

COMMENTS ON THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN BARGUZINSKAJA VALLEY, EAST SIBERIA

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Abstract: A short visit to the southern part of the Barguzinskaja Valley resulted in an observation of at least 55 bird species. Of them, three were new for the valley: *Chlidonias leucopterus*, *Otus scops*, and *Melanocorypha mongolica*.

Key-words: Aves, faunistics, Barguzinskaja Valley, Buryatia, East Siberia.

Introduction

Birds of East Siberia are still largely known from occasional observations. This applies also to the birds of the extensive Barguzinskaja Valley in west-central Buryatia. This valley has never been visited by an ornithologist before the 1950s, when N.G. Skrjabin (1960) and O.K. Gusev (1965) made there first relevant observations. Earlier observations were summarized by T.N. Gagina (1960), but the series of her reports seems to include many unsubstantiated and doubtful data (cf. Ljamkin 1977, Bogorodskij 1989). Subsequently, birds of the Barguzinskaja Valley were studied by V.F. Ljamkin (1977) in 1965-1967, and 1970. Thereafter, we visited southern part of the Barguzinskaja Valley in August 1993 (see below), and E.N. Elaev (pers. communication) started, in the same year, to investigate birds in the northernmost corner of the valley.

The Barguzinskaja Valley stretches from the south-west to the north-east (Fig. 1.). It is surrounded by the Barguzinskij and Ikatskij Ranges from the north, and by the Golondinskij Range from the south. These steep (mostly over 20°) ranges reach heights of some 2000-2500 m a.s.l., with a maximum of 2840 m in the Barguzinskij Range. The valley is approximately 500 m a.s.l., and the mountain ranges completely isolate it

from the nearby Lake Baikal (see Ljamkin 1977). The valley apparently was a kind of a river delta in the near past (see Bogdanov 1986), but since it was inhabited by humans in the mid-Holocene it started to be changed into a cultural land. This process became more intensive after the Russians colonized the valley in 1648, but most of the transformation took part in the (late) 20th century (Rumjancev 1956, Ljamkin 1977, and pers. observations).

In 1993 we observed, that rivers in the southern part of the Barguzinskaja Valley have been meliorated, and that wetlands have almost disappeared from the area. Most of it was covered by dry, short-grass pastures, scarcely sparkled with small and shallow pools. The pastures were largely barren of trees, but a narrow belt of flooded forest occurred along some parts of the lower Ina river. Large, shallow salt lakes occur in the SE part of the valley near Suvo village.

Ecologically, the valley is an isolated, northernmost patch of Central Asian dry, short-grass steppe (Ljamkin 1977). The climate is strongly continental. Mean yearly temperature in the Barguzin village is -2.6°C , mean July temperature is ca. $+17^{\circ}\text{C}$, and mean January temperature is ca. -30°C . The lowest temperature recorded is -53°C , the highest one $+36^{\circ}\text{C}$ (Ljamkin 1977). Snow covers the valley for some 140-170 days per year (Ljamkin 1977).

Our observations were concentrated on the lower Ina river in the southern Barguzinskaja Valley, and its vicinity. One group, with Jiří Mlíkovský (JM) as an ornithologist, and Radko Samek (RS) and Helena Popová as accompanying members, rafted in a small boat the Ina river from the Jubilejnyj village, where the river enters the Barguzinskaja Valley, till Barguzin village, where it flows into the Barguzin river. Near Jubilejnyj village, Ina river still has a character of a shallow, clean and rapid mountain river, but after a few kilometers it loses that character, and abruptly changes into a lowland, deep and strongly meandering stream with a muddy ground and non-transparent water. This trip took part on 31 July - 4 August 1993.

The other group, with Petr Stýblo (PS) as an ornithologist, and Radka Beránková, Jaromíra Horáková (JH), Zdeněk Kaplan, Pavel Pešout (PP) and Jiří Rejsek as accompanying persons studied the area between Jubilejnyj and Chara-Usun villages in the vicinity of Ina river on 31 July - 9 August 1993. The area was covered mainly by dry steppe and flooded forests.

In addition, Petr Stýblo visited Barguzinskaja Valley together with Evgenij Ovdin on 17 April 1993. The ornithological observations, which are included in this paper, were made around the road between Ust'-Barguzin and Bajangol villages.

