

Birding Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan (& Korgalzhyn extension)

Naturetrek Tour Report

11th – 26th May 2026



Altai Accentor



Pallas's Gull



Isabelline Wheatears



White-winged Lark

Tour report by Andy Smith



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Andy Smith (leader) and Chris Griffin (additional extension leader), and Harish Sharma (local guide) with eight Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 11th May

The group assembled at Heathrow in the late afternoon ahead of their overnight flight to Almaty via Istanbul.

Day 2

Tuesday 12th May

Having arrived on time in Almaty at 8.00am, we cleared formalities, met up with our local team, and hit the ground running. It was a cool, grey morning, following a lengthy period of heavy rain. Undeterred, we headed west out of the city with the unseen peaks of the Tien Shan on our left and then, after an hour or so, turned up into the famous Keskelen valley.

We ate a welcome al fresco brunch, then began birding in earnest. Activity was somewhat subdued due to the cool, damp conditions, but perseverance paid off, and we ultimately saw quite an exciting range of species. These included a pair of White-crowned Penduline Tits, a few Azure Tits, two Brown Dippers, two or three Blue Whistling Thrushes, and several European Rollers. There were European Cuckoos and Oriental Turtle Doves too, plus a Cinereous Vulture, a Booted Eagle and an impressive passage of Crested Honey Buzzards: we counted over twenty in a couple of hours.

In the late afternoon, satisfied with our first day, and with the rigours of our overnight journey catching up with us, we headed back to Almaty and checked into our hotel in good time for our first dinner together.

Day 3

Wednesday 13th May

After a slight delay waiting for a last group member to arrive in Almaty, we set off eastwards out of the city. It was a lovely clear morning, and the snow-capped ramparts of the mighty Tien Shans on our right flank looked magnificent in the early sunshine. The green farmland around Almaty gave way to more arid country as we progressed, and by lunchtime we had reached the rugged hills that signalled the start of the Kokpek Pass. We stopped for lunch at an abandoned café at the start of the pass, where we enjoyed great views of Pied Wheatears and both Rock and Red-headed Buntings, then pushed on into the pass proper. Flocks of Rosy Starlings whizzed overhead, and a pair of handsome Lesser Grey Shrikes sat sentinel in a small roadside tree. Our target here was White-capped Bunting and, walking up a narrow, rocky, side valley, we fairly soon found a singing male, and with a little effort we all succeeded in getting some great views of him. Also here were some more Rock Buntings and Pied Wheatears, plus a brief Common Rock Thrush and an impressive adult Golden Eagle.

We pushed on, and a little later turned off the tar road onto a track across part of the Sogety plain, a vast area of open, dry steppe. A short ad hoc stop to get a sense of the place and have a bit of a leg stretch produced Horned and Greater Short-toed Larks, a Tawny Pipit, some displaying Isabelline Wheatears, a couple of Black-bellied Sandgrouse and two delightful little Toad-headed Agamas. Our destination was an artesian spring-fed pool which we hoped would bring in some thirsty birds. Isabelline Wheatears chased around us as we sat and waited in the late afternoon sunshine, and a steady trickle of small birds dropped in to drink, including several Linnets, a Rock

Sparrow and, best of all, a pair of smart little Mongolian Finches. After a very relaxed and enjoyable hour or so we called it a day, and headed off to our dinner and lodgings.

Day 4

Thursday 14th May

A lovely sunny morning greeted us when we woke up at the Charyn River Hunting lodge, and a bit of pre-breakfast birding introduced us to the local Cuckoos, Nightingales, Azure Tits and Balkhash Water Frogs, alongside a few Hume's Warblers, a couple of Common Whitethroats and a pair of Mistle Thrushes.

Post breakfast, we set out onto the Sogety Plain again and had a rich couple of hours, with great views of a trio of Asian Desert Warblers, several Isabelline and Desert Wheatears, a few Tawny Pipits and some singing Greater Short-toed Larks. A pair of Mongolian Finches put in a brief cameo in a patch of scrub, and a Great Grey Shrike perched on a bush in the distance. Along a rough track across the plain, we saw more Desert and Isabelline Wheatears, plus a Long-legged Buzzard, a Steppe Eagle and a series of Goitered (Turkmen) Gazelles.

