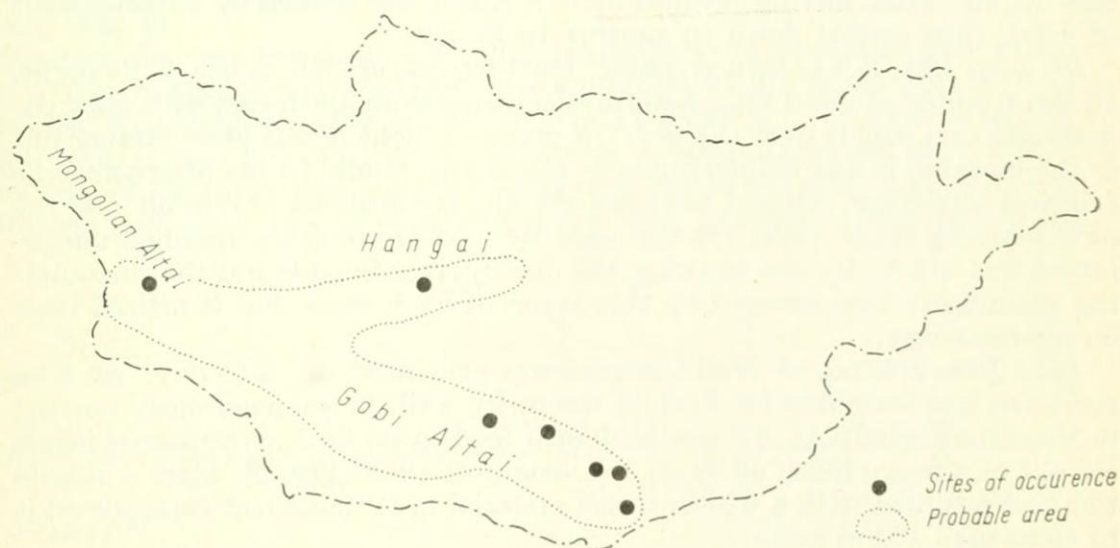


NEW RECORD OF THE WALL CREEPER (*TICHODROMA MURARIA*) IN MONGOLIA

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The northern border of the area of the south-palaearctic Wall Creeper (*Tichodroma muraria*) (L.) 1766 is extending through Mongolia (*Piechocki—Bolod*, 1972). According to *Kozlova* (1973), this bird is also common in the Gobi-Altai, in the southern part of the country. It is also supported by recent records reporting the occurrence of at least 7 nesting pairs on the area of Jolyn-am, in Gobi-Altai (*Mauersberger et al.*, 1982). A similar frequency of occurrence has been reported in the mountain Gurban-Sajehna by *Zieger* (1967). Accordingly *Tarasow* (1962), the Wall Creeper also occurs in the south-eastern part of the Mongolian-Altai, in the mountain-steppy zone (*Vaurie*, 1964; *Piechocki—Bolod*, 1972). The latter has been considered so far as its northernmost occurrence in Mongolia. In 1978, this species could be observed in another mountain, in the Hangai, too. Based on personal observations, a hatching succes of a Wall Creeper pair was discovered in the central region of the mountain Hangai, near the village Mandal, along a rocky range of 3 km. Here, nesting of some more 3 pairs seemed probable. This observation corresponds to the northernmost occurrence of Wall Creepers, in Mongolia, near the northern latitude of 47°. In the atlas of *Voous* (1962), the area for *Tichodroma muralis* is devoid of Mongolia, this a modification of the occurrence map is needed (Fig. 1).



1. Occurrence of *Tichodroma muraria* in Mongolia

The circumstance of finding and the environmental conditions.

In 1978, between June 5 and 15, our expedition was staying in the mountain Hangai, 140 km to northwest of Bajan-Hongor, near the village Mandal (additional participants of the expedition were: *Gy. Buzetzký*, *B. Kalocsa* and *I. Karáth*). Our camp was situated the bank of the river Cagan-turut (-Gol), on the southern edge of the rocky range. The mountain-steppy area is located at about 2600 m above sea level. The surrounding mountains are bare or covered by straggling steppy vegetation. Forest spotties appear only on the northern side of the remote mountains. The river Cagan-turut is accompanied by a granit rocky wall, of 50 to 120 m high, in a distance of around 3 km. The rocky range is populated by an avian community rich in species. The avian community, involved Wall Creeper, consisted of the following species: *Ciconia nigra*, *Anser indicus*, *Casarca ferruginea*, *Mergus merganser*, *Columba rupestris*, *Apus pacificus*, *Bubo bubo*, *Delichon urbica*, *Coloeus dauurica*, *Pica pica*, *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, *Tichodroma muraria*, *Monticola saxatilis*, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, *Oe. isabellina*, *Phoenicurus ochruros*, *Prunella collaris*, *Prunella fulvescens*, *Passer montanus* and *Petronia petronia*.

