

**Shamshy - Chon Jarguilchak valleys expedition**  
(8<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> September 2019)

For this expedition to the Shamshy and Chon Jarguilshak valleys, in the frame of the OSI-PANTHERA scientific program, we were a group of 4 volunteers from France: Aurélie Durand, Sébastien Quétant, Thierry Cosquer and Jean-Philippe Bertrand. The leader and scientific coordinator was Anne-Lise Cabanat. She was assisted by Bastien Chaix. With us were also kyrgyz rangers of each valley: Emil and Azat in Shamshy and Talant in Chon Jarguilchak.

Shamshy reserve was a hunting concession in the past, but since tree years it is managed by the SLFK (Snow Leopard Foundation in Kyrgyzstan). For the expedition we offered our services to the SLFK in order to set up 5 of their camera traps and to pick up one. In Shamshy valley we explored Burana valley, Kirgo valley, the surrounding of the main moraine and Tezek Teur valley.

Chon Jarquilchak reserve was created many years ago and managed by Issyk kul Biosphere reserve, but OSI-Panthera managers have knowledges about poaching, and out of expeditions they observed a very low density of preys there. That is why an expedition there could help to follow the exemple of Shamshy valley. In this valley we had 3 camera traps of OSI-Panthera's program to set up, we were monitoring valleys of Kul Teur, Kamoo, Kashka Teur and Jazgue Tchuu.

We were lucky to get a group really interested by birds monitoring.

## **Weather**

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For the Shamshy expedition, the weather conditions were cold and snowy all along the time except the last day!

In Chon Jarquilchak valley, the weather conditions were better, without snow (that was useful to find pug marks !), very clear and sunny, with cold nights.



**On the left the group with Emil and Azat on Tezek teur crest (Shamshy), on the right the group with Talant on Keul Teur crest (Chon Jarguilchak) with the view on Issyk Kul lake.**

## Daily reports

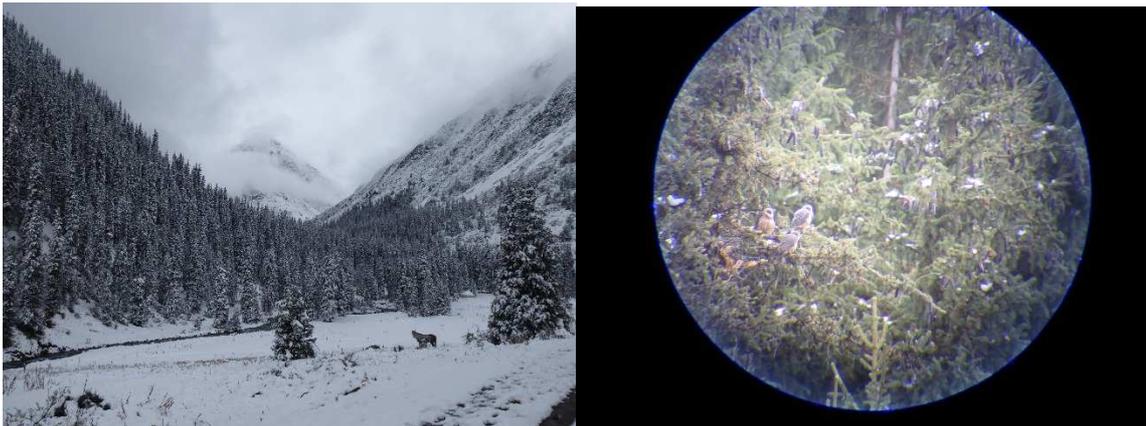
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09.09 → *Shamshy valley (South of Tokmok)*

In the morning we met Emil and his son Azat who drove us until their base camp in the main valley of Shamshy. The rangers house was very well restored by the SLFK team and is now very comfortable.

On the road we found a hare ill that seems not able to move from the middle of the road, we pick it up but it died in the evening.

One Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and an Eurasian hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) were fighting near the road and very close to ram our minivan!



10.09 → *In the afternoon, around the ranger's house:*

We woke up and outside it was all snowy!

