

BIRDS OF IKH NART NATURE RESERVE

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хураангуй. Бид Дорноговь аймгийн Их нартын байгалийн нөөц газарт гадаад болон дотоодын судлаачид, шувуу ажиглагч нарын ажиглаж тэмдэглэсэн шувуудын жагсаалтыг энэхүү өгүүлэлд нэгтгэлээ. Их нартын БНГ-т тохиолдлын болон харьцангуй элбэг тааралдах 204 зүйлийн шувууд бүртгэгджээ. Их нартын БНГ-т байнгын устай хоёр булаг, хэд хэдэн борооны усаар тэжээгддэг усан сан байх ба энэ нь говиор өнгөрч буй нүүдлийн шувуудын бууж амрах чухал байршил болдог. Энэхүү нөөц газар нь олон улсад устаж болзошгүй Идлэг шонхор (*Falco cherrug*), Хээрийн бүргэд (*Aquila nipalensis*) болон ховордож болзошгүй Нөмрөг тас (*Aegypius monachus*) зэрэг махчин шувуудын үржлийн чухал газар юм. Энэхүү жагсаалт нь цаашдын судалгааны үндэс суурь байх нь зайлшгүй юм.

түлхүүр үг. зүйлийн бүрдэл, жагсаалт, Дорноговь

abstract. We provide a checklist of birds recorded by Mongolian and international researchers as well as bird watchers in Ikh Nart Nature Reserve, northwestern Dornogobi Province, Mongolia. We recorded 204 bird species along with some data on the habitat in which they were sighted and their relative abundance. Ikh Nart contains two perennial springs and several ephemeral ponds that they provide important stopover sites in the Gobi for migratory birds. The reserve regularly supports several globally threatened breeding species, such as Endangered Saker Falcons (*Falco cherrug*), Endangered Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) and Near Threatened Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*). This checklist provides a baseline for future bird surveys in the region.

Key words: species composition, checklist, Dornogobi

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Introduction

Mongolia is a vast country with diverse ecosystems and landscapes, harboring a rich assemblage of birds (Finch 1996). In Dornogobi Province, which extends across three major vegetation zones (Mallon 1985), few details on the distribution of birds exist, yet it requires such data to better manage and conserve the avifaunal community (Murdoch *et al.*, 2006). There is a need for a better understanding of species composition, distributions, habitat preferences, feeding ecology and nesting ecology to improve the prospects for successful bird conservation. The dearth of distribution data stems largely from a lack of systematic surveys, limited access to and publication of results from surveys that do occur,

and the difficulties associated with detecting some species (Murdoch *et al.* 2006). A joint Mongolian and American research team has been conducting ecological studies of raptors in the reserve since 2003, focusing primarily on Cinereous Vultures and Lesser Kestrels (Reading *et al.* 2005, 2010; Kenny *et al.* 2008, 2013; Nyambayar *et al.* 2008). Aside from conducting periodic bird surveys, no other ornithological research currently occurs in Ikh Nart.

We present a checklist of birds in Ikh Nart Nature Reserve. Our aim is to provide relatively comprehensive records of the avifauna in the reserve and update existing knowledge about the distributions of some species in Mongolia.

Study area

Ikh Nart Nature Reserve (Ikh Nart) was established in 1996 to protect 66,600 ha of rocky outcrops in northwestern Dornogobi Province, Mongolia (Myagmarsuren 2000; Reading *et al* 2011) (Figure 1). The site lies at the junction of steppe and semi-desert eco-zones and is an ‘island’ of rocky terrain with shallow valleys that rise from the surrounding gently rolling land. Climate is strongly continental and arid, characterized by cold winters (to -40°C), dry, windy springs (up to 25 m/s), and hot summers (to 43°C). Seven types of habitats occur in Ikh Nart: dense rock, low-density shrub, high-density shrub-rock mix, and semi-shrub steppe, forb dominated short grass steppe, tall vegetation and ephemeral water bodies (Jackson *et al*, 2006). Flora and fauna are represented by species of the semi-arid regions of Central Asia, with a mixture of desert and steppe biome species (Reading *et al*, 2011). Birdlife International designated the reserve as an Important Bird Area (MN041) in 2004, primarily because of high densities of nesting Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) and Lesser Kestrels (*Falco naumanni*).



Figure 1. Map of Ikh Nart Nature Reserve

Methods

Ornithologists and bird watchers used binoculars, spotting scopes and digital photographs to record the presence of birds in Ikh Nart on a relatively regular basis throughout the year, but with most observations from spring to autumn. Researchers working within the reserve also recorded some data while conducting other wildlife studies. Location and date of observation were recorded during surveys and bird watching trips. For

bird taxonomy and nomenclature, we generally followed the Oriental Bird Club’s species list. We followed IUCN’s Red List (Birdlife International 2015) data base for globally threatened status of the species and used the Mongolian Bird Red List (Gombobaatar and Monks, 2009) for regional status.

