

MONGOLIA

MAY 29 – JUNE 16, 2010

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Please note that tour dates differ slightly from those in the 2010 catalog

The fabled lands of Mongolia conjure images of vast, seemingly limitless horizons, sparsely populated by nomadic horsemen and graced with saffron grasslands. The range of habitats surprises everyone and includes high jagged mountains—the Altai Mountains are surely some of our planet’s most spectacular; endless taiga forests; huge freshwater marshes; and a myriad of grassland types. And all this caressed by a night sky the like of which I promise you have never, ever encountered anywhere else. Above all Mongolia is a wonderfully exciting mix of great traveling experiences, absorbing history and prehistory and some magnificent wildlife.

The name “Mongolia” has always stirred up visions of the untamed and exotic—the warlord Genghis Khan, camels wandering in the Gobi Desert and wild horses galloping across the steppes. Even today, Mongolia seems like the end of the earth; outside Ulaanbaatar you begin to wonder if you haven't stepped into another century, rather than another country. It remains one of the last great adventure destinations in Asia.

Mongolia’s survival as an independent nation is little short of miraculous. For the first time in centuries the Mongolians, once rulers of the vast Eurasian steppe, are no longer colonial subjects of the Russian and Chinese empires. Only a century ago, so few Mongolians were left that it seemed their ancient, nomadic civilization might disappear altogether. Now the country has a constitution, multiparty elections and a ruling democratic coalition.

Lying at the heart of the vast continent of Asia is Mongolia, the land where nomadic horsemen still ride across windswept steppes, where Shamanism and ancient Tibetan Buddhism still flourish and where, according to legend, lies the last resting place of Genghis Khan, leader of the once great Mongol empire. This exotic country is full of natural wonders. The vast Gobi Desert, which covers one third of Mongolia, the endless steppes strewn with thousands of lakes, the picturesque Altai mountains and the rich taiga forest—all remote, beautiful, fascinating and full of birds.

Our trip here will be more than just another birding tour—it will be a true adventure. From the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, we’ll travel out into a forgotten land, much of it unchanged for centuries. As befits a culture famous for its nomadic way of life, we shall camp as we go, albeit largely in very comfortable Gers, or stay at one or two very attractive lodges. We’ll gaze on stunning landscapes seen by few Westerners, and on birds most birdwatchers can only dream about: Upland Buzzard, Amur Falcon, Altai Snowcock, Black-billed Capercallie, Pallas’s Fish-Eagle, Oriental Plover, Relict Gull, Pallas’s Sandgrouse, Mongolian Lark, Blyth’s Pipit, Kozlov’s Accentor... the list goes on.

Our ground agents are skilled at showing this wonderful country to groups. We'll travel in vehicles admirably suited to the terrain and stay in superb camps that are testament to their nomadic heritage. We'll mingle with the locals tending their flocks of sheep and cattle, much as they have done for centuries, and we shall walk along pathways few have trodden.

May 29-30, Days 1-2: Travel to Ulaanbaatar. Participants will need to depart the U.S. on May 29th via various commercial flights to Mongolia, arriving late evening on May 30th. Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to the hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name.

NIGHT: Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

May 31, Day 3: Ulaanbaatar. Our great adventure begins this morning with breakfast in the capital of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar. Ulaanbaatar is a relatively modern, though not especially attractive, city situated in the north-central region of this enormous country. Before the turn of the century there were only a few permanent buildings here and as a consequence, there is little of historical interest for the visitor to see. Nevertheless, although this is a bird and natural history tour, we will take time to gain a sense of what the Mongolian capital is like and to visit one or two of its important sites of interest. For example, we will visit the Gandantegchinlen Khild, roughly translated to mean “the great place of complete joy.” This is by far the largest, most impressive and most important monastery in the land and standing in its presence, one immediately realizes just how far removed we are from our native culture.