We observed one Blue Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*), 4 females and 2 kids of Siberian ibexes (*Capra sibirica*), 1 Black-throated Accentor (*Prunella atrogularis*), around 15 Daurian Partridges (*Perdix dauurica*), a group of Whit-browed Tit-Warbler (*Leptopoeile sophiae*), 1 Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*), 3 juveniles of Eurasian hobby (still not ready to fly) and 1 Blue-capped Redstart (*Phoenicurus caeruleocephala*).

We made the picnic under a spruce with a nice fire!

This first birds monitoring was a long time for Azat, because it was an ornithological initiation for him ("we are doing 300 m / h!") !

11.09 → *First ride in the direction of Burana valley and Kirgo valley*

We made two groups:

- Chon Burana valley: 3-4 Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*) with 1 juvenile, one hundred of Plain Mountain Finches (*Leucosticte memoricola*) and a Golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) eating a horse freshly died with the first snow fall.

- Kirgo crest : a group of 15 Daurian Partridges, farther on Chon Burana top: 14 Siberian ibexes, 1 Turkestan shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*). There we set up one camera trap.



12.09 → **Ride to the lake.**

In the morning we made the way by horse riding from the rangers house until the lake where we installed the camp.

*We observed 15 Crested Honey-buzzards (Pernis ptilorhyncus), 1 Cinereous Vulture (Aegypius monachus), 1 Booted Eagle (Aquila pennata), 1 Eversmann's Redstart (Phoenicurus erythronotus), 1 Common Redstart (Phoenicurus phoenicurus), 3+11 Siberian ibexes and 1 Solitary Snipe (Gallinago solitaria).*

A first vodka for the group in order to celebrate the beauty of the valley !

13.09 In the morning all the horses already gone lower in the valley... and the clothes washed the day before were hard like stones, a cold night!

→ ***We divided the team in two groups in order to do two distinct transects: one to moraine and one to Ailampa crest.***

*Group1 gone to the moraine: 6 Crested Honey-buzzards, Northern Goshawk (Accipiter gentilis), and picked up one camera trap before replacing it by another. We checked the pictures of the former camera trap, there was snow leopards (Panthera uncia) monitored in July and August, and also ibexes and red foxes (Vulpes vulpes). We observed 1 flying hummingbird hawk-moth (Macroglossum stellatarum).*

*Group 2 gone to Ailampa crest: we set up a camera trap and we came back by a good scree.*

14.09 → **Ride to Tezek Teur / Temir.**

At the cross of the valleys we observed 7 Siberian ibexes females + 6 juveniles and 2 young males.

*We set up one camera trap on a big stone were there was a old urine smell.*

*After installing the new camp in Temir area where there is a nice view on the enormous moraine, on Ailampa crest we monitored: 8 females ibex with 2 kids and 1 young male. There was also 1 Altai Accenter (Prunella himalayana).*



15.09 This morning it is the Himalayan snowcocks that woke up the team by flying very close over the tents ! It seems that only Bastien and the rangers had found a flat place for the tent, all the other members of the team had a not so good night, they slept in the slope and directly moved the tent in the morning!

*In the morning we observed : 8 Siberian ibexes males + 7 females + 5 youngs*

→ ***Transect on the crest of Temir***

*On the way to the crest we observed a White-winged Snowfinch (Montifringilla nivalis) cloud.*

*We founded: 6 rifle bullets (some of them of few years and other of few months) on two different places of the crest. Maybe poacher coming from Kochkor side.*

*We sampled a very fresh feces that could be of snow leopard feces or wolf (because of many very fresh pugmarks of wolves (Canis lupus) found on the snow).*

When we came back from the crest one of the small tent was broken by the snow... Thierry and Azat made the repairs !

*In the evening, from the camp we monitored Siberian ibexes: 4 females + 4 juveniles and 3 young males.*





16.09 → **Way back to the rangers house.**

In the morning, from the camp we monitored *Siberian ibexes*: 12 males + 14 females and 11 kids.

*Bastien and Sebastien set up one camera trap in the small cliff upper to the camp.*

*On the way back to the lower part of the valley, 1 Little Owl (Athene noctua) was observed along the moraine and 1 Solitary Snipe at the cross of the valleys.*

When we came back to the base camp the rangers already warmed a “Bania” (warm room with steam in order to wash), this one was very very hot! Everybody enjoyed alternating between this hot room and the cold water of the river (even Thierry that fallen full in the river!).