Appearance of the Wall Creeper was discovered by *B. Kalocsa* on June 8th. He observed one specimen at the opposite end of the rocky range, 3 km from our camp.

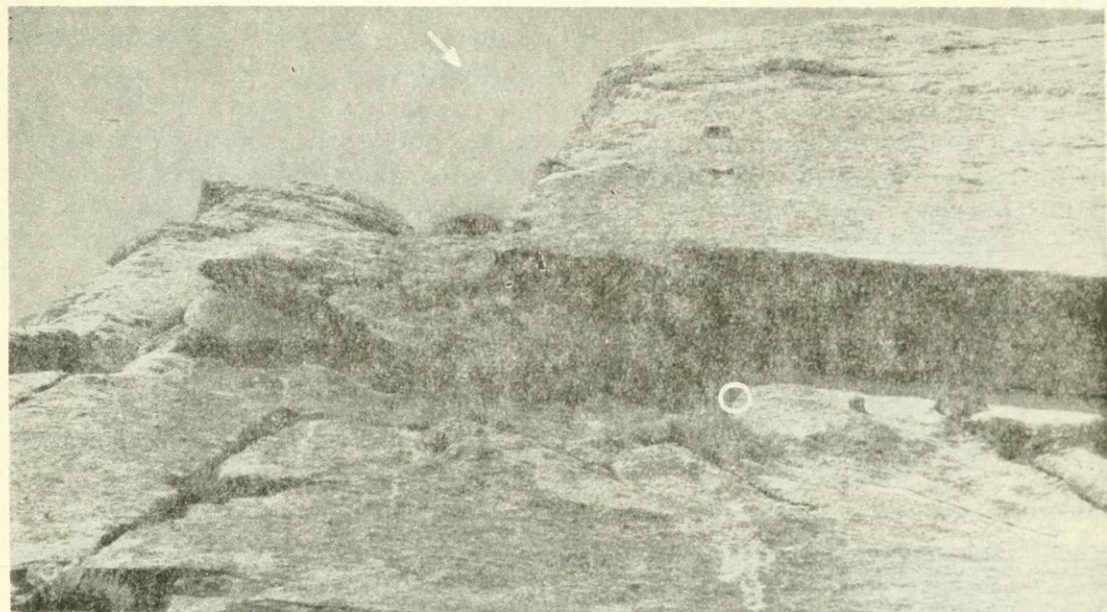
On June 10th, I noticed the first specimen 1 km from our camp. It was probably one of the nesting parents observed later. At 14⁴⁵ this female flew down to the rocky wall, at a height of 8 m, and began to spring upwards. It was gloomy. As the sun was breaking, the bird flew to another rock within 100 m and then to the opposite shadowed wall of the rocky gorge.

On June 11th, I observed a male in the same district. At 20²¹ this specimen was springing upwards the windless side of the rocky wall. (The strong, cold wind blowing from the south was actually perpendicular to the rocky wall. Air temperature was +10 °C and about 1 hr later it was getting dark.) Over the succeeding 10 minutes I observed its movement. Apparently, the bird tried to gather food only on the windless rocky cabin and inside the larger rocky slits. At 20³⁰ after having crept up to a cliff it was shaken by a strong blast of wind, then settled down to another rocky slit.

On June 12th, it was turned colder. The temperature fell to +3 °C by night. In the morning of June 12th, a storm-wind arose from south-east with dark cumuli and rain clouds over the sky. On previous night it was little raining but in the morning it was uninterruptedly raining for hours. In the afternoon, the rain was sometimes stopped but since evening it continued to rain all over the next morning (June 13th). On the night by next morning the minimal temperature was +2 °C. By the morning, the nearby river flooded and the surrounding mountains were covered by thin layer of fresh snow, but it melted later on the same day.

