

LITTLE-KNOWN ASIAN BIRD

Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* in the Mongolian Altai

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The poorly known Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* (2008 IUCN Red List: Vulnerable) has a small, declining population as a result of loss of its wintering grassland habitats in northern India and Nepal. Little is known about the species from its breeding grounds, and photographs have rarely been published.

On 21 July 2007 in Munkhkhairkhan National Park in the Mongolian part of the Altai-Sayan Mountain Ecoregion, we discovered a pair visiting a nest (hidden among boulders) at c.2,900 m elevation in a valley (46°49'N 91°46'E) with nearby peaks exceeding 3,000 and 4,000 m asl. A few hundred metres from the breeding pair JS observed a recently fledged juvenile. Habitat consisted of alpine meadows with scattered rocks and boulders. Other common species feeding their young in the same area were Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana*, Brown Accentor *P. fulvescens*,

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, and White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*.

The park (325,000 ha) was established in 2006 mainly to protect Altai Argali *Ovis ammon ammon* and Snow Leopard *Uncia uncia*. The main threat to the area is overgrazing by livestock. How (or if) this affects Hodgson's Bushchat and other breeding passerines is not yet known.

Hodgson's Bushchat is reported to occur in western Mongolia, eastern Kazakhstan and in the Russian Altai (del Hoyo *et al.* 2005). The tiny Russian population is possibly extinct (del Hoyo *et al.* 2005), whilst with the only records being a collected specimen of uncertain origin and an undated observation with no description, Wassink & Oreel (2007) omitted the species from the Kazakhstan list. If this is correct, today the only place to see and study the little-known Hodgson's Bushchat at its breeding sites is in Mongolia.

Plate 1 and 2. Adult male Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*, western Mongolia, July 2007.



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Plate 3. Adult female Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*, western Mongolia, July 2007.

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Plate 4 and 5. Recently fledged Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*, western Mongolia, July 2007.



Plate 6. Breeding habitat of Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis*, western Mongolia, July 2007.

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References

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