We will also spend time exploring the willow-dominated Tuul River and the adjacent grass-covered Zaisan valley where we will gain our first experience of the Mongolian avifauna. Some of the birds we may see include several breeding species such as Ruddy Shelduck; Black Kite (of the form *lineatus* which is sometimes considered to be a separate species viz. Black-eared Kite); Blue Hill Pigeon; Pacific Swift; Common Cuckoo; House Martin; lovely Citrine, Pied and Gray wagtails; Richard's Pipit; dapper Isabelline and Northern wheatears; Lesser Whitethroat; the attractive Azure Tit; charming White-crowned Penduline-Tit; Brown Shrike; Azure-winged and Black-billed magpies; Daurian Jackdaw; Red-billed Chough; Rook; Carrion Crow; Common Raven; the lovely Long-tailed Rosefinch; Hawfinch; and Meadow, Black-faced and Yellow-breasted buntings. Possible migrants here could include Olive-backed Pipit; Eye-browed Thrush; Siberian Rubythroat; Dusky, Arctic and Pallas's leaf-warblers; Brown and Red-breasted flycatchers; Pallas's Reed-Bunting and, if we are very lucky, Daurian Bunting.

NIGHT: Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

June 1, Day 4: Fly to Bayankhongor; Drive to Boon Tsagaan Nuur. This morning we will take a **very early** flight south and west to Bayankhongor, where we will board the vehicles we will be using for the next eight days, and set out for the fabulous Boon Tsagaan Nuur.

NIGHT: Mobile Tented Camp

June 2-3, Days 5-6: Boon Tsagaan Nuur. Located to the north of the Gobi Altai Range, Boon Tsagaan Nuur is a large, brackish lake set like an azure gem amidst truly stunning scenery. Water is a precious commodity in the Gobi and large permanent bodies of water are few and far between but where these exist they can support a vast range of birds and other wildlife which would otherwise be absent from this arid country. Boon Tsagaan Nuur is a large salt lake and remains one of the most reliable sources of permanent water in the Gobi. It is here that we will search for one of Mongolia's most alluringly enigmatic birds, the striking Relict Gull—arguably the rarest of its kind. For many years it was known only from a single specimen collected over the Mongolian border in Chinese territory and often dismissed as just a hybrid. Only in the last twenty years has its true status as a rare and endangered relict species, restricted to a few breeding colonies in Central Asia, been established. Even today, only a comparatively small number of ornithologists have ever seen one in the field. This particular lake is a regular locality for this attractive species and we can expect to see it daily during our stay. Boon Tsagaan

Nuur would be a wetland of major importance in its own right even without its famous gulls and at this season other waterbirds are numerous. Species that occur here include Great Crested Grebe; Eurasian Spoonbill; Whooper and Mute swans; Greylag, Bar-headed and elegant Swan geese; Falcated and Ferruginous ducks; Pallas's Fish-Eagle; Eastern Marsh-Harrier; Common Crane; Pied Avocet; Yellow-legged, Brown-headed and Great Black-headed gulls; and Little and White-winged terns. Few landbirds breed in this inhospitable region. The reedbeds which fringe parts of the lake are the only cover for miles around and are home to Pallas's Grasshopper and Paddyfield warblers, Bearded Reedling (actually a Parrotbill!) and Pallas's Reed-Bunting. Away from the water's edge, we will search for true desert species including Isabelline Shrike, Desert Wheatear, Desert Warbler and Mongolian Trumpeter Finch. The lake also acts like a magnet for migrating passerines as they fly over the immense Gobi and we can expect to encounter almost any migrant that may cross this vast empty "wasteland." Species we may encounter include Gray's Grasshopper and Thick-billed or Greenish warblers. In addition a variety of rarities such as Chinese Pond-Heron have been seen here in the past, and the list of shorebirds could include Greater and Lesser sand-plovers; Gray-tailed Tattler; Asiatic Dowitcher; Broad-billed Sandpiper; Little, Temminck's, Red-necked and Long-toed stints; and Terek Sandpiper.

