



White-winged Lark

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Almaty to Astana & Transfer to Korgalzhyn Steppe
Day 2	Korgalzhyn National Park
Day 3	Korgalzhyn to Astana via Western Lakes
Day 4	Departure

Summary

This short but rewarding extension takes us deep into the vast steppes and wetlands of central Kazakhstan, offering an unforgettable taste of this remote and little-visited corner of Central Asia. The landscapes here are among the most dramatic on the continent – immense open grasslands stretching to the horizon, dotted with shimmering lakes and wetlands that teem with wildlife.

At the heart of this journey lies Korgalzhyn National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and one of the most important wetland complexes in the world. Its mosaic of saline and freshwater lakes, fringed by endless steppe, serves as a crucial stopover on the Central Asian migratory flyway. Here, we find breeding colonies

of Dalmatian Pelican, Demoiselle Crane, and Great Black-headed Gull, alongside rarities such as the globally threatened Sociable Lapwing, one of the primary targets of this extension.

The surrounding grasslands also offer exceptional opportunities to encounter specialist steppe species, including Black Lark and White-winged Lark, as well as abundant raptors such as Pallid Harrier and Red-footed Falcon.

This extension pairs thrilling birdwatching with a chance to experience traditional Kazakh hospitality, staying in a comfortable guesthouse in a friendly rural village. The remote, windswept scenery, abundant wildlife, and remarkable sense of space make Korgalzhyn a truly unique and memorable destination.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1 Almaty to Astana & transfer to Korgalzhyn Steppe

Our extension begins with an early departure from Almaty as we head to the airport for a domestic flight north to Kazakhstan's capital, Astana. Upon arrival, we waste no time in leaving the city behind, venturing straight into the wild open spaces of the Kazakh steppes as we make our way to the celebrated Korgalzhyn region.

During the journey, we pause for some delightful birding en route. Roadside trees and pylons may reveal nesting colonies of charming Red-footed Falcons, while graceful Pallid Harrier drift low over the grasslands. Short-eared Owl are another likely sight, often seen quartering the steppe or perched atop fence posts. One of the day's highlights is the possibility of encountering the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing – among the most sought-after of Central Asian breeding species. As we immerse ourselves in these vast, open landscapes, dotted with wildflowers and echoing with bird song, we begin to appreciate the remote beauty of this remarkable region. By late afternoon, we reach the village of Korgalzhyn, where we settle into our comfortable guesthouse for dinner and overnight stay.

Day 2 Korgalzhyn National Park

We begin our day with an early start to maximise our time exploring Korgalzhyn National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve renowned for its combination of endless steppe and shimmering wetlands. These pristine habitats support an incredible diversity of wildlife. Among the highlights are grazing herds of Saiga Antelope, their distinctive Roman-nosed profiles an iconic sight of the steppe. Wolves and marmots also inhabit this vast wilderness, but it is the birds that take centre stage.

Located at the crossroads of major migratory flyways, Korgalzhyn serves as a vital stopover and breeding site for countless species. Wetlands teeming with life host elegant Demoiselle Crane, Dalmatian Pelican, White-headed Duck and colonies of Great Black-headed Gull. Graceful White-winged Black Tern and Black-

winged Pratincole flutter above the lakes, while the surrounding grassy plains attract Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope, Ruff in full breeding display, and a host of other shorebirds.

Perhaps most thrilling of all is the chance to see Sociable Lapwing nesting in their native steppe habitat. Elsewhere, Booted Warbler sing from bushes, and Red-footed Falcon, Pallid Harrier and Short-eared Owl patrol the grasslands. We'll also seek out two iconic Central Asian specialities: Black Lark and White-winged Lark—both often abundant here. After a full day immersed in this extraordinary landscape, we return to our guesthouse to relax and review the day's sightings.

Day 3

Korgalzhyn to Astana via Western Lakes

On our final morning, we explore the rich wetlands and lakes west of Korgalzhyn village. This is a perfect opportunity to search for any species we may have missed, or simply enjoy another morning amid the peaceful steppe scenery. Waterbirds abound here too, with a good chance of further encounters with Dalmatian Pelican, Whooper Swan, and various breeding ducks and grebes.

By mid-afternoon, we make our way back to Astana. Here, striking futuristic architecture contrasts with the ancient steppe landscapes we have been exploring. In the evening, we gather for a final celebratory dinner, reflecting on the superb wildlife and warm hospitality we've enjoyed.

Day 4

Departure

After breakfast, we conclude this memorable journey through Korgalzhyn's stunning steppes and wetlands.

Accommodation

Three nights' accommodation in excellent quality, comfortable hotels.

Cost

Please refer to the web page for the latest cost of this extension.

Included in the Cost

Three nights' accommodation and all meals and water throughout. All transfers, flights and daily transportation and guiding also included.

Additional Expenditure

The only extra expenditure will be for tips and any alcoholic drinks.



Demoiselle Crane