NOTES ON THE WADERS OF MONGOLIA

By Alan Kitson

Introduction

Despite its size, 1,565,000 km² (i.e. six times the area of the United Kingdom), in terms of ornithology Mongolia is poorly known. In 1977 I spent the six months from February to July studying birds in Mongolia, on a scholarship offered by the British Council under the Cultural Exchange Programme which exists between the UK and Mongolia. The Mongols evidently considered ornithology a somewhat unorthodox topic, but I was finally accepted.

Details of my itinerary and descriptions of the wetlands visited are given by Kitson (1978) who also summarizes the relatively little earlier ornithological work in the country. Mongolia is a high plateau (average 1580m above sea level), a land of mountains and steppes (Figure 1). Its climate is extreme continental. Several periods were spent at the capital Ulan Bator (9 February to 21 April; 10 May to 16 June; 4 to 17, 24, 25 July). Wetland birds were seen here on melt-water sloughs on Nisek and Amgalong Plains near the city and on the river Toal. The river was frozen until 26 March and some waterways until 16 April. Records for the Ulan Bator area are noted by an A. I was able to visit two other areas: (B) from 21 April to 10 May, Orok Nor, a lake of 80 km², and several nearby smaller lakes in the arid steppe zone; and (C) from 16 June to 3 July, the Hangai mountains, particularly the lakes in this area.

Systematic list

Little Ringed Plover Charadrius dubius. A common and widespread breeding visitor. A. In mid-May up to 20 Amgalong Plain, 20 Nisek Plain and 20 Toal at UB; in July 6, 2 and 4 respectively, almost certainly breeding. B. First were 2 Orok Nor April 25th; 7 there May 5th; 40 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 7th. C. Bayan Nor 1; Ogii Nor 2; Terhing Tsagan Nor 2; Dzoorn Nor 3 pairs; Sangin Dalai Nor 6; Taagan Cling Nor 1; Hont Nor 2; Jogmain Nor 4 pairs; Boost Nor 1 pair; Telming Nor 10 and 5 pairs; Halbob Nor 2 pairs; Ogii Nor 4; Cholot river 3 pairs.

Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus. Only on lakes having shallow, muddy shores. B. First were 4 Booreng April 22nd; 10 there May 9th; at Orok Nor max 60 April 27th; Adging Tsagan Nor 6 April 29th; Dzeun Nor 150 May 3rd. C. Telming Nor 14; Ogii Nor 20; Shorbok Nor 10 July 1st distraction-displaying.

Greater Sandplover Charadrius leschenaultii. Either on muddy shores, or, more commonly, on stone plains. B. Up to 8 Orok Nor April 25th–May 5th; Dzes Nor 2 May 3rd; Taatsing Tsagan Nor 5 May 7th; 4 near Toogruk May 8th. C. 1-2 Ogii Nor June 27th.

Oriental Plover Charadrius veredus. All males, probably all non-breeder or passage migrants, since it breeds in the alpine zone (Vaurie 1964). B. On stone plains between Booreng and Toogruk 3 singles April 23rd and 7 May 5th; 1 near Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 8th. C. 2 Ogii Nor June 26th.

Asian Golden Plover Pluvialis dominica. A. 1 Amgalong Plain May 23rd. B. Dzeun Nor 1 June 21st; Hont Nor 11 June 22nd; Ogii Nor 5 July 18th.

Grey Plover Pluvialis squatarola. C. 1 Telming Nor June 25th and 1 Ogii Nor on June 26th.

Lapwing Vanellus vanellus. A. Migrant in small numbers; most notable parties are given. First were 12 at Songin April 2nd with 26 at UB next day; 11 Nisek Plain June 2nd. B. At Orok Nor up to 18 and 4 Taatsing Tsagan Nor. C. Suspected breeding pairs are indicated Bayan Nor 1; Ogii Nor 30 June 17th, 600 in flock and 3 pairs July 2nd; Chinging Nor 150 and 2 pairs July 3rd; Terhing Tsagan Nor 60 and 2 pairs; Dzoorn Nor 1; Sangin Dalai Nor 23; Hont Nor 20; Jogmain Nor 4; Boost Nor 30 and 6 pairs; Telming Nor 70; Halbob Nor 2 pairs; Ogii Nor 16; Booleening Nor 1 pair; Shorbok Nor 3 pairs.

Turnstone Arenaria interpres. B. 1 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 6th. C. 6 Telming Nor June 25th.

Long-toed Stint Calidris subminuta. A. 1-2 Amgalong Plain May 16th-23rd. B. 2 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 7th. C. 4 Chinging Nor July 3rd.

Temminck's Stint Calidris temminckii. A. c 15 at marsh 50km SW of UB May 10th; 1 UB May 12th; 4-5 Amgalong Plain May 17th-23rd; 1 UB July 15th, presumably an early return bird. B. At Orok Nor 1 only, May 5th; 6 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 6th and 5 on May 7th.

Ruff Philomachus pugnax. B. 1 Orok Nor April 25th, 26th was, inexplicably, the only record.

Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus. C. At Ogii Nor 2 June 17th, 1 18th but none July 2nd; flock of 12 Hont Nor June 22nd. While both these sites offer apparently suitable habitats for breeding, it seems that my records probably refer to passage birds.

Spotted Redshank Tringa erythropus. B. 1 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 7th. C. Ogii Nor 1 June 18th, 25 July 2nd; Ogii Nor 1 June 27th; Terhing Tsagan Nor 28 June 29th; Cholot river 2 on 30th; Booleening Nor 1 July 1st, when also 52 Shorbok Nor; 30 Cinging Nor July 3rd. These records imply that this species (a) has an early return migration, and (b) it is not the vagrant to Mongolia that it has hitherto been labelled.