At the dramatic Charyn Gorge we walked out to a series of viewpoints to admire the superb scenery, and then ate our picnic lunch in a yurt, expertly commandeered by our fixer Damir. Notable wildlife seen here included a trio of Tolai Hares chasing around in the way that hares do.

A little later, back on the other side of the plain, we walked along the base of a dry rocky escarpment, which afforded fabulous views out over the vast landscape. Our chief target here was Grey-necked Bunting, and as walked we enjoyed some fabulous views of them, alongside the now familiar Pied Wheatears and Tawny Pipits. We also found at least three pairs of Red-tailed Shrikes, a flock of a dozen or more Mongolian Finches, a surprise male Ortolan Bunting and a number of impressive Great Gerbils.

It had been an enjoyable day and, driving back across the plain to the main road, we concluded proceedings in style with great views of a few Black-bellied Sandgrouse, a little herd of Goitered Gazelles and a close Golden Eagle.

Day 5

Friday 15th May

Some more early morning birding at the hunting lodge turned up a Kingfisher and a singing Greenish Warbler, and then, with breakfast completed, we set off toward the Kyrgyz border. Roadside Pied and Isabelline Wheatears and a couple of Black-bellied Sandgrouse enlivened the early drive, and at a brief wooded river crossing we paused for a few minutes and collectively enjoyed sightings of Common Rosefinches, a White-throated Dipper, some Alpine Swifts and another Golden Eagle.

We stopped for fuel in the town of Kegen and then by the river at Qarqara, where found Ruddy Shelducks, Lapwings, a Common Redshank, a couple of Common Terns and several Sand Martins. We reached the border at 10.30am (11.30am in Kyrgyzstan). It was busy and our passage was slow. Binocular-less and waiting in line, we added Himalayan Griffon and Northern Wheatear to the list, before finally making it into Kyrgyzstan. A lakeside lunch ensued, with some great birds including several Black-necked Grebes, four Ferruginous Ducks, a pair of Whooper Swans, a couple of dazzling Citrine Wagtails and a surprise Upland Buzzard.

We arrived at our lovely guesthouse in Karakol in the mid-afternoon and, after a quick turn-around, headed out to the remarkable sandstone rock formations at Jeti Oluz some little way out of town. A pleasant walk here in the late afternoon sunshine produced fabulous views of Grey-headed Goldfinches, Red-fronted Serins, a Hobby and a pair of Brown Dippers.

Day 6

Saturday 16th May

After an early breakfast, we left Karakol and drove through the dawn, west along the shore of Lake Iskyl, and then south and up into the Barskoon valley. Through the course of the morning and early afternoon we made a series of stops, gaining altitude all the time. We passed through spruce forest, treeline scrub and high meadows, and ended up in a realm of rocks, scree and snow patches at a lofty and decidedly breathless 3800m+. The scenery was consistently dramatic and the birding excellent. Highlights included Himalayan Rubythroat, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, White-browed Tit Warbler, Blue-capped Redstarts, Black-throated and Brown Accentors, and Willow (Songar) Tit.



Chonachu Valley



Barskoon Valley

Unexpected among this sensational haul, however, was a trio of Altai Accentors, one of which we watched at close range for several minutes as it sang from the rocks just in front of us. What a great little bird! Other notables included a Bearded Vulture, both Red-billed and Alpine Choughs, a White-throated Dipper, several Plain Mountain Finches, Hume's and Greenish Warblers, Eastern Black Redstart and dozens of Siberian Marmots. It was a rich day indeed!

Day 7

Sunday 17th May

We were up and away from Karakol early again this morning: our destination was the Chonachu valley, an hour or so to the east. A first stop in an area of open farmland with patches of scrub and occasional trees produced the hoped for Pine Buntings, including a female busy nest building in the base of a patch of thorny scrub. A male Siberian Stonechat, a Northern Wheatear, a Common Whitethroat and some Oriental Turtle Doves added further interest here. After this, and following the powerful, fast flowing Chonachu river, we proceeded up into the valley proper, and found ourselves in a breathtakingly beautiful world of extensive alpine meadows flanked by spruce- and juniper-covered slopes, topped by high scree and towering snow-capped peaks.

