

Kazakhstan - A Birdwatching Tour

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 - 26 May 2007



Red-headed Bunting



Rose-coloured Starling



Himalayan Rubythroat



Striated Scops Owl

Report compiled by Alan Curry
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Day 0

Friday 18th May

Flight: London to Almaty via Frankfurt.

Day 1

Saturday 19th May

Calm, overcast and cool

Having arrived at the Otrar Hotel just after midnight, it would have been quite justifiable if there had been one or two abstainers from our planned 6am gathering at the hotel entrance, however, a full house of keen participants were gathered on the steps eager to explore the environs of Paniflov Park, an ideally situated woodland opposite the hotel entrance! A short walk produced several showy singing Blyth's Reed Warblers as well as more challenging views of both Greenish and Hume's Leaf Warblers, while Golden Orioles contributed to the soundscape without giving themselves up. A nice gentle start to the trip!

Immediately after breakfast we teamed up with our local guide Professor Anatoliy Kovshar and Zareena, his excellent interpreter, we were soon on board our bus and travelling east out of the city. Our first series of stops along the old canal road gave us the first of what would prove to be many sightings of Rollers and Red-headed Buntings, fantastic views of a male Long-tailed Shrike and brief views for some of a White-capped Penduline Tit. Ahead of the bus, small groups of Oriental Turtle Doves of the form '*meena*' flushed off the road and Nightingales sang from the roadside scrub. What should have been a 'dead cert' stakeout of a Pale Sand Martin colony did not go quite according to plan, as recent sand extraction had damaged the breeding cliff face rendering the site deserted. A flyover pale phase Booted Eagle and Isabelline Wheatear offered some compensation.

Lunch was taken in a sheltered gully in the Kokpek Pass, and what a treat it was with constant close range eye level Lesser Kestrels and Crag Martin on offer, while Golden Eagles and a Black Vulture soared overhead. A Rock Bunting sang from the hillside and further up the pass, several White-capped Buntings performed admirably in a narrow steep sided gully.

Late afternoon saw us crossing the northern end of the Sogaty Plain, with both Lesser Kestrel and Lesser Grey Shrike plentiful on the roadside wires. Soon we arrived at the impressively situated overnight camp on the shore of Bartogai Lake. With plenty of light still available we quickly set off in search of some of the local specialities. A pair of Grey-necked Buntings was quickly located, while a walk along a nearby dry stream bed produced great views of Turkestan Isabelline Shrike, Tawny Pipit, Isabelline Wheatear and best of all a pair of Mongolian Trumpeter Finches sunning themselves on a cliff face. A brood of Long-legged Buzzards could be seen in the nest on a low lakeside cliff, and on two occasions one of the adults of this pair was seen to predate a vulnerable brood of Ruddy Shelduck ducklings well away from the safety of water.

Day 2

Sunday 20th May

Fresh northerly wind, steady rain

A small mobile group of hirundines along the lake shore pre-breakfast proved to be Pale Sand Martins, one of which almost falling to a hotly pursuing Eurasian Hobby.

The morning was spent exploring the Sogaty Plain, where despite the challenging weather conditions, Short-toed and the distinctive local race of Shore Larks abounded. An extended walk in search of Pallas's Sandgrouse proved fruitless, but offered good numbers of Mongolian Trumpeter Finches, a single Desert Warbler and a great bonus in the form of a female Goitered Gazelle with a tiny youngster! A sizable group of Demoiselle Cranes were encountered feeding near the roadside, while an impressive aggregation of Lesser Kestrels fought for our attention. Returning to the camp for lunch, a couple of Black Eared Kites greeted us patrolling the lake shore.

After lunch we headed out again across the Sogaty Plain this time bound for the Charyn Gorge, passing an enormous roadside colony of Rose-coloured Starlings of mind boggling proportions. On reaching the gorge, a pair of Azure Tits were quickly located amid the sparse riverside scrub allowing the whole group to indulge in this vital target species! Other distractions in the area included our first good views of the highly distinctive 'Masked' Wagtail, Blue Rock Thrush, Oriental Turtle Doves, Common Kingfisher and Rock Sparrow which may well have been breeding on the old decaying bridge that spanned the river.

Having probably overstayed at this productive location, the afternoon was now running away from us allowing only a brief visit to the scenically fantastic Red Canyon. Although time here was limited and a bit late in the day for raptors, some great views of Pied Wheatear and several Mongolian Trumpeter Finches were obtained before returning to Bartogai Camp for our final night there.

Day 3

Monday 21st May

Calm and clear, becoming showery

After an early breakfast we again hit the road bound for the delights of Nurly, expectant in the knowledge that a Pallas's Sandgrouse had been seen recently coming in to drink at a roadside artesian well. On arrival, the puddles

on the road were an ominous indicator that the previous day's rain had left the area with no shortage of drinking possibilities and the well was disappointingly quiet.