NIGHT: Mobile Tented Camp

June 4, Day 7, June 15: Drive to Taatzing Tsaagan Nuur. After a last morning at Boon Tsaagan Nuur, we will head eastwards, spending most of the day driving toward Taatzing Tsaagan. Before we reach the lake, we'll spend time searching for the charismatic Henderson's Ground-Jay, aided by good local knowledge of its habitat requirements. The same areas are likely to hold both Isabelline and Steppe Gray Shrikes, both species at the forefront of recent taxonomic decisions. Traveling into the heart of this extraordinary and fascinating region is a truly wonderful and uplifting experience. As we drive, we will follow roads and tracks where they exist, but in this vast country, we will often need to drive across open country to reach our destination. This is definitely a tour for those with an adventurous disposition! As we travel southwards, the steppe gives way gradually to desert and the scenery becomes wilder and more dramatic, the greens and browns of the steppe country giving way to the ochres, yellows, creams and grays of the arid lands to come. Arriving at Taatzing Tsaagan Nuur in the afternoon, we could be serenaded by displaying Richard's Pipits and "drumming" Common Snipe over our campsite, while flocks of Mongolian Trumpeter Finches feed nearby. Water levels in this lake vary considerably from year to year, governing to some extent what we'll see. If there is plenty of water, we could enjoy a selection similar to that at Boon Tsaagan Nuur, with maybe a few surprises in the form of different shorebird or wildfowl species. The damp areas left in drier years are home to Water Rail, Water Pipit and Citrine Wagtail as well as feeding Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, groups of White-winged Black Terns, perhaps some Garganey, and in the nearby hills such species as Chukar, Saker Falcon, and Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush.

NIGHT: Mobile Tented Camp

June 5, Day 8: En Route. Today will largely be one of travel; stopping along the way for anything of interest.

NIGHT: Mobile Tented Camp

June 6, Day 9: Drive to Bayanzag. Our drive today takes us through some fantastic scenery as we pass under the shadow of the mountain massif of Ikh Bogd Uul, which dominates the landscape. Tonight we will be based at the attractive Three Camels Lodge at Bulagtai Hill near Bayanzag. This veritable oasis overlooks a vast grassy plain and some spectacular mountains. During the afternoon we will explore the area known as "Flaming Cliffs," an area made famous in 1923 by the first ever finds of fossilized dinosaur eggs in 1923. Roy Chapman Andrews (role model for Indiana Jones) was leading the Central Asiatic Expedition on behalf of the Natural History Museum of New York and this was just one of his many remarkable discoveries. The area also supports a rich grove of Saksaul shrubs, where the localized Saksaul Sparrow may be seen.

NIGHT: Three Camels Lodge

June 7, Day 10: Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. After breakfast we'll head to Yolin Am, the Valley of the Lammergeier, in the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park. The lofty ridges of the valley are indeed patrolled

by Lammergeiers as well as Himalayan Griffon, Black Vulture and Golden Eagle. We'll also search this rocky habitat for Wallcreeper; Crag Martin; Water Pipit; the endemic Kozlov's Accentor as well as the much commoner Brown and Alpine accentors; Black Redstart; White-winged Snowfinch; Great, Common and Beautiful rosefinches; and Godlewski's Bunting. We'll scan the higher slopes for Altai Snowcock and in doing so, we may also see Ibex or Argali, the largest wild sheep in the world. There may be other eyes gazing on these creatures as well, for here we are in the territory of the snow leopard. Although visitors have seen them in the past, the chances of doing so are obviously very remote.

During the afternoon we will visit Khongoryn Els, also in the Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park and home to some of the world's largest sand dunes. The Gobi is a desert because the climate is so dry, rather than because of the temperature. In winter, temperatures are below freezing for months on end, but at the time of our visit, conditions will be very pleasant and the melt-water seeping down from the nearby Gobi Altai allows many wildflowers to thrive. Further from the mountains, the conditions are more arid and sand dunes and stony or silty desert with low bushes take over from the dry steppe. Of particular interest here are the Saxaul woodlands, which have evolved to cope with the waterless conditions of the Gobi. This specialized habitat is home to a limited range of birds including McQueen's Bustard, another chance for Pallas's Sandgrouse, Desert Wheatear, Desert Lesser Whitethroat, Desert Warbler, Isabelline Shrike, the very localized Saxaul Sparrow which is confined exclusively to Saxaul woodland, and Henderson's Ground-Jay. We should also be alert to the presence of such delightful mammals as goitered and Mongolian gazelles, both of which have adapted well to this harsh environment. An evocative feature of this area are the Mongol horsemen who ride across the steppe, attending the vast herds of horses, cattle, sheep and especially domesticated Bactrian camels. As is the case every day of our trip, the photographic opportunities will be endless. In some years there is a small stream on the edge of the dunes, which acts as a great migrant trap as well as a drinking site for many Pallas's Sandgrouse. We may wish to climb the dunes to watch the setting sun, an unforgettable experience.