June 13th. Nesting of Wall Creepers was evidenced on this day. At 9¹⁰ a specimen was searching for food on the rocky wall. It was vigorously moving in the strong wind. At 9²⁵ the bird with food in its beak disappeared inside the slit of a rocky block of 50 m, at a height of 48 m (Fig. 2). After a minute the bird returned with a white faecal material in its beak and transported it to more than 100 m away.

On June 14th, in the morning and in the afternoon I made some observations on *Tichodroma*'s hatching biology and frequency of feeding occasions. At 9³⁰

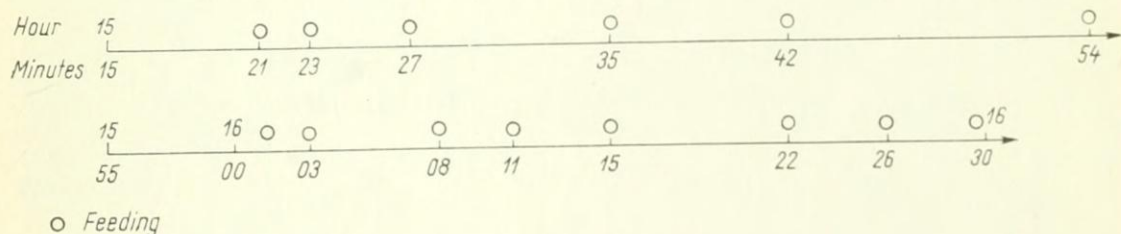


2. Nesting habitat of *Tichodroma muraria* in the mountain Hangai (Photo: Dr. A. Bankovics, 10. VI. 1978)

both adults were moving together. They were creeping upwards from the height of 20 m along the rocky wall, in a distance of 3 to 4 m in between. The birds moving along the sunny wall exhibited no sign of food collection. One of them, however, slipped in a shadowed slit and returned with food in its beak. At 11³⁰ one of the specimens was again moving on the rocky wall but without a longer stay for searching food. As the bird got higher, it began to search for food on a small spot for 1 minute, under the shadow of a rock bending underneath.

In the afternoon, between 15¹⁵ and 16³⁰ I could continuously observe their feeding frequency over 75 minutes, just prior to the outbreak of a summer rain-storm (Fig. 3).

As it can be seen, the parents fed their nestlings on 14 occasions over 75 minutes. The mean feeding interval was 5,4 minutes with a range from 2 to 12 minutes. A feeding occasion lasted for 5 to 12 seconds. The food collecting place took around 300 m distance of the nest in both directions, say a 600 m long part of the rocky wall. At the blazing sunshine in the afternoon, the birds gathered food only on the shadowed rocky wall. Sometimes they picked up



3. Frequency of feeding the young at the Wallcreeper (mountain Hangai, 14. June 1978)

food from the rocky slits, 15 to 20 m from the nest. On an occasion they picked up more insects in their beak. On two occasions I observed as the bird kept beating a larger insect to the wall to be stunted it prior to collect some more. In one instance it caught a flying insect in a flycatcher manner. The birds approached the nesting split always by springing on the wall. Even then approaching along the rocky wall from larger distances they settled down 5 to 10 m from the nest. Most frequently they approached the nest upwards from below, sometimes obliquely sideways, and once from above. Over the 75 minute observation, the male fed less frequently the nestlings than the female. In the course of the 10 minutes prior to rain storm, when it was thundering and lightning, it settled outside to the edge of the rock and on two occasions began to sing. During this 75 minutes, the faeces was only once transported from the nest, in a distance of 200 m. As I mentioned, the nesting slit was situated on a rocky wall facing to southward and it was exposed to sunshine from sunrise to 15⁵⁰ (June 14th). After 15⁵⁰ it was shadowed by the rocky eaves. The position of this nesting place is contradictory to the usual nesting habit of Wall-creepers, namely that *Tichodroma* prefers usually shadowed walls, rocky gorges for nesting.

Summary

Ascertained by nesting data (Mandal, 10 June, 1978), the Wall Creeper can be classified as a member of the nesting avian fauna of the mountain Hangai. Based on observations, its hatching, particularly the period of rearing the nestlings, takes place in the most rainy season, during June. Contrary to the usual habit, their nesting habitat was situated on a granite rocky wall of southern exposure. However, the bird gathered food on the rocky wall mainly on shadowed sites, rocky cavities and slits, as usual. Occasionally, it searched for food also on the sunny rocky wall, mainly in the morning at warming up and in the sunshine after showers. During this period the insects are, probably, more active on the sunny wall thus, easy to prey by the birds.

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