There were however plenty of distractions in the area to keep us occupied including a trio of superb Black-bellied Sandgrouse, a stunning male Montagu's Harrier, flyby Golden Oriole and a distant Demoiselle Crane. Relocating to another artesian well a few km away was more productive passerine wise with several Syke's Warblers, '*halmodendri*' Lesser Whitethroat, Desert Wheatear, Desert Finch and a conking Rufous Bushchat out on the road.

Lunch was taken on the edge of an extensive reed bed nearby, where many tantalising snatches of song were heard in the increasing wind. Cetti's, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers found their way on to the trip list, while several group members played their latest episode of hide and seek with the calling White-capped Penduline Tits. Overhead a Eurasian Hobby floated amongst the Swift flock.

Soon it was time to move on and begin the long drive back to Almaty, where we were to swap buses in favour of a sturdier mountain model(!). The weather was now deteriorating with light rain falling – a good time to be on the bus for sure. After changing buses we slowly climbed out of Almaty heading for the Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory. The rain was falling heavily now, and the mountain tops were under cloud. As we passed through the Great Almaty Gorge it was now a deluge, against all the odds a male Wallcreeper was seen flying past the bus window provoking a mass evacuation of birders off the bus and into the downpour! The Wallcreeper settled on a small cliff face allowing us all good, if a bit soggy views. Continuing the slow climb, the rain inevitably changed to snow and on reaching the observatory it was a complete white out! Sadly, external activities were no longer a viable option as we all retired to our rooms for the rest of the day.

Day 4

Tuesday 22nd May

Still, clear and cold.

Anticipation levels were enormous as we gathered at the observatory gates despite being almost knee deep in snow at 0530 hrs. We were greeted by the most fantastic white mountain scene, with crystal clear ridges and cloudless blue skies. The hoped for Himalayan Snowcocks were conspicuous by their absence as the ridges remained silent, and passerines proved few and far between as we waded through the snow exploring the grounds of the observatory. By breakfast Himalayan Rubythroat, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak, Brown and Black-throated Accentors had all given themselves up to some group members although the general impression was of an almost birdless environment!

Post breakfast saw us boarding the bus, but not for the planned uphill drive to the Kosmostation which was blatantly impossible but a trip down to the Bolshoi Almaty Lake in search of the near mythical breeding Ibisbills. On disembarking near the dam it became clear that there was a lot more bird activity in this area, as almost immediately a large flock of Hodgson's Mountain Finches flew over, as well as a mixed group of Alpine and Red-billed Choughs – all species that would be expected at a higher elevation. In a small sheltered gully along the access track, a stunning male Himalayan Rubythroat performed for all, along with up to four Eversmann's Redstarts, Black-throated Accentor and White-winged Grosbeak.

Continuing on down to the boulder field at the head of the lake we were greeted by not one but two crippling male Guldenstat's Redstarts, a male Black Redstart of the form '*phoenicuroides*' and up to four Sulphur-bellied Warblers all competing for our attention among the boulders and all presumably refugees from higher elevations escaping the snowfall.

It was difficult to focus our attention on searching for Ibisbills, but it was made much easier when the Professor expertly trained his telescope on an incubating adult, incredibly cryptically disguised amongst the rocks. What a brilliant moment, when the pair changed over at the nest, calling softly and briefly revealing a clutch of four eggs. Magic! It was difficult to drag ourselves away, but lunch awaited back at the observatory. However, not before we were treated to a superb singing Blue-capped Redstart, several Red-fronted Serins and back at the dam a group of distinctive '*blakiston?*' Water Pipits.

After a slightly late lunch at the observatory, the improving conditions prompted a valiant attempt to drive up to the Kosmostation, however despite the best of endeavours of our driver, the road proved impassable and an honourable retreat was called for. On the way back down a 'Grey' Partridge was located sheltering under a bank within a few feet of the bus window, generally pallid in appearance with a black as opposed to chestnut belly patch, it proved to be a Daurian Partridge, an excellent discovery of this rarely seen high elevation species. The excitement was not over as within a few minutes we were watching a pair of Brandt's Mountain Finches feeding in a roadside gully, a species seldom seen below 4000m – the harsh weather had certainly done us proud!

Late afternoon was spent around the observatory, where the thaw had prompted a bit more activity, several Himalayan Rubythroats were seen along with a couple of Eversmann's Redstarts and a welcome Songar Tit. We tried hard for Severtzov's Tit Warblers but the snow covered Juniper scrub debarred any sightings of this notorious skulker. Overnight was again spent at the observatory.

Day 5

Wednesday 23rd May

Warm southerly breeze, cloudless

A much milder dawn, and the group again gathered at the Obs gates hopeful of locating a Himalayan Snowcock, which by now was obtaining its own near-mythical status. Persistence eventually paid off when, after a couple of hours, a snowcock was located sat loud and proud atop of a rock on a distant ridge, lingering long enough for the entire group to secure some reasonable views. At this stage the sense of relief amongst the party was almost palpable!

After a speedy breakfast it was now time to leave the observatory, though we had time to take short walk through the Spruce forests below the dam. Here we had great views of a pair of Brown Dippers and another singing Blue-capped Redstart before again embarking the bus and descending the mountains. Unfortunately time did not permit a lengthy stay at a Blue Whistling Thrush breeding site and our luck was out, but we left the mountains behind content with the fantastic birds and scenery we had been lucky enough to experience.