NIGHT: Juulchin Gobi One Ger Camp

June 8, Day 11: Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park. Before breakfast, there will be an option to climb to the high ridges in search of Altai Snowcock, although scanning from our campsite could easily provide distant views. We'll spend the rest of the morning at Yolín Am, where Barred and Sulphur-bellied warblers may be the center of our attention, or maybe a small group of Twite drinking from the stream.

We'll spend the rest of the day on the edge of the dunes and possibly re-visiting Yolín Am, and we can expect to see a nice range of birds and other wildlife. For example, this day will provide our best opportunity to catch up with Oriental Plover. Such a dramatic species in a bleak, almost lifeless desert is sure to be one of the highlights of the trip. Our camp is surrounded by poplar trees planted several decades ago that not only provide shelter for the camp but also act as an oasis for passing migrants. Here we may see Golden Oriole, Long-eared Owl, the *leucopsis* race of White Wagtail, Red-throated Thrush, Siberian Rubythroat, Taiga Flycatcher, Brown Shrike, Chaffinch and Pallas's Grasshopper, and Two-barred Greenish, Dusky and Thick-billed warblers. Some new species for Mongolia, such as Forest Wagtail, Black Drongo and Red Collared-Dove have also been found here.

NIGHT: Juulchin Gobi One Ger Camp

June 9, Day 12: Fly to Ulaanbaatar. After a last look for migrants around our camp, we'll transfer to Dalanzadgad for our return flight to Ulaanbaatar. We will overnight in the capital, thus giving us a chance for the luxury of a regular bed and shower.

NIGHT: Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

June 10, Day 13: Drive to Gun Galuut. This morning we will make the two-to-three hour drive to the Gun Galuut Natur reserve located on the Herlen River. This small reserve supports a population of breeding White-naped Crane and we should have great views of this magnificent species. In recent years this site has occasionally hosted summering Siberian Crane, which would be just wonderful to see. The wet marshland holds

Citrine Wagtails and Marsh Sandpipers and sometimes Asian Dowitcher. Swan Geese graze in the nearby meadows and Mongolian Larks sing all around.

NIGHT: Seppe Nomads Ger Camp

June 11, Day 14: Drive to Jalman Meadows. We'll spend the morning around Gun Galuut, where two larger lakes often hold good numbers of wildfowl. This seems a popular site for the distinctive *stejnegeri* race of White-winged Scoter, and scanning through the ducks could produce Smew, Garganey or, if we are really lucky, a spectacular Falcated Duck. Waders can also be abundant with Marsh Sandpipers particularly common. Later in the day we'll move the short distance to a private ger camp run by our ground agents. Right outside our gers, we could see both Mongolian and Horned larks, and the nearby ridges often hold both Steppe and Golden eagles. Careful checking of all these raptors might produce an Oriental Honey-buzzard or perhaps a White-tailed Eagle.

NIGHT: Jalan Meadows Ger Camp

June 12, Day 15: Jalman Meadows. We'll spend all day exploring Jalman Meadows, where the riverside vegetation could produce such splendid birds as Black and Gray-headed Woodpeckers, Siberian Rubythroat, Azure Tit and Brown Shrike. The valley regularly holds raptors and at times it may be difficult to know whether to enjoy a singing Red-throated Thrush, count the Black Vultures or study the subtleties of a Two-barred Greenish Warbler identification.

NIGHT: Jalman Meadows Ger Camp

June 13, Day 16: Drive to Terlj. After some final birding we will drive to Terlj and if time allows, we'll explore the area around our tourist camp, where once again we'll sleep in traditional felt-lined gers. The patches of coniferous forest nearby are home to Olive-backed Pipit, Pallas's Warbler and Pine Bunting, and we could see Black Woodpecker and Common Rosefinch as well.

