



Customized two weeks private tour -
In the Footsteps of the Snow Leopard
in Kyrgyzstan with *Miksture*/Michael
March, April, September, October and November

This expedition will try to reveal some of the most unique mammals to be seen in Northern Himalaya. Unique mammals are on our target list: Argali, Siberian Ibex, Wolf and of course – great birds. Of course we also hope of watching one of the most mythic animals on globe – the Snow Leopard, but as we at present doesn't deal with purse Snow Leopard Expeditions as its simply to difficult to make agreements with the Snow Leopard. Miksture possess one of the world's highest success rates when it comes to finding a wild Snow Leopard, at present June 2011 our success rate is still more than 75% however we include count only-heard Snow leopards as well (it's more difficult and rare to hear a Snow leopard than seeing them...). All details are fixed and ready. We have negotiated with the people that are able to give Miksture access to one of the most unique areas in Kyrgyzstan. On this expedition we travel deep into the heart of the Snow Leopards kingdom, and with the expertise of our team our chances for an encounter are raised from virtually impossible to reasonable.

Tour start: In Bishkek (spring or autumn)

The area is situated in an area that have been closed for access in many years as its situated in the border zone between Kyrgyzstan and China. This is a very positive thing, as the wildlife in many years have been protected and been able to develop strong populations. Nowhere else in Northern Himalayas is it possible to observe such abundance of wildlife. I have heard tales about these areas from old hunters – now we go there. Finally! Still very few people have access to the area – but we managed...The area posses a huge population of Siberian Ibex *Capra ibex siberica* and a healthy population of Argali *Ovis ammon karelini* (the Argali is rare in Kyrgyzstan except in this area – until I visited the area in December 2009 I had during more than 15 years here in Kyrgyzstan seen in total less than 10 Argali – within few days in our new area I counted hundreds! In addition other mammals are present in good numbers: Altai Deer, Wolf, Tolai Hare, Pallas' Pika, Bobak Marmot, Ground Squirrels, Mountain Weasel, and Wild Boar etc. But above everything is the Snow Leopard and this is our main "target" and majority of our effort will be done to see this mythological cat... When I visited the area in December, we estimated the areas we visited (three valleys) to be home range for c. 8 Snow Leopard; at one spot we observed the tracks of four different Snow leopards. So... this is something. Before our arrival we increase the search and my guides are permanently based in the area. We will have the best opportunities given! Of course there are great photo opportunities in the area!

Kyrgyzstan supports one of the last strongholds for the mythical Snow Leopard. Few human have been fortunate enough to watch this magnificent feline in the wild. In more than ten years Michael Westerbjerg Andersen and his local team of former Snow Leopard catchers... (In the 60-70'ties former USSR captured Snow Leopards for the world's zoos – this of course long time ago has stopped) have roamed the Kyrgyz mountains in their effort to understand and watch Snow Leopards.

So the conclusion is easy – off we go!



This is an expedition where everything is very basic, but compared to my winter expeditions in the mountains we might be accommodated indoor... in a hut with stoves and beds. But getting close to the Snow Leopards we MAYBE have to place tent camps at some of the best areas. Of course it will be cold – but not unbearable. Not at all and before departure Miksture inform you about every single detail about cloth, and what to bring. My team prepares all meals for us and will be good and tasty! We will probably use horses to get around... don't be afraid. The horses are calm, stabile and easy to ride. There will be no-so ever hazards of climbing or such things. The area is one big plateau and more accessible than my usual mountain locations. If we don't use horses (depending on the areas we are recommended we will have to trek some of the days – of course without heavy baggage.

Drawing on unequalled birding experience in Kyrgyzstan (40+ comprehensive tours during 1994-2011) the following itinerary incorporates several sites pioneered by your Danish expedition leader Michael Westerbjerg Andersen, a Danish biologist currently living in Kyrgyzstan while writing a book about the country's birds and yet another about the Snow Leopards. This expedition has been carefully planned and updated to take in as wide a range of habitats as possible. We have sufficient time to ensure that all specialties can be properly searched for and observed at a realistic pace.



Situated in the northern Himalayas with over 80% of the country straddling the fabled Tien Shan and Pamir Mountains, Kyrgyzstan's intact and undisturbed alpine nature makes it among the world's most unique mountainous places. Kyrgyzstan is one of the Central Asian ex-Soviet states achieving independence in 1991 and since then continues to develop and flower making it to the most peaceful and beautiful of the Central Asian countries. It's wedged between Kazakhstan in North, Uzbekistan in west, Tadjhikistan in South and the huge China in east. Without any ocean (however the worlds next-biggest mountain lake Issyk Kul) and palm-coral beaches Kyrgyzstan is luckily still visited by few tourists and those coming here does it to marvel the magnificent nature.