Changing buses again in Almaty back to the 'sleek' road model, we headed off on the long drive to the Taukum Desert. Lunch was taken at the highly attractive Kopa Lakes, where a small isolated tree a few metres from our picnic site contained a wealth of migrants including several Blyth's Reed, Greenish and Hume's Warblers, Spotted Flycatcher and Common Rosefinch. A brace of White-winged Black Terns flew by, several Little

Bitterns were seen and yet again White-capped Penduline Tits were vocal but continued to elude. A great lunch stop!

Moving on, our next stop was among the low hills of Tamgaly, home to numerous ancient petroglyphs on the exposed rock faces as well as a pair of easily observed breeding Eastern Rock Nuthatch. A little further along the road brought us to an area that positively throbbed with larks. Travelling through a gently undulating landscape Bimaculated and Lesser Short-toed Larks were regularly flushed from the road and as the steppe became flatter these were replaced by Calandras by the shed full! Stopping at a known site for White-winged Larks a female Pallid Harrier passed close by, while up above a brace of Steppe Eagles soared over. Scanning the plain revealed two distant Short-eared Owls and an even more distant male Pallid Harrier. The first of several White-winged Larks revealed themselves, readily located by their quirky bouncing song-flight and 'Redshank like' upperwing patterns. Three medium sized raptors soared over – Crested Honey Buzzards, brilliant! Time was again running away from us and reluctantly we had to keep moving as we needed to reach Kolshengel Camp before darkness fell.

Day 6

Thursday 24th May

Still, hot and sunny

This trip is certainly one of extremes, and barely 24 hours after sunrise in the snow of the Tien Shan Mountains we were standing on top of a desert sand dune at dawn scanning for Macqueen's Bustards. We were not to be disappointed with two distant males performing their bizarre display ritual. A quick breakfast then it was a short walk to the dune overlooking the nearby artesian well, where over the next hour several hundred Black-bellied Sandgrouse came in for their morning drink. The whole area abounded with larks – Calandra, Bimaculated, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed. A family group of Isabelline Wheatears were at the well, joined briefly by a male Spanish Sparrow. A female Pallid Harrier passed by followed shortly after by a young male Montagu's and a pair of Demoiselle Cranes flew over. A small flock of Temminck's Stints dropped out of the sky and fed avidly around the well. Quail were calling in the distance.

As usual, time was of the essence as we needed to reach Zhealturanghy before the sun became too hot, otherwise the Saxaul Sparrows could become very difficult. After what seemed like an eternal drive, we reached the village and eventually, though it was not without its difficulties, obtained some good views of this highly attractive species. A displaying Shikra over the cemetery provided a great sideshow.

Lunch was taken in an attractive area of Turanga Forest nearby, and almost immediately on arrival two site specialities White-winged Woodpecker and Turkestan Tit were safely in the bag. Eversmann's Stock Dove proved a bit trickier, giving mainly flight views to all. As we ate our picnic, a squadron of 96 White Pelicans soared overhead.

Soon after lunch, a small owl discovered by Martin roosting on an exposed branch offered fantastic close range views and careful scrutiny left no doubt as to its identity – Striated Scops. Although this species has been reported in the area before, this was the first confirmed sighting for the initially incredulous professor who considered this to be over 1000km east of its regularly occurring range within Kazakhstan.

Leaving the Turanga Forest, we could now explore the highly attractive Topar Lakes complex at our leisure. A group of four soaring pelicans proved to be three Dalmatian and a single White, while several Black-necked Grebes, Ferruginous Ducks and Red-crested Pochards were noted. Black Terns were new for the trip as were two distant Pygmy Cormorants. Searching the Taukum Sands area on the return journey failed to produce the hoped for Steppe Grey Shrikes, though several grey crowned '*karelini*' Turkestan Shrikes were of interest.

Our final destination of the day was the trees around Kolshengel Village, a noted migrant trap – or as Zareena described it, El Dorado. We were not to be disappointed, with large numbers of Blyth's Reed, Hume's and Greenish Warblers along with Lesser Whitethroats, Nightingales and Spotted Flycatchers all giving great views. A pair of Desert Finches showed well to all in the trees at the back of the compound. Overhead a small group of raptors circled – three Griffons, two Greater Spotted Eagles and a Steppe Eagle while over towards the artesian well two first summer male Pallid Harriers rested on a hillside, not to mention the two Shikra's over the compound. El Dorado indeed!

Arriving back at the camp just before dusk, there was still time for a brief look at the artesian well – an inspired move, among the regulars was a Citrine Wagtail (of the black mantled form *calcaracta*) and best of all a spanking male Caspian Plover. What a day!

Day 7

Friday 25th May

Light westerly wind, warm and overcast

Our final day began with another dawn display by the Macqueen's Bustards, followed by a last chance to savour the sandgrouse and lark fest at the well. Unfortunately the star birds of the previous evening had moved on, however Eurasian Turtle Dove and Brown-necked Raven were new for the trip.