NIGHT: Terelj Lodge Ger Camp

June 14, Day 17: Terlj. The country around Terlj consists of rocky hills alternately covered in grassland and coniferous forest, with beautiful broadleaf woodland along the flat river valleys. This upland area, not that far south of the Russian border, is extremely cold in winter, but there is a rapid transformation in late spring when warm weather turns the forests in a matter of a week or so from winter gray to summer green. Birding is exciting and many species we encounter here will not have been seen earlier on our travels. As we explore the area, we shall be looking out for such species as Goosander (or Common Merganser); Crested Honey-buzzard; Eurasian Sparrowhawk; Common Buzzard; Booted Eagle; Eurasian Hobby; Hazel Grouse (fairly secretive at this season); Swinhoe's Snipe (which has an amazing dive-bombing display flight at dusk); Eurasian Woodcock; Common Sandpiper; Oriental Turtle-Dove; Oriental Cuckoo; Eurasian Wryneck; Gray-headed, Black, White-backed, Great Spotted and Lesser Spotted woodpeckers; Red-rumped Swallow; Olive-backed Pipit; Gray Wagtail; the extraordinary Siberian Rubythroat; the retiring Siberian Blue Robin; Red-flanked Bluetail; Common and Daurian redstarts; Eyebrowed and Red-throated thrushes; the secretive Chinese Bush-Warbler; Lanceolated, Thick-billed, Greenish, Dusky, Arctic, Yellow-browed and Pallas's leaf-warblers; Asian Brown and Dark-sided flycatchers; Red-throated (or Taiga) Flycatcher (split from Red-breasted); Long-tailed Tit (of the beautiful white-headed form); Willow, Marsh and Coal tits; Eurasian Nuthatch; Eurasian Jay; Long-tailed Rosefinch; and Pine Bunting. With luck, we will find the impressive Ural Owl and perhaps Radde's Warbler. Mammals are not conspicuous here, but we are bound to encounter the adorable Siberian chipmunk. For those willing to make a fairly strenuous hike up into the open larch and fir forest on the surrounding mountains, there is a good chance of seeing the elusive Black-billed Capercaillie, as well as Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, Siberian Jay and Spotted Nutcracker.

NIGHT: Terlj Lodge Ger Camp

June 15, Day 18: Drive to Ulaanbaatar. In the afternoon, we'll return to Ulaanbaatar.

NIGHT: Corporate Hotel, Ulaanbaatar

June 16, Day 19: Fly to USA. Our tour concludes today with our flight back to the USA.

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Bishop and a local leader

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 33 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, and most recently Central Asia. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England) in the attractive university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$5,295** per person in double occupancy from Ulaanbaatar. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to breakfast on Day 19, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, domestic flights (Ulaanbaatar/Bayanhongor-Ulaanbaatar/Eznis),* gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Ulaanbaatar and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$495**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

***Please Note that domestic airfare from Ulaanbaatar/Bayanhongor-Ulaanbaatar/Eznis is included in the tour fees above. VENT will have a group block of seats on these flight segments and will automatically assign you to these flights as you register for the trip. At the time of printing, the approximate total cost of these air segments is \$250, but is subject to change without notice until the time of ticketing. Should rates increase, passengers may be invoiced for the fare difference.**

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see below).

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making air arrangements. Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility. First and business class travel may be available on some flights. **All requests for travel assistance (air tickets, additional hotels, etc.) must be received no later than 90 days prior to departure date. Within 90 days, arrangements must be made on your own.**

BAGGAGE: Clients are encouraged to take whatever they think they will reasonably need for this tour, including telescope and tripod (especially useful), camera and video equipment. With regard to clothing, participants should bring sufficient items with them so that from Day 4 when we depart Ulaanbaatar, they only need to have minimal laundry done. Getting laundry dry in camp can sometimes be difficult. While participants are permitted two large pieces of baggage into and out of the USA, Mongolian airlines limits are variable and will have to be negotiated on the spot. We strongly recommend that you carry your check-in baggage in two soft bags so that when camping, one bag can be kept on the luggage truck with all the things you do not immediately need. This will permit more room in your Ger or tent and more personal comfort. Ideally everything should be packed in plastic bags to protect items from sand and rain.