The Kyrgyz Mountains is world-class experience with numerous mighty peaks, glaciers, and meadows all forming a stunning back-drop. The birdlife is prolific and these mountainous areas we will visit are also host to a variety of seldom encountered resident and wintering birds and specials we will seek out include the Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Wallcreeper, accentors, redstarts and the elusive White-browed Tit-warbler. Further and more specific information about the birds can be obtained by contacting Michael/Miksture, and/or reading our reports from former tours (pls see our report section or check www.travellingbirder.com)

Miksture and the Snow leopards

On several expeditions we have searched and narrowed the search to few locations. Every winter and spring they have made expeditions to remote valleys and for weeks marveled the incredible winter landscapes, and of course seen Snow Leopards. It would never be possible to issue a guarantee for seeing these animals, but with a success rate of more than 75% and better possibility can't be made. During our expeditions, we are always in the heels of the Snow Leopards and know thoroughly the Leopards habits and movements. On the other hand we never disturb this shy and vulnerable species, and priority is always made to benefit the best for the Snow Leopard. However it's possible to watch Snow Leopards in the wild without disturbing them. It should be stated too, that the Snow leopards nature and acceptance of human beings is unique. It has never been documented that Snow Leopards have tracked and killed human beings (opposite its African cousin...). It simply considers a completely different nature of mind, and Kyrgyz hunters have had numerous encounters with Snow Leopards on their tours. Luckily there is a respect among hunters and Snow Leopards. They share same prey so to say – the Siberian Ibex. The hunters focus is in other words not on hunting Snow Leopards. There is a century-old respect for the Snow Leopards in Kyrgyzstan, however increasing requests from obscure Asian medicine markets in recent ten years have increased the illegal poaching of Snow Leopards everywhere in their range – in Kyrgyzstan too. Luckily it's still rare that Snow Leopards are target for these awful hunts, and with increasing awareness and ecotourism of foreign visitors it can help to save the Kyrgyz Snow Leopards in future. This is one of Mikstures aims and reasons for making these expeditions. It will never be mainstream tourism

product searching the Snow Leopards. This is simply too difficult and with negative cost-benefit for the tourist companies... Searching the Snow Leopards in these pristine mountains demands ultimate knowledge and experience. Extremely few possess such knowledge... The preferred habitat comprises undisturbed and intact nature. They live in rough high altitude terrain of canyons and alpine meadows where they predate their favorite prey the Ibex. On this expedition you will witness wherever we track the Snow Leopards footprints of Ibex and Snow leopards never will be far away from each other! During the summer months the Ibex along with their "shepherds" migrate up the slopes to 4.000 – 5000 meter above sea level where they are almost impossible to find. In the winter months however the heartless cold mountains force the animals to the valleys where tree and bushes gives shelter and food in the harsh winter conditions. Here we will look for the Snow Leopard!

Never guaranteed, the Snow Leopard - this superbly camouflaged top carnivore of these bleak uplands, is one to dream about. Mind you, dreams come true occasionally: we have seen Snow Leopards!

Itinerary: Day-to-day program

Day 01: Arrival Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital. City tour & relaxation

After arrival in Manas airport outside Bishkek, transfer to guesthouse in Centre. After some hours of relaxation, we make a city tour and it's possible to purchase souvenirs and other items. In the evening we find an excellent café. Early to bed, so everyone is relaxed for the days to come

Day 02: Transfer to Tamga, Issyk Kul Lake

Issyk Kul Lake is the second largest mountain lake of the world and it never gets ice covered completely due thermal water flows. This creates kind of micro-climate and the conditions is less harsh along the shore in winter thus attracting tens of thousands of ducks, coots and other waterfowl. These birds survive the harsh Kyrgyz winter on this lake, sometimes in such numbers that they turn the water's surface black. Raptors and other species follow this great natural phenomenon, providing a great opportunity and experience for birders. We will witness a wonderful day in the pure Kyrgyzstan air with interesting sightings Besides this natural wonder, it is exciting to know that the portion of road we are riding today is part of the ancient Silk Road - giving us the opportunity to learn and experience about this important historic heritage of Central Asia. As we pass through sleepy lake shore villages, we will stop at their bazaars and learn a great deal about the quiet winter existence of the local people. In the afternoon we arrive to our accommodation for the next night; a comfortable guesthouse on the southern shore of Issyk Kul. Here is it possible to experience the Russian sauna, and warm and comfortable beds wait for us. BLD