After bidding our farewells to the camp crew, another session at El Dorado was a must and if possible it proved even busier than the previous evening. Amongst the almost countless numbers of 'regular migrants' a brace of Barred Warblers and an elusive Thrush Nightingale vied for our attention, while a male Whitethroat of the race *rubicola* caused some serious identification difficulties! The journey back to Almaty is a long one, and soon we had to drag ourselves away from this amazing place comforted by the fact that we would soon be stopping at another – Alderly.

El Dorado was always going to be a tough act to follow, and although the single isolated 'migrant' tree at Alderly was indeed bristling with migrants, there was undoubtedly a sense of anti-climax here. Red Backed Shrike was new for the trip, while a flock of 104 migrant Demoiselle Cranes made a fine sight. Nearby, another pair of cranes were attending a small chick. Moving on to our final birding stop at Sorbulak Lake, both White and Dalmatian Pelicans offered good views. A group of four migrant Terek Sandpipers fed on the lake shore and a fitting final new bird of the trip made a distant flyby – a summer plumaged Great Black-headed Gull, cosmic!

Arriving back at the Otrar Hotel in Almaty by early evening, there was time for a much needed clean up followed by a good meal and a beer or three. An election for 'bird of the trip' proved illuminating with heavyweight contenders such as Azure Tit, Saxaul Sparrow, Wallcreeper, Caspian Plover, Striated Scops Owl, Daurian Partridge and Himalayan Snowcock failing to even make the podium.

The top three being:

1: Ibisbill

2: Himalayan Rubythroat

3: Demoiselle Crane

A fab trip!

Species Lists

Birds

- Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis* (1:7)
Three were located on a ridge above the Tien Shan Observatory
- Chukar** *Alectoris chukar* (perhaps *kurdistanica*) (1:7)
A single seen briefly from the bus window in the Kokpek Pass
- Daurian Partridge** *Perdix daurica* (1:7)
Presumably a snow driven refugee from higher elevations, a single was seen at the roadside between the Tien Shan Obs and the Kosmostation
- Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* (*mongolicus* group) (2:7)
Heard near Nurly and one seen on the road near the Topar Lakes
- Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (1:7)
Up to three calling at Kolshengel Camp
- Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* (7:7)
Seemingly present at any wetland locality, as high as the Bolshoi Almaty Lake
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera* (2:7)
A single at Topar Lakes and six at Sorbulak Lake
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos* (2:7)
A pair at Bartogai and Sorbulak were the only sightings
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca crecca* (1:7)
A single was at Sorbulak Lake
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta acuta* (1:7)
A pair on Sorbulak Lake were the only ones seen
- Garganey** *Anas querquedula* (1:7)
A flock of 30 gathered on Sorbulak Lake
- Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* (2:7)
Some of the lakes near Topar held small numbers and four were at Sorbulak Lake
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* (1:7)
A single male flew over Bartogai Lake
- Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* (2:7)
Six at Topar Lakes and 12 at Sorbulak
- Goosander** *Mergus mergus mergus* (3:7)
At least three at Bartogai Lake
- Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis* (1:7)
Three at Sorbulak Lake were the only ones recorded
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus cristatus* (5:7)
Bartogai, Sorbulak Lake and Topar Lakes each held a few
- Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis* (2:7)
Two at both Topar and Sorbulak Lake
- White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (2:7)
A flock of 96 over Turanga, single at Topar and eight at Sorbulak
- Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* (2:7)
Three at Topar and at least 20 at Sorbulak

Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i> Two at Sorbulak was the only sighting	(1:7)
Pygmy Cormorant <i>Phalarocorax pygmeus</i> Two circled distantly over Topar Lakes	(1:7)
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus minutus</i> Up to three during lunch near Kopa and another three at Sorbulak Lake	(2:7)
Great Egret <i>Ardea alba alba</i> Three near Nurly, seven at Topar and a single Sorbulak.	(3:7)
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea cinerea</i> Recorded at most wetland sites.	(3:7)
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i> Regular sightings throughout, with the highest concentration of 15+ around Kolshengel Village	(6:7)
Eurasian Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps fulvus fulvus</i> Three circled over Kolshengel Village	(1:7)
Eurasian Black Vulture <i>Aegypius monachus</i> A single soared over the Kokpek Pass	(1:7)
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> A single near Nurly and pair exhibiting breeding behaviour at Subulak Lake	(2:7)
Pallid Harrier <i>Circus macrourus</i> Two near Tamgaly and several sightings in the Kolshengel area	(2:7)
Montagu's Harrier <i>Circus pygargus</i> Three near Nurly and singles around Kolshengel	(4:7)
Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus melaschistos</i> (2:7) Singles at Bolshoi Almaty Lake and Tamgaly	
Shikra <i>Accipiter badius cenchroides</i> (2:7) Several sightings around the Illi Delta and Kolshengel Village	
Crested Honey Buzzard <i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i> Three migrants soared amongst the singing White winged Larks near Tamgaly	(1:7)
Common ('Steppe') Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i> A single near the Bolshoi Almaty Lake was the only sighting	(1:7)
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus rufinus</i> Generally quite common in the steppe with breeding pairs found at Bartogai and Tamgaly, up to thirty per day were seen in suitable habitat but none were seen in the high Tien Shan	(6:7)
Greater Spotted Eagle <i>Aquila clanga</i> Three adults circled over Kolshengel Village	(1:7)
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis</i> Two near Tamgaly and singles over Kolshengel Village	(3:7)
Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> Two over the Kokpek Pass and three near Nurly	(2:7)
Booted Eagle <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> Two were seen near Malybai on day 1	(1:7)
Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i> Regularly encountered including a party of over 30 on the Sogaty Plain	(6:7)
Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus</i> Present in low densities throughout, including at over 2000m at the Tien Shan Observatory.	(7:7)