ALTITUDE: Mongolia has an average elevation of 1,580m (5,200 feet) with its highest mountains rising to over 4,300m (14,000 feet). We will likely not be ascending much over 2,300m (7,500 feet) and with the exception of two optional hikes in the Gobi Altai to look for Snowcock and in the Terlj area to look for Capercallie, most if not all the walking will be on fairly flat albeit sometimes sandy, dusty or rough, stony terrain. We will rarely be walking along a road as there are very few paved roads in Mongolia. However, we will walk at a slow pace, so this should not be a matter of concern for anyone in moderate to reasonable condition. Those with heart or respiratory concerns should contact their doctor prior to departure.

ACCOMMODATION: Mongolia is not a regular tourist destination. Consequently, the infrastructure for visitors is minimal, especially once we depart the capital Ulaanbaatar. In Ulaanbaatar, however, we will stay in an attractive, modern hotel. Needless to say, the very best birding sites are a long way from the nearest “hotel.” Our ground agents will therefore set up very comfortable camps and we will stay at the attractive Three Camels Lodge instead of camping midway through our journey. **VENT has opted for the more comfortable walk-in tents with cots etc. However, in the event of strong winds, we will have to revert to crawl-in tents.** All of these are delightful sites, located amidst lake, steppe, desert, forest and mountain scenery. We will also stay in Ger Camps. Gers are the traditional large round felt tents of the region, and the camps are almost like tented motels. Gers are spacious and cozy, often heated by wood or dung fires. Washing and toilet facilities at these camps are basic and consist of a separate toilet (happily though, they are generally clean and western style facilities) and a building with hot showers (this can be idiosyncratic). Each camp also has its own restaurant where soft drinks and beer are usually available. Please note that you will need to bring a sleeping bag which can keep you warm should night-time temperatures drop below freezing. Water is available for washing, but you should bring swimming trunks or a bathing suit to wear when showering. When camping in the remote regions, our crew will erect a “toilet tent,” which consists of a hole in the ground and “flushing” with a spade and earth.

CLIMATE: Mongolia exhibits a continental weather system that typically can be very mixed at this time of year, so you need to dress accordingly. Generally it will be warm and very dry (almost no humidity) during the day; occasionally we will encounter hot conditions with very bright sunshine, which characteristically in the mountains and at these generally higher elevations results in increased radiation and thus the skin burns more readily than one supposes. It can be cold at night and in the early mornings and at a few of the higher altitude sites. Rain is also possible at almost any time and we may encounter some snow. At night temperatures can drop below freezing. Temperatures may range from 25° to 100°F.

PACE OF TOUR: In order to reach the various habitats and birds of this vast country, there will be a fair amount of driving. After driving on poorly paved roads around the capital, we are unlikely to travel on anything other than dirt roads and sometimes bumpy and dusty desert tracks until the final few days of the tour. At other times we’ll cross dried up (in some cases not so dry) riverbeds, where many large boulders make the journey

uncomfortable. We'll be using vehicles admirably suited to the purpose and making frequent stops, but some discomfort is inevitable. Because of this, breakdowns, flat tires and getting stuck in sand happen frequently. Although this can appear frustrating at first, almost everybody in Mongolia (including our ground crew) are experts in these situations, and with so many birds to see, a half hour delay is often a good chance for more birding. There will be some strenuous walking, especially when searching for Black-billed Capercaillie and Altai Snowcock. Elsewhere, we'll be wandering around fairly flat open landscapes at altitudes often around 6,500 feet, making plenty of stops for birds. On most days our ground crew will first help the cook set up, then erect common shelters before erecting the group's tents while we go birding nearby; however, in some situations (strong wind or rain), it may be necessary for us to help them. On those days when we are camping, the daily routine to some extent will revolve around the need to set and break camp. Most days will consist of an optional walk before breakfast; early mornings are not compulsory.