Day 03: Transfer to Snow leopard Base Camp in remote Tien Shan

Starting early we'll devote the transfer to the mountains. It will be a long tough drive but ahead waits the best wildlife areas in Kyrgyzstan. Here we will based in a primitive hut and the only available accommodation except for tents for our entire stay – a group of old wooden kind-of-houses. However we will try to make it as comfortable as possible. Magnificent views to the snowcapped mountains (and grazing Argali and Ibex) where we the coming days will search the Snow Leopard, in addition there is a fine set of birds. BLD





Day 04-09: In the Footsteps of the Snow Leopard

Today and the following five days we set off on foot or horseback in an attempt to explore an area searching for signs and tracks of the Snow Leopard in this area that supports one of the highest densities of Snow Leopards in the world. Until the mid 70's, a handful of famous Snow Leopard hunters trapped live Snow Leopards in Kyrgyzstan in order to satisfy the great demand of the world's zoos. Following our breakfast, and we start walking at around 8 in the morning. We'll be out all day and already after few hours we would be likely to find tracks and signs of Snow Leopard. On the way we will admire beautiful mountainous landscapes and do birding and wildlife sightings... We are now in the kingdom of the Snow Leopard, and few places in the world offers more spectacular sceneries. Although, the hike doesn't require mountain climbing skills, it is still a long distance in temperatures between zero and minus ten degree Celsius, and we will have to carry backpacks with our cameras and personal belongings. There is a great likelihood that we and will still walk in fresh snow, which is never the easiest surface to conquer. We will also pass through some narrow gorges, but the incredible scenery will make every step worth it, and we will return late afternoon to our hut, feeling absolutely privileged to be here. BLD

Day 10: Back to Tamga Guesthouse

After some final wildlife watching near our camp we'll turn downwards after breakfast to Tamga where milder conditions await in the comfortable guesthouse. Once we reach Tamga village, we check in at our comfortable guesthouse, and run straight into the sauna, to warm up our bones that still carry the wind chill and sharp cold of our Snow Leopard experience in the mountains. BLD

Day 11: Excursion to Jety Oghuz and Karakol. Last night in Tamga. BLD

We spend the day along the Southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, visiting some remarkable red sandstone formations in Jety Oghuz. Later the same day we visit the provincial capital of Eastern Kyrgyzstan – Karakol. A nice calm city with relaxed atmosphere and interesting history. Late afternoon return to Tamga Guesthouse. BLD

DAY 12: Tamga – Bishkek

After early breakfast we return to Bishkek. On the way we stop at interesting points until we eventually arrive to Bishkek. A combination of crisp-clear air and beautiful landscapes en route ensure that we arrive to Bishkek in high spirits... We expect to get back to Bishkek in time to seek out a good restaurant and sample some of the famous Kyrgyz food, and as we think back on some outstanding nature watching in the course of a very special trip knock back a shot or two of the local firewater. BLD

DAY 13: The tour concludes...

...with post-breakfast transfer from the hotel to the nearby Manas international airport for departure.



Transport: 4WD vehicles to the mountains and comfortable vehicles on the other parts. We also have to hike and use horses during our stay in the mountains.

Accommodation: In Bishkek and Tamga comfortable guesthouses. In the mountains: very basic accommodation in huts and maybe tents.

Food: All meals and tea/coffee are provided, during the day generally from local cafes/restaurants or in the mountains from our own kitchen team. We'll make a point of eating well whenever possible – most people come away feeling that „it's not for nothing that Central Asian cuisine is so famous“ - but expect some meals to be on the simple side, however both tasty and nourishing.

Weather: Cold but usually clear in the mountains. Nights cold but days, with blue skies alternating with over-cast conditions. Some snow is likely (but usually it occurs in beginning of January and in end of March. Expect temperatures in the -16 to zero Celsius range in the mountains (night) and warmer during daytime. Very strong sun! A wind-chill factor must be taken into account at high altitude.

Photography: VERY GOOD! We'll spend our time trying to see animals, but the keen photographer will find plenty of opportunity to make use of the often excellent light.

Health: as much time will be spent above 2,000 m. Problems aggravated by altitude is as good as non-existing. We take very good care of our clients and we walk careful to reduce risks and uncomfortable. Check e.g. http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/travel/diseases/altitude_sickness.htm for more information about health at altitude. Further, note that only the most basic medical facilities exist away from Bishkek: all participants must accept the full implications of this, but we are of course capable handling most incidences and our team is well educated and experts in moving in mountainous conditions. However, anyone in general good health and reasonably fit should find that acclimatization is achieved within a few days of arrival, ensuring full enjoyment of this exciting journey.