Eurasian Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo subbuteo</i>	(5:7)
Singles encountered in a wide range of habitats including central Almaty	
Peregrine Falcon <i>Falco peregrinus</i>	(1:7)
One over the ridge above the Tien Shan Obs was the only sighting	
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus chloropus</i>	3:7
One or two were present at Kopa, Topar and Sorbulak Lake	
Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra atra</i>	(3:7)
Up to 10 were at Kopa, Topar Lakes and Sorbulak Lake	
Demoiselle Crane <i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	(6:7)
Highest counts were flocks of 22 on the Sogaty Plain and 104 at Alderly, where a pair were seen with a small chick	
Macqueen's Bustard <i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>	(2:7)
Two males were seen at varying distances from Kolshengel Camp where they performed their bizarre display runs	
Ibisbill <i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>	(1:7)
A breeding pair at Bolshoi Almaty Lake gave decent scope views, living up to all expectations	
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus himantopus</i>	(2:7)
Ten were in the Topar area and over 20 at Sorbulak Lake	
Eurasian Stone-curlew <i>Burhinus oedichnemus harterti</i>	(1:7)
One seen by the roadside while crossing the Taukum Sands	
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius curonicus</i>	(5:7)
Noted breeding at Bartogai, Kolshengel, and Sorbulak Lake	
Caspian Plover <i>Charadrius asiaticus</i>	(1:7)
A male in breeding plumage was present at the Kolshengel Camp well on one evening only	
Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	(5:7)
Up to 12 per day were seen away from the high mountains	
Temminck's Stint <i>Calidris temminckii</i>	(2:7)
Up to 15 at the Kolshengel Camp well	
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	(1:7)
A single at Sorbulak Lake was the only record	
Common Redshank <i>Tringa tetanus tetanus</i> and/or <i>ussuriensis/ eurhinus</i>	(2:7)
Two near Nurly were followed by a dozen at Sorbulak Lake	
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>	(1:7)
Five migrants were at Sorbulak Lake.	
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	(5:7)
Up to eight were found at Bartogai, with smaller numbers at Kopa, Kolshengel and Sorbulak Lake	
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	(1:7)
A single at the wetland near Nurly	
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	(1:7)
A single in the company of two Redshank at an artesian well near Nurly	
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus ridibundus</i>	(6:7)
Seen daily away from the Tien Shan Mountains	
Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	(1:7)
A cracking summer plumaged adult was a fortunate discovery at Sorbulak Lake	
Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans cachinnans</i>	(1:7)
About 10 seen rather distantly at Sorbulak Lake, where this species breeds	
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo hirundo</i>	(2:7)

About six at Topar lakes, and a dozen at Sorbulak Lake

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* (1:7)
Half a dozen were noted at Topar Lakes

Black Tern *Chlidonias niger niger* (2:7)
Eight were found at Topar Lakes followed by two at Subulak Lake

White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* (2:7)
Two flew through Kopa and up to 10 at the Topar Lakes complex

Black-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles orientalis arenarius* (3:7)
After three showed well at Nurly, several hundred visited the artesian well at Kolshengel Camp

Rock Dove *Columba livia neglecta* / **Feral Pigeon** (6:7)
Seen almost daily, including a 'pure' looking pair breeding in a manhole in the middle of the Sogaty Plain

Yellow-eyed or Eversmann's (Stock) Dove *Columba eversmanni* (1:7)
A total of about six were found in and around the Turanga grove near Zhealturanghy

Common Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus casiotis* (4:7)
Singles were seen along roadsides, with two at Kolshengel Village

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto stoliczkae* (4:7)
Occasional pairs were seen in Almaty and at Kolshengel

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur turtur* (1:7)
Three were noted in the Kolshengel area

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia (orientalis) meena* (5:7)
Regular sightings, a classic 'bus window job'. Seen well at *El Dorado* alongside Eurasian Turtle Dove for comparison

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus canorus* and/or *subtelephonus* (7:7)
Seen and heard frequently, including in the vicinity of the Tien Shan Observatory at c2600m in heavy snow

Striated Scops Owl *Otus brucei* (1:7)
An extremely fortunate discovery, roosting in full view in the Turanga Forest

