near the river in the afternoon where we will look for **Azure Tit**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, **Amur Falcon**, **White-crowned Penduline Tit**, **Hawfinch**, **Long-tailed Rosefinch**, **Red-throated Thrush**, and some waterfowl in the nearby gravel pit ponds.

Overnight: Ulaanbaatar



*The beautiful **Azure Tit** will be enjoyed while in Mongolia (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia).*

### Days 2 - 3. Jargaltkhaan

We will have two days birding in the steppes and mountains in some of the least-visited parts of Jargaltkhaan county where, with the help of our local trackers, we will hope to find the highly sought and beautiful **Pallas's Cat** along with an assortment of great birds, some of the highlights could include a spectacular set of raptors such as **Saker Falcon**, **Upland Buzzard**, **Steppe Eagle**, **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier), **Cinereous Vulture**, **Greater Spotted Eagle**, **Eastern**

**Imperial Eagle**, and **Golden Eagle**. Interesting passerines possible in the area include **Rock Sparrow**, **Red-billed Chough**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, **Richard's Pipit**, **Meadow Bunting**, **Asian Short-toed Lark**, **Mongolian Short-toed Lark**, **Common Rock Thrush**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, and **Pied Wheatear**.

Overnight: Tourist ger camp



*Saker Falcon is a huge falcon and makes its home in the steppes and mountains of Mongolia.*

#### Days 4 - 5. Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve

We will spend time birding in the picturesque Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve. The reserve was founded in 2003 in order to protect the endangered wildlife and their habitat along the River Kherlen and the reserve is made up of high mountains and pretty lakes teeming with birds and surrounded by grassland full of beautiful and colorful flowers, all providing important breeding and foraging grounds for many of our target species here.

There are several birds of global significance in this area and we will spend time trying to find as many of them as possible, with potential highlights including **Siberian Crane** (Critically Endangered, BirdLife International), **White-naped Crane**, **Demoiselle Crane**, **Common Crane**, **Black Stork**, **Swan Goose**, **Bar-headed Goose**, **Whooper Swan**, **Stejneger's Scoter**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Asian Dowitcher**, **White-winged Tern**, **Common Tern** (the *longipennis* subspecies), **Vega Gull**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Amur Falcon**, **Saker Falcon**, **Pere David's Snowfinch**, **Meadow Bunting**, **Pallas's Reed Bunting**, **Lanceolated Warbler**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, **Oriental Reed Warbler**, **Northern Wheatear**, **Pied Wheatear**, **Citrine Wagtail**, and **Red-throated Thrush**.

Overnight: Steppe Nomads ger camp



*Black Stork can be seen in Gun-Galuut Nature Reserve.*



*Large flocks of Demoiselle Crane should be seen on this tour.*



### Days 6 - 7. Gorkhi Terelj National Park

We will drive to Gorkhi Terelj National Park and check into a tourist ger camp near the birding site for a two-night stay as we explore this fascinating area. Here we will look for forest and forest/steppe birds, including the tough and highly sought **Black-billed Capercaillie** and **Chinese Bush Warbler**, along with plenty of other quality birds like **Siberian Rubythroat**, **Daurian Partridge**, **Ural Owl**, **Oriental Cuckoo**, **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker**, **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Dark-sided Flycatcher**, **Taiga Flycatcher**, **Black-faced Bunting**, **Stejneger's Stonechat**, and **White-cheeked Starling**.



*Black-billed Capercaillie will be another big target bird during our time in Gorkhi Terelj National Park (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia).*