CLOTHING: Casual is the order of the day; however, short pants, short skirts, and halter-tops are not appropriate in this rather conservative region. Participants may want to pack one set of slightly smarter clothes to wear at our hotel in Ulaanbaatar. Hard wearing, easy-to-wash-and-dry field clothes are ideal. Sturdy hiking boots with a solid lug sole are essential; sneakers or sports-type shoes are not appropriate, as the ground will be rough, sandy and occasionally wet and possibly slippery a lot of the time in Mongolia. Some flip flops or shower shoes are recommended. Participants should bring layers rather than one or two large items. Sturdy, rainproof jackets and pants are strongly recommended (shower proof plastic jackets are not sufficient), in addition to at least one warm sweater, and a down jacket or down vest. Other items that are recommended include a warm head-covering such as a beret or balaclava, in addition to a regular birding hat, gloves and scarf. Silk or synthetic thermal long underwear will be very handy for the cool nights and early mornings. Sunglasses are very essential (bring a spare pair). Thick socks that absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet from hard surfaces are important. It is also useful if the socks are long enough so that the bottom of one's pants can be tucked inside.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please absolutely no bright colors. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very special, elusive species. Muted colors are essential to enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia. Furthermore, if you can avoid crackling nylon/plastic jackets and pants, this will greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the trip and enable the leader to hear those critical, but so easily overlooked, subtle call notes of the birds you want to see.

CURRENCY: Credit cards are increasingly accepted at hotels and shops; however, you will most certainly need cash once we are "on the road." Participants are advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express U.S. dollar travelers checks and/or U.S. dollars in cash. The latter can be very useful in an emergency.

The Mongolian currency is the *Togrog*.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure date is required for United States citizens to enter Mongolia. No visa is required for US citizens visiting for fewer than 90 days. For other nationalities, a 30 day visa can be obtained from your nearest embassy.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good repair (please check before departure!). Your tour leader will be carrying a Leica spotting scope; however, you are **strongly recommended to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish, as this will greatly enhance your enjoyment of this tour**, especially if you are used to carrying and regularly using your own scope.

You should bring all the camera equipment, spare flash-cards, batteries, and film that you will need. Flash-cards and film will be almost impossible to obtain once we depart Ulaanbaatar. **Nearly everyone brings too few batteries and too little film or flash-card space, and this can cause some distress. PLEASE bring loads (we cannot emphasize this enough!!!!).** UV and polarizing filters are recommended, especially at higher elevations where glare can be a problem. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust. A really good

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flashlight or headlamp is essential, so please ensure that yours is in good working order and that you have spare bulbs and batteries. A spare flashlight or headlamp is ideal. Couples should bring one flashlight or headlamp each.

A small daypack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas where we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver and his mate. **Water bottles are important** if you like to carry a regular supply of water.

Other useful items include:

1. **Flashlights or headlamps** (as previously indicated): We will be out at night on a few occasions; a small flashlight or headlamp is essential to find your way in your tent and around camp at night, especially at checklist sessions.
2. **Handy-wipes:** These are very important, and paper tissues are also especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient amounts for their personal needs for the entire tour. Although basic shower facilities will be available in camp, some participants found the use of Handy-wipes was sufficient for at least one (several?) night.
3. **Spare glasses or contact lenses.**
4. **One bath towel and face cloth:** Our ground agents will provide a brand new towel for all participants. However, a second one of your own, plus your own face cloth, is handy.
5. **Sunscreen:** Strongly recommended, especially for higher elevations where the UV is much greater; **lip balm** is also essential.
6. **Umbrella:** The collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

MISCELLANEOUS:

Electricity – Mongolia uses 220 volts, 50 cycles, AC. The sockets are designed to accommodate two round prongs in the Russian/European style. A flashlight or headlamp with a good supply of batteries will be essential. Do not rely on an electric razor, or having electricity available for charging your video batteries.

Language – Mongolian is a member of the Ural-Altaic family of languages, which includes Finnish, Hungarian, Turkish, Kazakh, Usbek and Korean. The traditional Mongolian script looks like Arabic turned 45 degrees. In more recent times the Russian Cyrillic alphabet was adopted with two additional characters. Mongolian also has a Romanised form, although the 35 Cyrillic characters give a better representation of Mongolian sounds.

Time – When it is noon in the capital Ulaanbaatar, it is 8:00 p.m. the previous day in Los Angeles and 11:00 p.m. the previous day in New York and 4:00 a.m. in London and 2:00 p.m. in Sydney. Ulaanbaatar is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Snacks - It is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks, as western-style snacks will not be readily available and Mongolian food may not include the roughage and variety we have grown accustomed to in our Western diets.