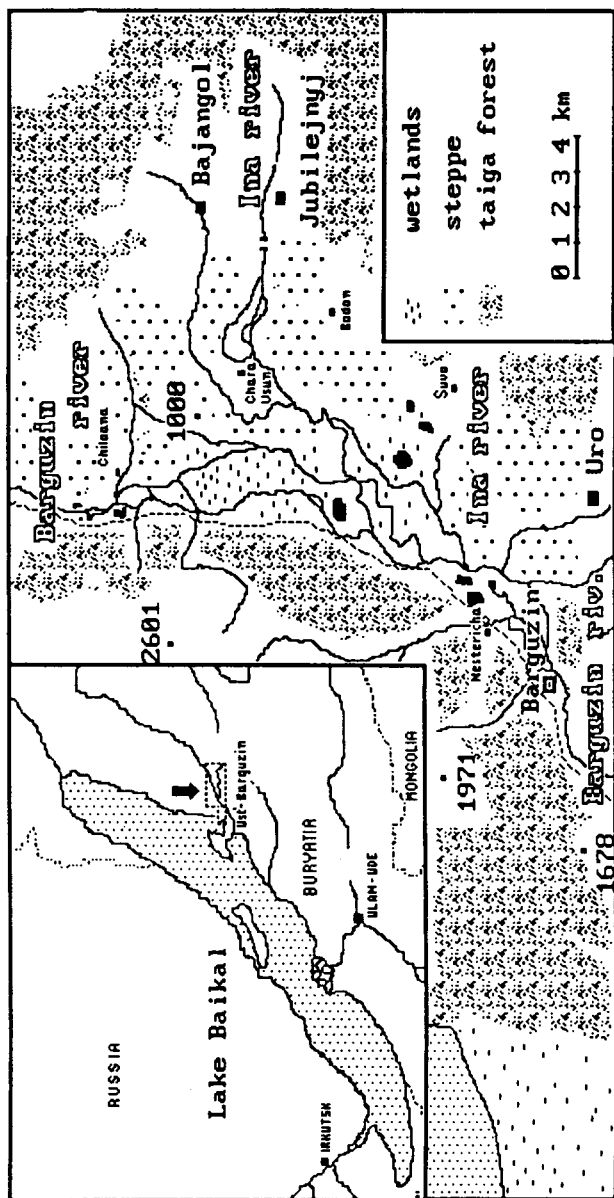


Fig. 1. Map of the Barguzinskaja Valley, west-central Buryatia. Observation points are indicated.

Systematic list

The following list is arranged according to Voous (1977).

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica* (Linnaeus): One adult bird seen on 1 August on Ina river (JM). Gagina (1960) mentioned that the species occurs in the Barguzinskaja Valley during fall migration, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it in the 1960s.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus: Abundant on Ina mud flats and nearby meadows (JM, PS). This heron commonly breeds in the valley (Gagina 1960, Ljamkin 1977).

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (Linnaeus): An individual was seen near Jubilejnyj on 2 August (PP, PS). Gagina (1960) listed this species as occurring in Barguzinskaja Valley, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it in the 1960s.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (Pallas): Pairs were observed almost on all thawing up lakes on 17 April (PS). Several birds were seen on dry salt lakes near the Suvo village on 1 August (JM, PS), and voice of one bird was heard near the Ina river on 2 August (JM).

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus: Common on the river (JM, PS). Known as a common breeder in the valley (Gagina 1960, Ljamkin 1977).

Pintail *Anas acuta* Linnaeus: A female with several half-grown young was seen at a small pool near Ina river on 1 August (JM).

Anas sp.: A single undetermined duck of this genus was observed on 17 April flying in NE direction (PS). According to E. Ovdin (pers. communication) it was the first duck observed at NE Baikal that year.

Pochard *Aythya ferina* (Linnaeus): Three females with young (2x5, 1x6) were observed on pools near Ina river on 3 August (JM).

Goosander *Mergus merganser* Linnaeus: Common on Ina river, where the water still was clean. Four females with families of 3x4 (JM) and 1x5 (RS) half-grown ducklings were observed on 1-2 August on Ina river, another ones with 4 and 2 young were found near Chara-Usun village on 1 and 2 August, respectively (PS).

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Linnaeus: Common at villages of Ina and Chara-Usun (PS).

Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucus* (Pennant): Several individuals (both males and females) were seen on meadows near Ina river on 2-3 August (JM). The species was unknown from the valley in 1960s (Ljamkin 1977), but has been discovered there recently (A.A. Vasil'čenko in Doržiev 1988a). The species is rare in Buryatia (Doržiev 1988a).

Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (Pallas): A bird was seen flying above steppe along the road between Barguzin and Jubilejnyj on 31 July (JM).

Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* Linnaeus: Two males were seen flying over Ina river on 4 August (JM).

Saker *Falco cherrug* Gray: A Saker was seen to unsuccessfully pursue Mallards above water near Chara-Usun on 6 August (JH, PS). Gagina (1960) listed this species as occurring in Barguzinskaja Valley, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it in the 1960s.

Mademoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo* (Linnaeus): Two individuals were seen catching prey on a muddy shore of Ina river on 5 August (PS), and a flock of 6 individuals was seen there flying toward south on 6 August (PS). This species has not been recorded in Barguzinskaja Valley until recently (cf. Ljamkin 1977, Vasil'čenko and Prokop'ev 1988).

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Scopoli: Repeatedly seen at Ina river and steppe lakes near Jubilejnyj and Chara-Usun between 2-6 August (PP, PS). Gagina (1960) listed this species as occurring in Barguzinskaja Valley, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it in the 1960s.

Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* (Linnaeus): Very common on mud flats at Ina river and on nearby meadows. A flock of some 300 individuals was observed on 1 August (JM, PS) and 4 August (PS).

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* (Linnaeus): Common on mud flats at Ina river (JM).

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* (Bechstein): Repeatedly seen at Ina river and steppe lakes near Jubilejnyj and Chara-Usun between 2-6 August (PP, PS).

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* Linnaeus: Repeatedly seen at Ina river and steppe lakes near Jubilejnyj and Chara-Usun between 2-6 August (PP, PS).

Sandpiper *Tringa* ssp.: Individuals and small flocks were occasionally seen flying along Ina river or sitting on its mud flats (JM). They could not be exactly identified.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Linnaeus: Common on the shores of Ina river (JM, PS).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* Linnaeus: Observed regularly, though in small numbers at Ina river (JM, PS). A flock of about 300 individuals was seen near Chara-Usun on 2 August (PS). On 17 April, two individuals were seen flying above Ust'-Barguzin (PS).

Common Gull *Larus canus* Linnaeus: Common on mud flats in the upper part of the lower Ina river (JM).

Herring Gull *Larus argentatus* Linnaeus: Rarely seen at Ina river on 3-4 August (JM), and one juvenile was observed near Chara-Usun on 5 August (PS). Gagina (1960) reported that Herring Gulls visit Barguzinskaja Valley in fall, but Ljamkin (1970) has not observed them in the 1960s.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Linnaeus: Common at Ina river (JM). Fledged young fed by parents were observed near Chara-Usun on 1-5 August (PS).

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (Temminck): Found to be abundant on wet meadows along Ina river on 3-4 August (JM). Formerly, this species was unknown from Barguzinskaja Valley (Gagina 1960, Ljamkin 1977).

Eastern Rock Dove *Columba rupestris* Pallas: Commonly seen in Barguzin village on 31 July (JM, PS).

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* (Pontoppidan): An adult bird was seen flying in the evening of 1 August (JM) and in early morning of 2 August (RS) over Ina river. Gagina (1960) believed that this species breeds in Barguzinskaja Valley, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it at all in the 1960s. Prokop'ev and Vasil'čenko (1988) reported that its numbers in Barguzinskaja Valley are currently increasing.

Scops Owl *Otus scops* (Linnaeus): Frequently heard on the evenings of 1-2 August from flooded forest at Ina river (JM, PS). It has not been recorded from Barguzinskaja Valley before (Gagina 1960, Ljamkin 1977, Doržiev 1988b).

Needle-tailed Swift *Hirundapus caudacutus* (Latham): Approximately 5-7 individuals were regularly seen at Ina river near Chara-Usun on 4-7 August (PS).

Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Linnaeus: Common on the meadows along Ina river (JM).

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* (Linnaeus): An adult male plus 2 juveniles were observed in a flooded forest near Chara-Usun on 4-6 August (PS).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor* (Linnaeus): A single bird was observed in a belt of flooded forest at Ina river on 2 August (JM). Gagina (1960) listed the species as breeding in Barguzinskaja Valley, but Ljamkin (1977) has not recorded it in the 1960s, and Prokop'ev (1988) has not included Barguzinskaja Valley among the few localities, from which the species is known in Buryatia.

Mongolian Lark *Melanocorypha mongolica* (Pallas): Common in the dry steppe near Jubilejnyj village (PS). This species has been unknown from Barguzinskaja Valley hitherto (Gagina 1960, Ljamkin 1977). The species was previously unknown from the whole central and north Baikal area, until a vagrant bird was seen on 7 July 1988 in Svjatoj Nos wetlands (Heyrovský et al. 1992).

