

Trip report Terelj and Gun Galuut, 13-17 September 2018 from Margaret and Richard

Thursday. After you all left we went for a walk in the forest along the river. It was very quiet at first but we saw a red squirrel, and then heard tapping and a three toed woodpecker arrived and flew round us attacking the tree trunks low down. I managed to get a photo of it which I have attached. On the river there were two goosanders, cormorant, and white wagtails and grey wagtail, also carrion crows and tree sparrows around the hotel.

Friday. This morning we drove up to a pine wood. Again it was very quiet inside the wood until several eurasian nuthatches appeared and we heard willow tit. Along the edge of the wood we saw jay, grey wagtail, nutcracker, raven, carrion crow, steppe eagle, booted eagle, upland buzzard and daurian jackdaw. A red squirrel was in the wood and long-tailed ground squirrel outside.

We had lunch back at the hotel and then returned to the woods along the river. This time we had good views of a lesser spotted woodpecker, more nuthatches, a willow tit which came very close, a marsh tit and eurasian treecreeper. The goosanders were still on the river. We searched for a mandarin duck and roe deer but without success.

Saturday. Before breakfast we saw two rook, a hill pigeon, a great tit, the resident tree sparrows and daurian jackdaws, then it was time to leave and drive to Gun Galuut.

We enjoyed our stay at Terelj very much, the river walk was so attractive and peaceful. The hotel was quiet and comfortable and had a good menu.

The journey to Gun Galuut was straightforward. We stopped to admire the great statue of Ghengis Kahn and then spent some time at one of the lakes. Here there were eurasian teal, a few pintail, wigeon, mallard, goldeneye, ruddy shelduck, whooper swans and cormorant. There were pacific golden plover, marsh sandpiper, grey heron. We also saw a distant kestrel, black-eared kite, black-headed and mongolian gulls.

Lunch was at Gun Galuut, and afterwards we drove a short distance from the camp and found several demoiselle cranes followed by up to fifteen white-napped cranes. We spent some time watching these beautiful birds with telescopes so as not to disturb them. We also saw a mongolian lark on the ground, a corsac fox just showing its head and there were pica and many marmots. Back at the camp there were tree and rock sparrows, a black stork flew by and there were red-billed choughs, raven and magpie.

Sunday. Today we drove up into the mountains to search for the Argali sheep. Margaret spotted a small group in a ravine and as we watched more and more appeared until there were about thirty making their way up the mountain side. They were quite distant, and a long way from the road, but again telescopes gave us good views. We stopped at another lake on our way back for lunch and here there were more teal, goldeneye, a few pintail and two garganey showing their pale blue-grey wings when they flew. The whooper swans had

well grown cygnets and we had more views of distant white-napped cranes, a black stork and many grey herons. An eastern marsh harrier was on the ground and then flying, and a steppe eagle cruised by. Suddenly there was a huge flock of hundreds of jackdaw. They were mostly western jackdaw with a few daurian with them. They were around most of the day but had disappeared by the next morning.

We had lunch at the camp and then drove to another lake. Again there were many eurasian teal and goldeneye, also eleven swan geese and several ruddy shelduck. On the shore there were several ruff, horned lark, white wagtail, black-headed and mongolian gulls. An upland buzzard was around and a distant kestrel. We thought the kestrels were rather pale and wondered if lesser kestrel was possible. They were too far away for us to identify accurately.

On our way back to camp we had excellent views of a corsac fox interacting with marmots who easily chased it away, and then at dusk a tolai hare ran past our window.

Monday. It was time to drive back to UB after breakfast, but our flight did not leave until 23.15 so we had time to visit another lake on our way. Again there were more of the same ducks, also common pochard, a shoveler and more swan geese. On the shore we found spotted redshank, one still quite dark, a greenshank, five long-toed stint and a sharp-tailed sandpiper. We passed two immature steppe eagles on the ground tearing at a kill. They let us come quite near and I have attached a photo of them. We had lunch in UB and then there was still time to buy a few souvenirs to take home. We managed to get out of UB while it was still light and went to a small park a few miles beyond the airport where there was another kestrel, an amur falcon, steppe eagle, upland buzzard and black-eared kite. There was a steady stream of cormorant heading for the river, whooper swans and a collared dove. Then as the sun disappeared behind the hills we reluctantly went to the airport.

The accommodation at Gun Galuut was also very comfortable. We had a chalet with en-suite, constant hot water, heating and electric light! The food was excellent. Words cannot express how much we enjoyed the whole experience. Usukh, Uugan's brother was very enthusiastic, wanting to learn the European names for the birds, he was also very sharp-eyed and was a great help spotting for us. I had my ipad with pictures of most of the birds with their names so I was able to help him with the pronunciation. Esther was delightful, well organized and most helpful. We learnt something about life in Mongolia from her, and had plenty of laughs. We really enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and taking our time to see everything. Both Terelj and Gun Galuut were lovely places so we have many wonderful memories.