Bug juice – Everyone will need **plenty of insect repellent** to deal with the mosquitoes and biting flies we will occasionally encounter at the time of our visit.

HEALTH: Participants are advised **NOT** to drink the tap water or unboiled water placed at the table unless advised by your tour leader. Bottled drinks (including uncarbonated bottled mineral water) will be available at all times. Participants should not eat uncooked foods such as meat or vegetables, or food that has cooled and/or been sitting in the open, permitting flies to settle. Unpeeled fruit is fine, provided you wash the exterior first in clean water.

Biting insects can be very common locally, especially around the lakes. Insect repellent (preferably with a high percentage of diethyltoluamide – DEET) should provide adequate protection. We also recommend *CUTTER'S LOTION* in the squeeze bottle or pump-style *OFF*.

We will experience strong sun in several places so a good sun-screen and lip balm is recommended.

No vaccinations are required; however, cholera, typhoid and tetanus should be current and Hepatitis A and B, Rabies and Polio are recommended. **Malaria is NOT present.** Please consult your physician or local travel clinic for recommendations. In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line (877) FYI-TRIP. You can check the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

PLEASE NOTE: While away from Ulaanbaatar, participants will be at least two days from western medical facilities in case of emergency. Please be aware of this before joining the tour. Furthermore, western doctors are few and far between, even in Ulaanbaatar.

All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour including all necessary prescription drugs, as well as aspirin, antacids, and a supply of antihistamines should you develop a cold.

Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books. We also recommend Andrew Isles bookstore for the Asia-Pacific region at www.andrewisles.com. Andrew can also often obtain difficult to find and out of print books.

WILDLIFE

Benton, M. J. *et al* (editors). *The Age of Dinosaurs in Russia and Mongolia*. 2003. Cambridge University Press.

Braunlich, A. *Birds of Mongolia*. **Due out 2008.** Christopher Helm
This will be THE bird field guide to have along on tour.

Finch, C. *Mongolia's Wild Heritage*. 1999. Mongolian Ministry of Nature & Environment.

Mallon, D. P. *The mammals of the Mongolian People's Republic*. *Mammal Rev.* 15(2):71-102.

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Smith, A. T. and Xie, Y. (Eds) *A guide to the Mammals of China*. 2008. Princeton. This is the only guide to all the mammals of China and includes many species we are likely to encounter in Mongolia.

PLANTS

Hilbig, W. *The Vegetation of Mongolia*. Amsterdam, SPB Academic Publishing.

Polunin, O. and Stainton, A. *Flowers of the Himalaya*. 1984. Dehli: Oxford University Press. A very helpful guide; while not quite encompassing Mongolia, it will help somewhat with the flowering plants we encounter.

GENERAL

Becker, J. *The Lost Country: Mongolia Revealed*. 1993. Insightful and well written.

Blunden, J. *Bradt Travel Guide: Mongolia*. 2003. Bradt Travel Guides.

Bowde, C. *The Jebtsundampa Khutukhtus of Urga*. A renowned Buddhist history of the greatest Mongolian lamas.

Kahn, P. *The Secret History of the Mongols: the Origins of Genghis Khan*. Regarded as the best study of *The Secret History*.

Kohn, M. 2008. *Mongolia*. Lonely Planet Guides. Footscray, Victoria, Australia.

Severin, T. *In Search of Genghis Khan*. 1991. Great photos; an excellent review of nomadic lifestyles.

The Secret History of the Mongols, Mongolia's most famous book, has no known author. This epic history records the life and deeds of Genghis Khan.

MAPS: Maps produced outside Mongolia are according to the Lonely Planet Guide “routinely inaccurate and best avoided.” Good maps and a road atlas are available in Ulaanbaatar and we will make a point of setting time aside to visit the map shop on our first full day in country.

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history. 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K. Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280.

SHOPPING: Most of Mongolia's economy is based on natural products: hand-woven carpets, leather clothing and articles, woolen clothing, furs, cashmere, camel hair products, Mongolian oil and water paintings, wooden toys, puzzles and games. There are a number of souvenir shops around the capital where the most popular items can be purchased.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 4, 2007, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.