The bania was followed by a Kyrgyz cogniac and a French Chartreuse and cake in order to thank our host!



17.09 → **On the road from Shamschy to Chon Jarguilchak (on the South of Issyk Kul lake, near Barskoon)**

We said goodbye and thanks a lot Emil and Azat for their kindness and happiness. Azat was a very good cooker! We took the bus for our next destination and on the way we observed many European Rollers (Coracias garrulus) and a Booted Eagle.

18.09 → **Departure from the village CJC,**

In this village at the south of the lake Issyk Kul (at 1700 m) we met our 8 strong and enjoyed horses and our local guide, Talant and his family.

All along the valley that we rode up, we appreciated the colours of autumn: orange

larichs, yellow birchs, green spruce.... and the songs of rock buntings (*Emberiza cia*), songar tits (*Parus songarus*) and spotted nutcrackers (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*). Arrived at 2624m, we camped in the small house of the shepherd (thanks to him!).

19.09 → **Kul Teur crest**

We walked in direction of a large landscape: a lot of juvenile of red fronted serin (*Serinus pusillus*), desert wheatears (*Oenanthe deserti*), water pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) were observed. We arrived on a crest with an amazing view on the lake and glaciers! There is the phone 3G (it should be interesting for the transmission of the image of camera trap.)!

Above the crest, we followed fresh wolf's pug marks in the snow and behind a rock with a juniper, we found beautiful pug mark of lynx (*Lynx lynx isabellinus*). We set up un camera trap next to this pug mark and hope that it will return here in the next months!



20.09 → **We moved the camp !**

We rode higher in the valley, and camped at 3100m at the cross of the valleys, near the river, for 3 days.

Along the way, we observed many Ewersman's Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythronotus*), Goldenstädt's Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*), Blue capped Redstart (*Phoenicurus coeruleocephala*), Hume's whitethroat (*Sylvia althaea*) and two Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) that flew really close to our heads.

We had the chance to take the dinner in front of big wood fire under the milky way (wood carried by the horses, even if we lost more than half of the wood on the road...!).

21.09 → 2 groups for two transects!

Bastien returned with the horse « Joli Coeur » to pick up a camera trap set up in July 2018 near 4200m on the crest of Kamoo! But no snow leopard on the slides, only beech marten (*Martes foina*), fox, Lammergeier, golden eagle and red billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*).

The second group walked in the direction of a Kashka teur valley where there is a high cliff, between the two valleys. In the snow they found few pug marks of ermine (*Mustela erminea*), fox and ibexes. Talant found a “large and round mark, with 4 fingers”: a snow leopard went here few days ago and walked along the cliff and urine on a rock ! All the group was able to identify this very fresh urine on the rock!

We decided to set up a camera trap on this place.

No ibex were monitored anywhere the valley... so, the group is asking what does the snow leopard eat ? Fortunately, Bastien have seen one female and a young on a crest today!

When we returned to the camp, Thierry found a complete wing of a young Himalayan Griffon.



22.09 → A last crest at 4000 m above sea level ( Jezgue chuu ) !

We rode along another valley and joined a large crest over 4000m (too bad for Thierry that had a rest this day...): a no man's land of rocks, only a fox and few pug marks of a young ibex and its mother were seen.

Otherwise we discovered a wonderful view on the Issyk Kul lake and on the glaciers at the end of the valley.

Two Lammergeier and a Himalayan griffon seemed to be interested by our picnic!

Nevertheless, we decided to set up a camera trap on this crest.

23.09 → **Way back to Issyk Kul**

For the last day, 6 Lammergeiers flew a long time over the camp: 5 juveniles and one adult played together in a beautiful dance over the crest and cliffs.

At the beginning of the way back, we busied a juvenile golden eagle that had just beginning to eat a Himalayan Snowcock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*), for him it was not really easy to take off without a cliff!

We really appreciate the return with our brave Kyrgyz horses in this amazing landscape with autumn colours and the view on the lake.

At the end of the day, we appreciate to eat delicious apples of Issyk kul garden (even Jean-Philippe makes up with apples!) and to be clean after a great banya (not too hot this time).

Thanks a lot to the Talant's family for their welcome! Raxmat !