We stopped at the roadside to listen to a White's Thrush singing unseen deep in the spruce forest, then took a walk on the riverside meadows and found a trio of Ibisbills. A careful approach allowed us some lovely views of

these beautiful and iconic birds, and we were able to appreciate all the features of their striking plumage, and something of their habits as they foraged along the riverbank.

Walking up the slope away from the river, through carpets of pink Bird's-eye Primroses nodding in the breeze, we reached a promising area of treeline juniper scrub. A rewarding hour or so here produced a series of great birds, including Red-mantled Rosefinches, White-winged Grosbeaks, a Black-throated Accentor, a pair of Red-fronted Serins and a couple of singing Himalayan Rubythroats

We ate our picnic lunch back down by the river, where a passing Bearded Vulture kept the avian interest going, then started to make our way back down the valley. A couple of stops in the spruce forest brought us encounters with Blue-capped and Eversmann's Redstarts, a Steppe Buzzard and a number of Hume's Warblers, and then it was time to start making our way back to Karakol. It had been another excellent day!

Day 8

Monday 18th May

Having departed from Karakol after a leisurely breakfast, we retraced our steps back towards the Kazakh border. A couple of stops a little out of town, in farmland with reed-filled ditches and patches of scrub, proved pleasantly productive. In a short space of time, we had great views of Paddyfield and Grasshopper Warblers, Common Rosefinches, Citrine Wagtails, Red-tailed Shrikes and Corn Buntings. Meanwhile, Corn Crakes rasped unseen from the long grass, a Booted Eagle passed overhead, a Syke's Warbler popped up, singing in a willow clump, and Kyrgyzstan's ubiquitous Rooks kept up their usual clamour in the roadside trees.

We ate lunch by the lake where we had stopped a few days previously, and enjoyed a similar suite of birds, augmented this time by a Marsh Harrier and a pair of Garganeys. Shortly before the border, we stopped again, in an area of high-altitude grassland. Little Ringed Plovers and both Masked and Citrine Wagtails showed very well by a small pool, and a gang of six Upland Buzzards hanging in the wind over a nearby ridge were impressive indeed, but the big prize here was a Richard's Pipit, a scarce bird in this region, which we found after a short search, and of which we enjoyed great views. Our passage back through the border was quick and smooth, and with the time change between the two countries in our favour, we had the satisfaction of arriving back in Kazakhstan before we'd left Kyrgyzstan!

We pushed on, pausing briefly to look at an Egyptian Vulture on the ground with a bunch of Black (-eared) Kites, then took a short walk in a rather beautiful valley with grassy, boulder-strewn slopes. Here there were Corn, Red-headed and Grey-necked Buntings, Isabelline Wheatears, Tawny Pipits and a Golden Eagle: not a bad haul! A last stop by a cemetery in a rather arid open region produced fabulous views of twenty or so delightful Lesser Kestrels, a foraging Hoopoe and a brood of fledgling Isabelline Wheatears, which made a lovely end to the day's birding. It was time to put our heads down and boot it back to Almaty.

Day 9

Tuesday 19th May

Having left Almaty after breakfast, we drove north-east to Kapchagai lake, where we spent the morning exploring. A rich variety of birds presented themselves, and we enjoyed great views of Dalmatian Pelicans, Black and Little Terns, Caspian and Black-headed Gulls, Great Egrets, Great Crested Grebes, Red-crested Pochards, Great Cormorants and lots more. Passerines included Black-headed and Citrine Wagtails, a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin,

Blyth's Reed and Greenish Warblers, Red-tailed Shrikes and many Sand Martins. There were Bee-eaters and Hoopoes too, plus a Cuckoo, a Hobby and a couple of Rollers. It all made for a satisfying time, and after a picnic lunch on the shore we set off towards the Taukum desert.

