

Summer birds in Arkhangai province, Mongolia, July-August 2002.

Anthony S. Cheke

139 Hurst Street, Oxford OX4 1HE, UK; anthony@innerbookshop.com

Abstract

A list of breeding birds for Tsetserleg and its surroundings is given for the first time, and additions are noted for the Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur National Park. The presence of Eurasian Griffons and Lammergeiers in the Khangai mountains is confirmed, and Black-headed Gulls suspected of breeding near Tsagaan Nuur, a new locality. An apparent marked increase in breeding/summering numbers of Tufted Duck and Velvet Scoter and a possible range expansion of Daurian Redstarts was noted. Mass mortality was observed in House Sparrows from eating moths.

Key words: breeding checklist, Gypsy Moth, sparrow, Tsetserleg, Khorgo, Terkhiin-Tsagaan-Nuur

Introduction

Mainly through the effort of East German expeditions in the 1970s and 1980s, and the activity of Mongolian ornithologists in the last decade, the overall composition of the Mongolian avifauna is well-known - but not many sites are well documented. The country is large (1,566,500km²) and sparsely populated (2.65m; 1.69/km²), but has large numbers of domestic animals (c70m, exceeding the carrying capacity, Avaadorj & Badrakh 2001); the principal way of life outside the capital is nomadic herding. Ulaanbaatar (hereafter 'UB') is the only major urban area, with nearly a third of the country's human population (773,700) (Mayhew 2001, www.geohive.com). Little has been written about the Mongolian avifauna in English, though Bräunlich (2002) recently published a useful general birdwatchers' overview. The following notes may serve as a more specific introduction to one province.

In 2002 I spent nearly three weeks (20 July - 8 August) based at Tsetserleg (pop. c20,000), principal town of Arkhangai *aimag* (province); the town is also known locally by the province name and Erdene Bulgan. The visit also included the hot springs Tsenkeriin Khaluun Us (= Bor Talyн Arshaan) about 33 km SSE of Tsetserleg), driving via Ikh Tamir (=Zhankushuu) and the Chuluut river gorge to the Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur national park (c120km NW, staying 30/7-2/8); Khorgo is also known as Tariat. These localities are all within the Khangai range of hills and mountains. I travelled the roughly 400km to and from UB by jeep, via Khotont, Kharkhorin

(=Karakorum), Sansar (=Rashaant), Erdenesant and Lün; the more direct northern route via Ogii Nuur, an interesting lake, is no longer in regular use. Names are spelt here in the current transliteration system recognised for Mongolian Cyrillic script (Mayhew 2001); the German literature uses different spellings - e.g. Zezerleg/Cecerleg for Tsetserleg.

Tsetserleg was visited by German expeditions only en route to other places, and their visits to the lake Terkhiin Tsagaan Nuur (Mey 1994, Stephan 1988) were brief and confined to the eastern end and the adjacent wooded volcano, though Kitson (1978) reached the western end. *Nuur* is Mongolian for lake, *gol* for river. There are many lakes in Mongolia called *tsagaan nuur* ('white lake'), but for the rest of this paper 'Tsagaan Nuur' refers to the one in the Khorgo national park

Habitats

Although best known for its endless steppes, Mongolia still has a substantial amount of forest. Tsetserleg nestles at around 1700m under granite mountains wooded with birch *Betula* spp. and larch *Larix sibirica*, on the edge of the wide floodplain of the Urd Tamir Gol, otherwise lined with hills of bare overgrazed steppe. There is a strip of poplar *Populus diversifolia* woodland along the line of the river itself, very open in places through heavy grazing pressure. South into the Khangai mountains, the hot springs are in the upper valley of the Tsenkher Gol, the north-facing slope of which is covered in dense mature larch forest, with steppe on the south-facing slopes. In general, Mongolian larch forests are heavily grazed, selectively cut over