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus* (1:7)
Two hunted over steppe near Tamgaly

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus sarudnyi* or *unwini* (1:7)
At least two churring birds was heard in the desert at Kolshengel Camp

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* (3:7)
Noted at Charyn Gorge, Kopa and Sorbulak Lake

Common Swift *Apus apus* (2:7)
At least 500 were seen from the bus between Nurly and Almaty, with a further single over Almaty itself

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (5:7)
Several were seen along roadsides between Almaty and Bartogai, about 50 over Kopa and smaller numbers in the Kolshengel / Zhealturanghy area

European Roller *Coracias garrulous semenowi* (6:7)
Common along roadsides in many lowland areas, and seen almost daily with the exception of the Tien Shan mountains

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops epops (saturata* a possible migrant) (6:7)
Seen abundantly on most days, breeding at Kolshengel Camp

White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucopterus* (1:7)
Seen well at nest hole in Turanga Forest

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa* (6:7)
Abundant in steppe to the north and west of Almaty, especially on the flat plains near Tamgaly

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata* (3:7)

Common at Kolshengel with occasional birds seen in steppe elsewhere

- White-winged Lark** *Melanocorypha leucoptera* (1:7)
At least seven were songflighting just north of Tamgaly, occasionally showing very well in flight at close range chasing Calandra Larks.
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis* (4:7)
Common on the Sogaty Plain, with over 100 noted, small numbers also present around Kolshengel Camp
- Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens heinei* (3:7)
Two were noted on the Sogaty Plain, otherwise this species was most common around Kolshengel Camp
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata magna* (2:7)
Ten at the Taukum Sands and six at Alderly
- Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis dulcivox* (5:7)
Noted in small numbers on the Sogaty Plain, Tamgaly and Kolshengel
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris brandti* (1:7)
Over 50 were noted on the Sogaty Plain, of this distinctive 'monochrome' form
- Pale Martin** *Riparia diluta* (1:7)
Six roamed the lake shore at Bartogai giving repeated close range views
- Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia riparia* (3:7)
Migrants were noted at Nurly, Kolshengel and Sorbulak
- Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* (2:7)
Two were noted in the Kokpek Pass and half a dozen in the Charyn Gorge
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica* (6:7)
Very widespread with highest count at Nurly of over 100
- Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica rufula* (3:7)
Scarce, seen briefly from the bus window near Tamgaly, Kolshengel and Sorbulak
- Common House Martin** *Delichon urbica urbica* (5:7)
Small numbers were encountered, mainly in urban contexts
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris* (5:7)
Noted at Bartogai Camp, on the Sogaty Plain and near Kolshengel
- Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni* (2:7)
Up to half a dozen around the Bolshoi Almaty Lake and along the roadside below the Tien Shan Observatory
- Black-headed (Yellow) Wagtail** *Motacilla flava melanogrisea* (*feldegg* group) (3:7)
Males of this distinctive form were noted at Bartogai, Nurly and Kopa
- Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* (1:7)
A single male was present at the Kolshengel artesian well one evening
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea melanope* (4:7)
A single at Nurly, was followed by several in the Tien Shan area
- 'Masked' (White) Wagtail** *Motacilla (alba) personata* (4:7)
This very distinctive member of the White Wagtail complex is treated as a full species by Kazakh ornithologists. One or two were at several wetter sites in the lowlands
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba* or '*dukhenensis*' (2:7)
Singles at Bartogai and Kolshengel were presumably northbound migrants
- Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasi* (1:7)
A pair showed well downstream from the Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Winter Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i> Several singles were noted in the Tien Shan area	(2:7)
Brown Accentor <i>Prunella fulvescens</i> (perhaps <i>dresseri</i>) At least four were around the Tien Shan Obs	(2:7)
Black-throated Accentor <i>Prunella atrogularis huttoni</i> Up to 15 per day were found at and around the Tien Shan Obs and in the spruce forest below	(2:7)
Rufous Bushchat <i>Cerotrachus galactotes familiaris</i> A singing male showed very well at Nurly, at one stage coming out on to the road	(1:7)
Thrush Nightingale <i>Luscinia Luscinia</i> A single lurked discreetly amongst the migrant fest at <i>El Dorado</i>	(1:7)
Common Nightingale <i>Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi</i> Several individuals of this distinctive and somewhat Bushchat-like race were noted at several localities, more often heard than seen. Eventually seen well at Kolshengel Village	(6:7)
Himalayan Rubythroat <i>Luscinia pectoralis pectoralis</i> Proved elusive in the snow around the Tien Shan Observatory, eventually being seen very well by all	(2:7)
Eversmann's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i> About half a dozen in the Tien Shan Observatory area	(1:7)
Blue-capped Redstart <i>Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus</i> (2:7) Three singing males offered great views in the spruce forests below the Tien Shan Observatory	
Black Redstart <i>Phoenicurus ochuros phoenicuroides</i> (1:7) A single male on the Bolshoi Almaty Lake boulder field was a surprise discovery	
Güldenstadt's Redstart <i>Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis</i> Two males and a female were found on the boulder field at the Bolshoi Almaty Lake, an untypically low elevation for this species	(1:7)
Siberian (Common) Stonechat <i>Saxicola (torquatus) maurus</i> Three were noted between Almaty and Bartogai and singles at Kopa and Tamgaly	(2:7)
Isabelline Wheatear <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i> Common to abundant in most lowland areas, over 100 were seen, especially at Bartogai camp and at Kolshengel where a fledged brood were prominent at the artesian well	(6:7)
Northern Wheatear <i>Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica</i> Three were seen in the Tien Shan Observatory area	(1:7)
Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i> Common in suitable habitat	(6:7)
Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti deserti</i> Two were seen at the artesian well west of Nurly	(1:7)
Blue Rock Thrush <i>Monticola solitarius pandoo</i> Only recorded once, a male in the Charyn Gorge	(1:7)
Eurasian Blackbird <i>Turdus merula intermedius</i> Noted in Almaty, Charyn Gorge and at the Tien Shan Observatory	(4:7)
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i> Small numbers in the spruce forests in the mountains	(2:7)
Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti albiventris</i> Birds were heard at several sites but never showed well to the group as a whole	(4:7)
Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella naevia straminea</i> One was heard singing near Great Almaty Gorge	(1:7)
Savi's Warbler <i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	(1:7)