The action continued as we hurtled across the vast spaces of steppe and sub-desert: a pair of Demoiselle Cranes with two downy chicks, a Rosy Starling colony in a rubble pile, Long-legged Buzzards, Rollers and Lesser Grey Shrikes. It was all good, and soon enough we arrived at the ramshackle truck-stop village of Kenshengel, where we investigated a tiny area of trees behind a disused petrol station. Initially, it looked decidedly unpromising but the more we looked the more we saw. In half an hour or so, we'd chalked up two Barred Warblers, a couple of Nightingales, a male Red-backed Shrike, three Lesser Whitethroats, at least ten Spotted Flycatchers, a Chiffchaff, a flock of fifty or so Common Rosefinches and several dozen Rosy Starlings. Not bad at all for a few scraggy trees and bushes in the middle of nowhere! A little later we arrived at our yurt camp and settled in, prior to dinner.

Day 10

Wednesday 20th May

We were up at dawn and away from camp a little later: we drove some way into the desert. Long-legged Buzzards, Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Isabelline Wheatears, Calandra Larks, both Turkestan and Greater Short-toed Larks and a good number of Goitered Gazelles enlivened our progress, but we were intent on more elusive targets. Bustards and plovers were our quarry, and after some little time an Asian Houbara was spotted a few hundred metres ahead of us. We enjoyed good telescope views of this mighty but very wary creature, before it took to the air and flew with powerful wingbeats way off into the distance. A little further on, we found some Greater Sand Plovers with downy chicks, which were a lovely sight, and then it was time to head back to camp for some breakfast.

In the late morning, we drove out to a derelict farmstead with a few bushes and trees, where we found a Nightingale, a singing Sykes's Warbler, some Red-headed Buntings, several Spotted Flycatchers, thirty Common Rosefinches and a very smart Indian Golden Oriole. There were a Roller and a couple of Tawny Pipits here too, plus a Little Owl roosting in a crevice in a rubble pile, and a range of reptiles comprising a couple of Horsfield's Tortoises, and both Steppe and Toad-headed Agamas.

Turning our attention to a nearby waterhole, we noticed a couple of sandgrouse hunkered down among the vegetation along the waterline. There had been a number of beefy Black-bellied flying around, but these fellows, although we couldn't see them clearly, somehow felt a bit different. We approached cautiously, and it soon became clear that these were Pallas's Sandgrouse, a big prize for all of us. Delighted, we all had a good look, then approached more closely and enjoyed some great views of these enigmatic and very beautiful birds. Finally, unnerved by us, they took to the wing and hurtled off into the distance. Two more joined them, and then they happened to fly close to a group of Black-bellied Sandgrouse, allowing for a wonderful comparison: the Pallas's slim, attenuated and very elegant, the Black-bellied clearly larger and much more heavily built. Fantastic!

Lunch and a siesta back at camp followed, and then, in the late afternoon, we headed back over to Kenshengel village to explore an area of shallow pools and scrub. A rich couple of hours ensued here, with great views of a satisfying range of species including Temminck's Stints and Little Ringed Plovers, several European Bee-eaters, two Hoopoes, a Roller, a Lesser Grey Shrike, a couple of Blyth's Reed Warblers, a few Red-headed Buntings and various other bits and pieces.