Results

Out of the 484 species of birds recorded in Mongolia (Gombobaatar *et al* 2011; Avibase 2014), we have observed 204 species (42.1%) to date in Ikh Nart Nature Reserve (Table 1). The vast majority of species recorded in the reserve were passage migrants ($n = 126$, 62.1%), followed by winter visitors ($n = 23$, 11.3%), resident breeders ($n = 23$, 11.3%), breeding visitors ($n = 13$, 6.4%), vagrants ($n = 8$, 3.9%), and summer visitors ($n = 1$, 0.5%) (Some species fall into more than one category) (Table 1). Three observations represented new records for Mongolia, specifically Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*), Hair-crested Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*), and Chestnut-flanked White-eye (*Zosterops erythropleurus*) (Reading *et al*. 2011; Birding Mongolia blog; Ornis Mongolica 2013; Ogtonbayar *et al*. 2013.). The latter is an entirely new family – Zosteropidae.

There were twelve (6%) globally threatened species occur in the reserve, including three (1.4%) Endangered species – Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), and Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*) and four (1.9%) Vulnerable species – Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Great Bustard (*Otis tarda*), Asian Houbara (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*), and Relict Gull (*Larus relictus*) (Birdlife International, 2015). In addition, the Birdlife International (2015) listed five (2.5%) species as Near Threatened – the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), Falcated Duck (*Mareca falcata*), Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*), Red-necked Stint (*Calidrus ruficollis*) and Redwing (*Turdus iliacus*). Within Mongolia, the Greater Spotted Eagle and Relict Gull are listed as Endangered, while the Bearded Vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), Saker Falcon, Great and Houbara Bustards are listed as Vulnerable (Gombobaatar *et al*, 2011). Near Threatened species in Mongolia include the Falcated Duck, Yellow-breasted Bunting, Common Crane (*Grus grus*), and White-tailed Fish Eagle (*Haliaeetus*

albicilla) (Gombobaatar *et al.*, 2011). However, fifteen species remain Data Deficient or Not Applicable in Mongolia (Table 1).

Uncommon species comprised 48.8% of the species in the reserve (n = 199), while 37.9% of the species were common (n = 77) and 13.3% of the species were rare (n = 27) (Table 1). Rare species sightings in summer included Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*), Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*), White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*), Great bustard (*Otis tarda*), Asian Houbara (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) and Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*). We observed a few additional locally rare species during winter, such as Red Crossbill (*Loxia curvirostra*) and Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*). But we sighted most rare species during migration, including, Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*), Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*), Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*), Yellow-billed Grosbeak (*Eophona migratoria*), Yellow-breasted bunting (*Emberiza aureola*), and Yellow-browed bunting (*Emberiza chrysophrus*).

The relatively large number of habitats in Ikh Nart provides a range of breeding and migratory stop-over sites for birds. Rocky outcrops, deep ravines, and rock cavities provide potential nesting substrates for breeding raptors, including Upland Buzzard (*Buteo hemilasius*), Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*), Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), Steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), Cinereous Vulture (*Aegyptus monachus*), Little Owl (*Athene noctua*), and Eurasian eagle Owl (*Bubo bubo*). Other raptors, such as Black-eared Kites (*Milvus lineatus*) and Cinereous Vultures nest in Ledebours's Willow (*Salix ledebouriana*) and Siberian Elm (*Ulmus pumila*) trees. Amur Falcon (*F. amurensis*), and Eurasian Hobby (*F. subbuteo*) usually nest in deserted or newly built nests of Common Magpie (*Pica pica*) on willow and elm trees; however, two nesting pairs of Amur Falcons were recorded in Cinereous Vulture nests in summer of 2013. The stands of Siberian Elm and the willow trees that occur along drainages of perennial springs or sandy, dry river beds, the two freshwater springs, and the ephemeral lake and ponds of the reserve attract a large number and diversity of migrants.

Other common breeders in the reserve include Chukar (*Alectoris chukar*), Daurian Partridge (*Perdix dauurica*), Oriental and Greater Sand Plovers (*Charadrius veredus* and *C. leschenaulti*, respectively), Pallas's Sandgrouse (*Syrrhaptes paradoxus*), Pacific Swift (*Apus pacificus*), Common Raven (*Corvus corax*), Red-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*), Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*), Common Magpie (*Pica pica*), Mongolian Horned Lark (*Eremophila brandti*), Asian Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella cheleensis*), Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*), Mongolian Finch (*Eremopsaltria mongolicus*), Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*), Rock Sparrow (*Petronia petronia*), and four species of wheatears (Table 1). Please see Table 1 checklist in following link: www.wscc.org.mn/mjo/20160219

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