A single heard reeling at the lunch stop near Nurly

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (6:7)

Noted at most low elevation localities, 20+ at Kolshengel village being the highest concentration

European ('Caspian') Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus* (3:7)

Most numerous among the reedbeds at Kopa, with a few amid the Kolshengel migrant fest

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi* (3:7)

Singles heard at Nurly and Kopa, with half a dozen heard and seen at Sorbulak Lake

Syke's Warbler *Hippolais rama* (1:7)

Only identified with certainty at Nurly, where up to three sang and showed well.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* (1:7)

Two were seen during the 'stroll' across the Sogaty Plain.

Barred Warbler *Sylvia nisoria merzbacheri* (2:7)

Two at Kolshengel and Aldarly proved a real highlight for some members of the group

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* (various races) (3:7)

The identification and taxonomy of Lesser Whitethroats in Kazakhstan represents a major headache, most individuals seen well enough seemingly conforming to either *halimodendri* or *blythii* types

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis rubicola* (2:7)

A female at the Bolshoi Almaty Lake struggled for attention while cohorting with a male Himalayan Rubythroat, two males of this distinctive form at Kolshegel proved a significant identification headache

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*

(6:7)

Singing birds on territory were noted in the spruce forests of the Tien Shan, while migrants were noted in Almaty, Charyn Gorge, Kopa and in abundance at Kolshengel

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei humei*

(7:7)

Encountered at most localities, with predictably the highest accumulations occurring at *El Dorado*

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* (1:7)

Four were located on the edge of the boulder field at the Bolshoi Almaty Lake

'Siberian' Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis* (2:7)

A couple of late migrants were encountered around the Tien Shan Observatory

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* (3:7)

Noted at Kopa, Kolshengel (20+) and Aldarly

Songar Tit *Parus songarus songarus*

(2:7)

A single was located in the grounds of the Tien Shan Observatory

Coal Tit *Parus ater rufipectus* (a member of the crested *aemodius* group) (2:7)

Several in the Tien Shan spruce zone, including a pair breeding in an old Three-toed Woodpecker nest hole

Azure Tit *Parus cyanus tianshanicus* (1:7)

Fantastic views were obtained of a confiding pair in the Charyn Gorge

Great Tit *Parus major* (4:7)

Common in Almaty and sparingly elsewhere

Turkestan Tit *Parus bokharensis turkestanicus* (1:7)

A family party showed well in the Turanga forest

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus coronatus* or *stoliczkae* (4:7)

Recorded at four localities, but proving generally elusive to the group as a whole

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronata* (1:7)