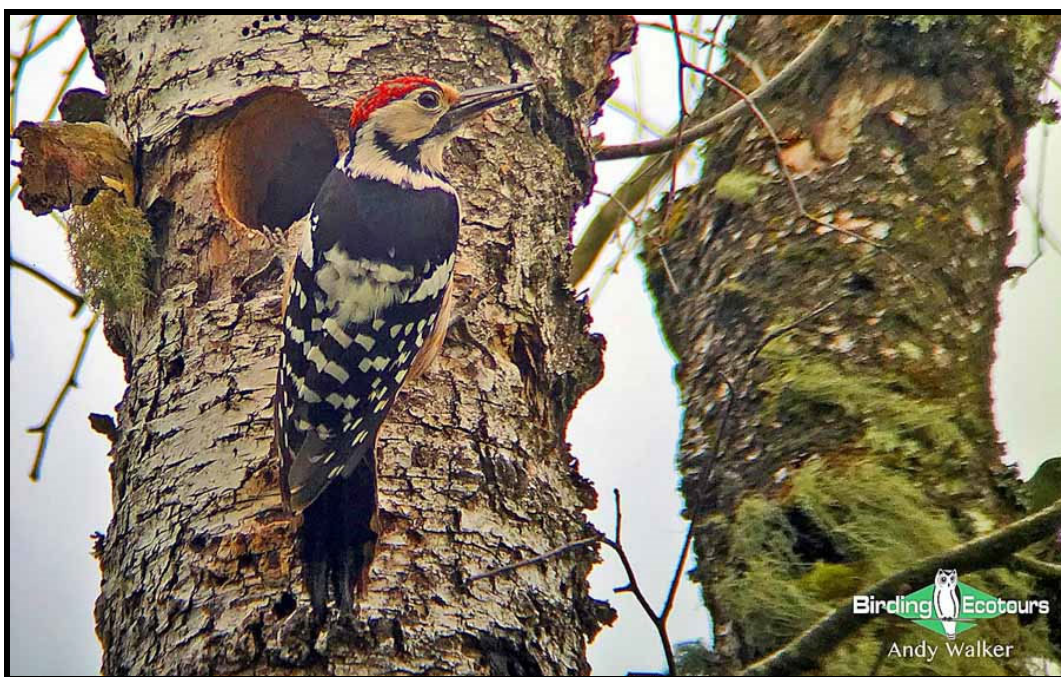
Birders who have spent time in the non-breeding season in Thailand (e.g. our **Northern Thailand – Spectacular Resident and Migrant Birds** birding tour) or chased rare birds in the US or Europe will be familiar with the challenge of *Phylloscopus* warbler identification. In Gorkhi Terelj you have the opportunity of seeing breeding and singing **Arctic Warbler**, **Greenish Warbler**, **Two-barred Warbler**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Hume's Leaf Warbler**, **Pallas's Leaf Warbler**, and **Dusky Warbler** which makes identification less of a challenge!

Other birds we will look for in the Siberian boreal forest (taiga) include **Northern Goshawk**, **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **Black Woodpecker**, **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Spotted Nutcracker**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Pine Bunting**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, **Oriental Reed Warbler**, **Lesser Whitethroat**, **Willow Tit**, and **Common Redstart**.

Overnight: Tourist ger camp



*We will look for **Ural Owl** while in the taiga forests.*



*Another target in the taiga forests will be the pretty **White-backed Woodpecker**.*



### Day 8. Bayanzag

Today we will take a flight to Dalanzadgad and then drive to the Bayanzag or ‘Flaming Cliffs’, famed for the world’s first discovery of dinosaur eggs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This site is also great for a few localized birds and we will search here for **Pallas’s Sandgrouse**, **Oriental Plover**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Great (Steppe) Grey Shrike**, **Horned Lark**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, and **Desert Wheatear**. There are several mammals possible in the area too such as **Goitered Gazelle**, **Gobi Jerboa**, **Great Gerbil**, and with luck maybe even some dinosaur bones!

Overnight: Tourist ger camp



*Pallas’s Sandgrouse can be found in the Gobi Desert (photo Natural Heritage Center of Mongolia).*

### Days 9 - 10. Khongoryn Els

We have a long drive today as we travel to the ‘Singing Sands’, the famous dunes of Khongoryn Els, located within the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park (i.e. the Gobi Desert!). We will make stops along the way for any of the interesting birds or the incredible sandstone hills scenery along the way. Once we arrive at our ger camp we will be able to relax and unwind with spectacular views of seamless desert steppe with massive sand dunes set against the grandeur of the high mountains. We will have to pull ourselves away from these views in order to get looking for the many Gobi Desert specialties such as **Henderson’s Ground Jay**, **Saxaul Sparrow**, **Hill Pigeon**, **Pallas’s Sandgrouse**, **Lesser Kestrel**, **Long-legged Buzzard**, **Great (Steppe) Grey Shrike**, **Desert Wheatear**, and **Asian Desert Warbler**.