Essential equipment: Warm expedition down jacket! Rainproof jacket & ditto over trousers; long-johns; hiking boots; woolen hat; gloves; sun glasses; sunscreen lotion & ditto lip balm (protection factor 15-30 is necessary at high altitude); warm socks (dry socks are important when hiking, and there will be few opportunities to do any washing); plenty of chocolate & other favorite snacks/ energy food; lozenges; torch; hiking sticks; towel; winter sleeping bag. However prior departure we will provide informative and plentiful information about this

matters. Dress code: please note that outer layers must be in muted colors to decrease the risk of spooking e.g. those shy animals.

Visa: A visa is needed entering Kyrgyzstan - most nationalities nowadays can obtain visa upon arrival, but check it out in good time prior arrival and pls follow Mikstures instructions when you have booked the tour; this we will inform about prior departure – special permits relating to our itinerary are secured for us locally prior to our arrival.

General note: Though all possible efforts will be made to stick to the itinerary this may not always be possible due to circumstances beyond our control: a degree of flexibility is thus required, and participants must be adventurous and willing to put up with the rigors and discomforts inherent in travel in remote & culturally alien areas.

Trekking is restricted to day hikes: emphasis will be on seeing the animals, not on covering as many kilometers as possible on foot - however, the terrain is steep in places, and this, in combination with altitude, means that a degree of determination will on some occasions be required to reach the habitat we aim for. Maybe there will be possibility of horseback riding!

Tour price varies - please contact Miksture!

Price usually include: Guiding by Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen and his team • Porters • Local (English-speaking) interpreters • Transportation according program • All accommodation in Kyrgyzstan – guest-houses, huts and tents • All food in Kyrgyzstan • Necessary permits for Restricted Area sites and other paperwork • Services of tour leader, porters and driver • Administration from Miksture • Local entrees and fees according day-to-day program

Price does usually NOT include Drinks at meals in restaurants and cafes • International flights • Personal expenses for eventual extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Tips to drivers and interpreter • Travelinsurance – mandatory! • Eventual other insurances • Eventual extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Money for own expenses – actually very little needed • Visa to Kyrgyzstan • and anything strictly personal (e.g. laundry, phone calls, any excess luggage charges, snacks).

It's possible to rent sleeping bags and karimats. Pls contact Miksture for further info: info@miksture.com

Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen, Bishkek 30. June 2011



All travelers are welcome and on our travels there usually is a mix-ture of nationalities. Language is no problem: English, Russian, French, German and Danish are spoken. Miksture provide information about travelling in the region and specific information. My team and I can be hired for birding in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Southern Siberia and Western China. We are able to "tailor-make" the journey according your wishes – destinations & species as well as duration. It's possible to book me as leader or co-leader for your journey in the region. We use our own vehicles, own gear – tents, kitchen-team, etc. Everything to increase your birding experience and your safety. In addition our prices are reasonable for everyone. We have an excellent team by whom I have travelled and worked together with for more than four-teen years. They are some of my very best friends and in combination; we know thoroughly the areas and the birds. Usually we arrange tours for 4-16 pax; but we are flexible. Fair prices, security, honesty and great tours are keywords – try us! Please contact me for further information. Programs can be studied on our website. You are welcome to contact me for further information and I welcome any remarks and dialogue.

Miksture was established with the purpose of encourage and combine Eco-tourism and biological scientific research in Central Asia; mainly Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The approach of combining Eco-tourism and Nature Conservation is in many ways opposite activities, but in Kyrgyzstan we have done it without severe compromises for the visitors and the environment. Our tours are the result of friendship and strange ideas and our carefully planned itineraries and intensive approach have since 1994 given those who travel with us an unusually experience.

Miksture is an independent company, established and owned by Michael Westerbjerg Andersen. You will always be in contact with Michael when you contact us. All itineraries are accompanied by his staff and partners who possess the knowledge and experience to make the tour wholly successful. They know the areas thoroughly and take pride in showing those who travel the local hotspots, confidently coping with any problems that may arise and so greatly increasing the chance that everything will run smoothly. Leading a tour in Europe or North America is one thing, leading one in Central Asia where logistical problems are a fact of life is quite another! Where practicable and necessary we obtain the assistance of local leaders who have both an intimate knowledge of their home areas and the ability to look after the group to the required standard.