A pair showed well at Tamgaly coming and going from a nest site

- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria* (1:7)
A most welcome male gave itself up to the whole group during torrential rain in the Great Almaty Gorge
- Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus kundoo* (4:7)
A classic 'bus window' job, with several being seen in lowland areas
- 'Turkestan' Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius (isabellinus) phoenicuroides* (6:7)
Noted regularly at a wide range of localities, including several of the *karelini* form while crossing the Taukum Sands
- Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* (either *collurio* or *pallidifrons*) (1:7)
Two at Alderly were the only ones of the trip
- Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach erythronotus* (3:7)
Three singles were seen including one in central Almaty in a supermarket car park!
- Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor* (6:7)
The commonest shrike of the trip, with the highest count of 30+ coming from the Zhealturanghy / Kolshengel area
- Magpie** *Pica pica bactriana* (7:7)
Present in small numbers in most wooded areas
- Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus* (1:7)
A tumbling flock of 17 were over the Bolshoi Almaty Lake
- Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis* (2:7)
Numerous around the Tien Shan Observatory, with an estimated flock of around 200 seen at one stage crossing the valley over the spruce zone
- Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula soemmerringii* (5:7)
Regularly noted while travelling through the lowlands
- Rook** *Corvus frugilegus* (5:7)
A common roadside species in agricultural areas
- (Eastern) Carrion Crow** *Corvus (corone) orientalis* (6:7)
Common only seemingly absent in the mountains
- Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis* (1:7)
A single flew over the Kolshengel camp and another seen from the bus while travelling towards Alderly
- Common Raven** *Corvus corax* probably *tibetanus* rather than *laurencei* (*syn. subcorax*) (3:7)
A couple were at Bartogai and the Tien Shan.
- Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus* (4:7)
Another regular roadside species
- Rose-coloured Starling** *Sturnus roseus* (5:7)
Regular scattered small flocks were found, but by far the highest count was at a breeding colony near the Charyn Gorge which held a conservative 2000+
- Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis tristis* (7:7)
Regularly encountered usually around habitations
- Saxaul Sparrow** *Passer ammodendri ammodendri* (1:7)
Seen mainly in flight commuting between Zhealturanghy Village and the walled cemetery, eventually giving acceptable scope views to most of the group preening on overhead wires
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus domesticus* (5:7)
Apparently confined to urban contexts, fairly common in Almaty and surrounding areas
- Indian Sparrow** *Passer indicus bactrianus* (5:7)
Regarded as part of a separate species by Kazakh ornithologists, due to its migratory behaviour and differing breeding ecology. The commonest sparrow overall and smart with it
- Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus* (1:7)
A male was observed drinking at the Kolshengel Camp artesian well

Eurasian Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus dilutus</i> A few scattered records in lowland areas	(3:7)
Rock Sparrow <i>Petronia petronia exigua</i> Three were seen in the vicinity of the crumbling old bridge over the Charyn Gorge	(1:7)
Red-fronted Serin <i>Serinus pusillus</i> Showed well around the dam at the Bolshoi Almaty Lake	(2:7)
European Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris turkestanicus</i> Only seen in central Almaty	(1:7)
'Grey-headed' (European) Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis/caniceps paropanisi</i> Seen regularly in mainly upland areas, a very different and distinctive form	(4:7)
Common Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina bella</i> Common around Bartogai	(4:7)
Hodgson's Mountain Finch <i>Leucosticte nemoricola altaica</i> Flocks totalling over 100 birds were at and around the Tien Shan Observatory	(2:7)
Brandt's Mountain Finch <i>Leucosticte brandti</i> An excellent chance discovery of a pair of this fundamentally high altitude species near the Tien Shan Observatory, again presumably snow driven refugees	(1:7)
Desert Finch <i>Rhodopechys obsoleta</i> (3:7) Two were present at Nurly and Kolshengel Village, great birds	
Mongolian Trumpeter Finch <i>Bucanetes mongolica</i> Several were seen around Bartogai Camp and the Red Canyon, and over 30 recorded during the 'stroll' over the Sogaty Plain	(3:7)
Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis</i> 12 in the Kokpek Pass was the highest count, followed by five at Tamgaly	(3:7)
Red-mantled Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys rhodochlamys</i> and/or <i>kotschubeii</i> Proved fairly elusive at Tien Shan Obs, with most sightings being of unsatisfactory flyovers	(2:7)
White-winged Grosbeak <i>Mycerobas carnipes carnipes</i> Present at a low density around the Tien Shan Observatory	(2:7)
White-capped Bunting <i>Emberiza stewarti</i> Three males gave neck-aching views in a narrow steep sided gully in the Kokpek Pass	(1:7)
Rock Bunting <i>Emberiza cia par</i> Two serenaded the group during lunch in the Kokpek Pass	(1:7)
Grey-necked Bunting <i>Emberiza buchanani neobscura</i> Common in the Bartogai area and also noted at Nurly	(3:7)
Common Reed Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhuloides</i> A single was heard during the lunch stop near Nurly, although the windy conditions contrived against any sightings	(1:7)
Red-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza bruniceps</i> 'The' Bunting species of lowland open environments, commonly occurring except in the high mountains	(6:7)
Corn Bunting <i>Miliaria calandra buturlini</i> Singles were noted in a couple of lowland areas	(2:7)

Mammals

Tolai Hare <i>Lepus tolai</i>	1:7	Red Squirrel <i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>	(1:7)
Goitered Gazelle <i>Gazella subgutterosa</i>	(1:7)	Corsac Fox <i>Vulpus corsac</i>	(3:7)
ibex <i>Capra ibex</i>	(2:7)	Red Deer <i>Cervus elaphus</i>	(1:7)
Great Gerbil <i>Rhombomys opimus</i>	(3:7)	Muskrat <i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>	(1:7)
Red Pika <i>Ochotona rutila</i>	(3:7)	Stoat <i>Mustella erminea</i>	(1:7)
Large-toothed Souslik <i>Spermophilus fulvus</i>	(3:7)		

Reptiles and Amphibians

Horsfield Tortoise <i>Testudo horsfieldi</i>	(2:7)	Marsh Frog <i>Rana ridibunda</i>	(4:7)
Agama Lizard <i>Agama agama</i>	(4:7)		