Overnight: tourist ger camp

### Days 11 - 12. Yolyn Am

We will drive through yet more beautiful scenery as we head to Yolyn Am, a deep and narrow gorge in the Gurvan Saikhan Mountains in the Gurvan Saikhan National Park. We hope to see **Bearded Vulture** (Lammergeier) and **Himalayan Vulture** at close range, along with **Kozlov's Accentor**, **Sulphur-bellied Warbler**, **Himalayan Beautiful Rosefinch**, and the monotypic **Wallcreeper**.

Other species we will look for over these two days will include **Chukar Partridge**, **Cinereous Vulture**, **Golden Eagle**, **Eurasian Eagle-Owl**, **Saker Falcon**, **Barred Warbler**, **Brown Accentor**, **Güldenstädt's Redstart**, **Eversmann's Redstart**, **Asian Rosy Finch**, **Brandt's Mountain Finch**, **White-winged Snowfinch**, **Mongolian Finch**, **Godlewski's Bunting**, **Grey-necked Bunting**, **Eurasian Crag Martin**, and **Common Rock Thrush**. We will also search for **Altai Snowcock**, which is one of the more challenging species for the trip. **Siberian Ibex** can be found in the mountains here too.

Overnight: Tourist ger camp



*Wallcreeper — always a highlight.*

### Day 13. Travel to Ulaanbaatar

Essentially a travel day as we will take a flight back to Ulaanbaatar from Dalanzadgad. Depending on the time of the flights there may be time for some additional birding near Dalanzadgad or Ulaanbaatar.

Overnight: Ulaanbaatar



**Day 14. Departure from Ulaanbaatar**

This is a non-birding day with your departure home from Ulaanbaatar. Depending on your flight schedule you may have time to explore the city. If you would like to extend your stay in Mongolia we can easily arrange for this.

Overnight: Not included



***Long-legged Buzzard*** — one of the many raptors we should see on this trip.

*Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads or birding sites, and the discretion of the guides and other factors.*

**Duration:** 14 days  
**Group Size:** 4 - 8  
**Dates:** 13 - 26 June 2023  
**Start:** Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar  
**End:** Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar

**Prices:** US\$6,869 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants, which includes the domestic flights (2023)

**Single Supplements:** US\$659 (2023)

**Price includes:**

Domestic flights (Ulaanbaatar to Dalanzadgad and Dalanzadgad to Ulaanbaatar)  
All accommodation (as described above - 2 nights in hotels and 11 nights in tourist ger camps of a good standard – *see important note on accommodation below*)  
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 14)  
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle  
Expert tour leader  
Local bird and wildlife guide/trackers fees  
National park/birdwatching reserve/protected areas entrance fees  
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

**Price excludes:**

Flights to/from Chinggis Khaan International Airport, Ulaanbaatar  
Visa  
Departure tax  
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.  
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions  
Soft/alcoholic drinks  
Camera (still/video) permits  
Personal travel insurance  
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))

**Accommodation note:**

We will spend two nights in hotels (in Ulaanbaatar at the beginning and end of the tour) but the majority (11 nights) of the tour accommodation will be spent in tourist ger camps with all equipment provided (gers are the local name for yurts). Our selected ger camps are the highest of local standards. The camps provide gers for accommodation; each ger usually has 2-4 beds, a stove, chairs, a table, and drawers inside. Due to the remoteness, bathrooms are shared, and electricity is provided at limited hours, usually between 7-10 pm. We will mostly stay in comfortable and clean ger camps on shared basis. But we will try to book the gers closest to the bathrooms. Please note that en suite ger camps are limited in Mongolia, please advise us on booking if you require a ger all to yourselves and we will try and book this where possible. The meals are served in a restaurant, usually an immense ger or a one-story building. We do not stay in small, portable tents (such as those you might use when you go camping at home) like some operators in Mongolia put you in. We believe you can see the birds and amazing country yet still remain comfortable at the same time.