Redshank Tringa totanus. A. Passage migrant; singles May 12th, 17th, 28th. B. Seen Orok Nor April 25th – May 5th with max 6 on latter date; 8 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 7th; 39 Booreng May 9th. C. Breeding unproven but strongly suspected and indicated as pairs here. Terhing Tsagan Nor 17; Dzoorn Nor 4; Sangin Dalai Nor 13; Hont Nor 4; Jogmain Nor 1; Boost Nor 3 pairs; Telming Nor 3; Halbob Nor 1; Ogii Nor 10; Cholot river 1 pair; Booleening Nor 1 pair; Shorbok Nor 4; Ogii Nor 18 and 6 pairs July 2nd; Chinging Nor 8 and 1 pair July 3rd.
Marsh Sandpiper Tringa stagnatilis. A. On May 10th 150km SW of UB; 1 on Amgalong Plain May 16th, 17th. B. First May 8th, 2 Gochin Os at water-hole, and 1 Booreng following day. C. Pair/pairs indicate suspected breeding. Ching Nor 4 pairs July 3rd; Ogi Nor 6 pairs July 2nd; Terhing Tsagan Nor 5, 1 pair; Sangin Dalai Nor 1; Hort Nor 15, 1 pair June 22nd; Boost Nor 1; Telming Nor 3; Oigon Nor 5.

Greenshank Tringa nebularia. A. Recorded May 13th – 17th, max 6 on 16th Nisek Plain. B. 2 Orok Nor May 5th; 5 Taatsing Tsagan Nor 7th; 9 Booreng 9th. C. Oigon Nor 1 June 26th; Terhing Tsagan Nor 3 on 29th; Ogi Nor 1 July 2nd; 1 Chinging Nor 3rd.

Green Sandpiper Tringa ochropus. A. On the Plains mid and late May, peak 20 Amgalong Plain 16th; 4 there July 9th and 3 UB 15th; B. First seen April 26th Ork Nor, where daily max 13 May 5th; on 9th 8 Booreng; C. On June 19th 1 pair along rocky stream-with-bushes near Terhing Tsagan Nor may have been breeding; Telming Nor 5; Cholot river 13 June 30th; Shorbok Nor 2; Ogi Nor 6 July 2nd; Chinging Nor 5 on 3rd.

Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola. A. Up to 16 Amgalong Plain mid May, and 3 Nisek Plain 15th; at marsh 30km SW of UB May 20th; singles UB July 9th, 25th. B. First was 11 days after Green Sandpiper, on May 7th Taatsing Tsagan Nor; 1 Gochin Os 8th; 2 Booreng 9th. C. None in Hangai proper. Shorbok Nor 5 July 1st; Ogi Nor 15 2nd; Chinging Nor 200 on 3rd.

Common Sandpiper Tringa hypoleucus. A. Suspected of breeding on Toal. Seen more or less daily May 12th onwards; max 100 Amgalong Plain May 16th; held up by a cold spell; in July small numbers along Toal. B. At Ork Nor on only two dates, April 25th (the first) 1, May 5th 2; 6 Taatsings Tsagan Nor May 7th. C. Despite numerous fast-flowing rivers only recorded once, on river between Hort and Jogmain Nor, a pair June 22nd.

Terek Sandpiper Xenus cinereus. A. Nisek Plain July 1st. B. 2 (pair?) on mud-flats, Oigon Nor June 26th.

Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa. B. 16 Ork Nor May 1st, 1 5th; 2 Days Nor 3rd; 1 Taatsing Tsagan Nor 7th. C. At Ogi Nor 7 June 18th, 12 July 2nd, including 2 probable nesting pairs; Hort Nor 1 June 22nd; Chinging Nor flock of 12 July 3rd.

Curlew Numenius arquata. B. 10 Taatsing Tsagan Nor April 24th, 2 May 6th; max 16 Ork Nor April 25th. C. No sign of breeding except 1 singing Terhing Tsagan Nor June 19th; Sangin Dalai Nor 8; Hort Nor 1; Boost Nor 3; Telming Nor 3; Ogi Nor 135 June 26th; Shorbok Nor 14; Ogi Nor 4 July 2nd.

Snipe Gallinago gallinago. A. Migrant. Seen May 12th-22nd, max 7 Amgalong Plain 16th; 1 Nisek Plain June 2nd. B. 2-3 Taatsing Tsagan Nor April 24th, May 6th; 3 Ork Nor April 27th, 5 May 5th.

Pintail Snipe/Swinhoe's Snipe Gallinago stenura/G. megalae. Although I called all the snipes given here as Pintail, since so far as I know the field identification of Pintail from Swinhoe's is impossible, and since both occur in Mongolia, it is prudent not to exclude possibility of latter. A. On Amgalong Plain May 7 on 16th; 6 17th, 23rd and 1 on 28th.

Solitary Snipe Gallinago solitaria. A. 1 in wet brush Nisek Plain May 20th. B. At Ork Nor 2 in marsh April 27th and 1 there 28th.

Avocet Recurvirostra avosetta. B. More or less daily at Ork Nor, max 11 May 5th; first were 8 Taatsing Tsagan Nor April 24th; 6 Days Nor May 3rd. C. The only wader proved to breed. Bayan Nor pair June 17th; at Telming Nor 35 and a loose colony of 6 nests found at west end, of which 5 examined had clutches 1,1,4,4,7; Oigon Nor 6; at Shorbok Nor on July 1st 45 adults and 6 chicks.

Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus. Not mentioned in Vaurie (1964). B. 9 Ork Nor April 25th, 26th on north shore; 2 27th, 28th west end; 1 Dav Nr May 3rd; 2 Taatsing Tsagan Nor May 7th. C. 2, presumably a pair, Chinging Nor July 3rd.

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References