Skylark *Alauda arvensis* Linnaeus: Many singing males were seen along the road between Ust'-Barguzin and Bajangol on 17 April (PS).

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* (Linnaeus): Common in the dry steppe near Jubilejnyj village (JM, PS).

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* (Linnaeus): Common at Ina river. Breeding colonies were found in steep sandy shores of Ina river. Numbers of holes

per colony were ca. 70, 50, 20, 160, 210, 10, and 80, respectively (JM). Adults feeding young in holes were seen on 1 and 2 August (JM).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus: Common at Ina river (JM, PS).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Tunstall: An individual was seen at Ina river on 2 August (JM).

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba* Linnaeus: Common at Ina river (JM).

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (Temminck): Common in the dry steppe near Jubilejnyj village in early August (JM,PS), and on 17 April (PS).

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe* (Linnaeus): Common along the road between Ust'-Barguzin and Bajangol on 17 April (PS). A bird was seen in Barguzin village on 31 July (JM), and two individuals were observed in the steppe near Jubilejnyj on 2 August (PS).

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* Linnaeus: Two individuals were seen in tree thickets at Ina river on 1 August (JM).

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* (Linnaeus): A single bird was observed in tree thickets at Ina river on 3 August (JM).

Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*: An adult bird with 4 young was seen in shrubs at Ina river near Jubilejnyj on 2 August (PS).

Azure Tit *Parus cyanus* Pallas: Common in flooded forests along Ina river (JM). Two flocks with fledged young were observed there on 1 August (JM) and on 2 August (PS).

Great Tit *Parus major*: Two individuals were recorded in shrubs at Ina river near Jubilejnyj on 2 August (PS).

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyana* (Pallas): Two flocks were encountered in flooded forests at Ina river on 1 and 2 August (JM, RS).

Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* (Linnaeus): Common at Ina river (JM).

Jackdaw *Corvus monedula*: Flocks of 10-20 individuals were seen along the road between Ust'-Barguzin and Bajangol on 17 April (PS).

Crow *Corvus corone* Linnaeus: Common at Ina river (JM).

Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Linnaeus: Occasionally seen flying across Ina river (JM).

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Linnaeus: Commonly seen in Barguzin village on 31 July (JM, PS).

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (Linnaeus): Abundant in flooded forests at Ina river (JM). Four nests were found in dead willow trees on 31 July. The hollows were ca. 0.7, 2.5, 2.5 and 3 m above ground, respectively (JM). Three young could be seen in the lowest of these holes on 1 August (JM). An empty nest of this species was found build in an abandoned Magpie nest, located ca. 4 m above ground in a willow tree (3 August, JM).

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* (Pallas): A single bird was seen flying along Ina river on 4 August (JM).

Meadow-Bunting *Emberiza cioides* Brandt: Two individuals were seen in grass tussocks in the steppe near Jubilejnyj on 2 August (PS).

Bunting *Emberiza* sp.: Flocks of hundreds of unidentified buntings were observed in taiga in the SW Barguzinskaja Valley on 17 April (PS).

Discussion

Overall, 55 species of birds were observed in the southern part of the Barguzinskaja Valley. Of them, three species are new to the Barguzinskaja Valley, viz. *Chlidonias leucopterus*, *Otus scops* and *Melanocorypha mongolica*.

The avifauna of the Barguzinskaja Valley markedly differs from that of the remaining northern Baikal. The Barguzinskaja Valley is closed from all sides by high mountains and contains steppes of Central Asian type. They represent the northernmost outcrop of this habit at type in the Lake Baikal region (Ljamkin 1977). Of the observed species, nine reach in the Barguzinskaja Valley the northern border of their distribution, viz. *Tadorna ferruginea*, *Circus melanoleucus*, *Otus scops*, *Upupa epops*, *Melanocorypha mongolica*, *Oenanthe isabellina*, *Parus cyanus*, *Cyanopica cyana*, and *Uragus sibiricus*.

Continuing melioration of the river net in the Barguzinskaja Valley changes the landscape from the original extensive wetlands into a dry cultural steppe. This will certainly influence distribution of some bird species and may be the reason for recent range extension of southern elements, such as *Circus melanoleucus*, *Otus scops*, and *Melanocorypha mogolica*. On the other hand, our research in the Barguzinskaja Valley was too limited yet to see whether some wetland bird species have abandoned the valley due to habitat destruction.

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