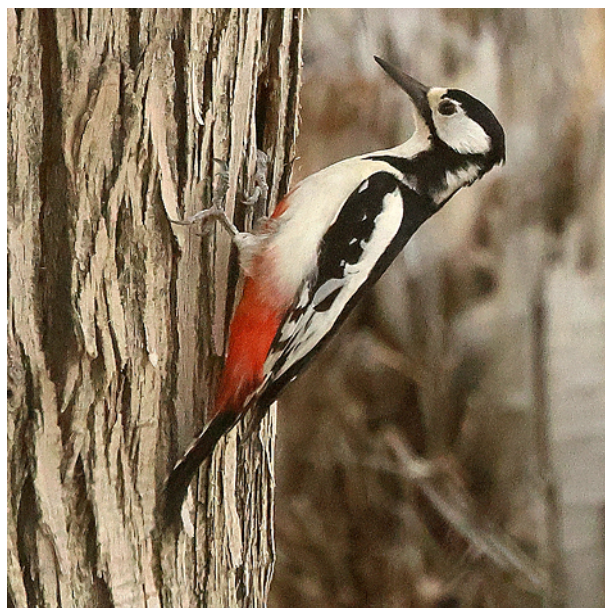
Day 11

Thursday 21st May

Having got up at first light again, we drove eastwards through extensive vegetated sand dunes towards the distant village of Topar. We made a number roadside stops along the way, and encountered a nice range of birds, including a pair of Chukars, several Cuckoos, a Steppe Grey Shrike, a couple of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins, two Barred Warblers, a singing Sykes's Warbler, and lots of Crested and Turkestan Short-toed Larks. We paused in Topar to collect some picnic supplies, and lucked in to a flock of seventy White Pelicans, gloriously white in the blazing sunshine as they soared and circled their way overhead.



Saxaul Sparrow



White-winged Woodpecker

A little later we reached the stretch of Turunga poplar woodland that we were aiming for, and set about searching for the special birds of this park-like habitat. The prizes came thick and fast: Yellow-eyed Pigeon, Saxaul Sparrow, 'Turkestan' Tit and White-winged Woodpecker all showed well in rapid succession, and it was a happy crew that sat down to late breakfast! A lengthier exploration followed and brought more encounters with the same four "specials", plus a supporting cast of Rollers, Hoopoes, Spotted Flycatchers, Blyth's Reed Warblers and a brief Shikra.

Retracing our steps, we ate a picnic lunch in Topar, then made a series of stops at various lakes and wetlands along the way, adding sightings of Great Egret, Common and Ruddy Shelducks, Garganey, Temminck's Stint, Kingfisher and White-crowned Penduline Tit. One small mud-fringed lake held a number of waders, and as we pulled up to check them out, we were amazed to find that they were all Terek Sandpipers, twenty-seven in all. A last scan in the dunes sometime later finally produced a decent sighting of the hoped-for Bimaculated Lark, but sadly not for all. Never mind though: it had been a great day!

Day 12

Friday 22nd May

A warm, windy, overcast night gave way to a still dawn, with a promise of rain. With hope in our hearts, we set out for a last Caspian Plover search. Despite a great deal of scanning, we were out of luck: Goitered Gazelles, Brown-necked Ravens, Black-bellied Sandgrouse and the regular larks and wheatears were our rewards. After a couple of hours, persistent rain set in, and forced us back to camp for breakfast.

Breakfasted and packed, we left the camp and began our journey back to Almaty, stopping for a while to explore an area of trees and gardens at Kenshengel. The place was full of migrants, and in a short space of time, despite the continuous rain, we found over thirty Hume's and twenty Blyth's Reed Warblers, five Lesser Whitethroats, three Lesser Grey Shrikes, twenty Spotted Flycatchers, thirty Oriental Turtle Doves, thirty Black Kites, a pair of Desert Finches and a Hoopoe. The rain finally got the better of us, however, so we continued on our way. The rain accompanied us all the way back to Almaty, where we arrived in the mid-afternoon.

Day 13 / Korgalzhyn steppe extension Day 1

Saturday 23rd May

Some of the group departed for the airport for flights back to the UK very early in the morning. The rest of us had a slightly more civilized departure time, and after a spell at the airport and an hour or so in the air, found ourselves in a very different place at around 8.30am: Astana and the northern steppes!

Having met up with Naturetrek colleague Chris Griffin and some of his group starting the main tour in a few days' time, we found our driver and bus, and headed swiftly out of the airport and westwards away from the city. The terrain was flat, open and agricultural, a mixture of grassland and arable. After half an hour or so, we stopped by a reed- and poplar-fringed lake to see what we could find. A thin, high-pitched call alerted us to a penduline tit building its nest, but this was a European Penduline Tit, not the White-crowned ones that we'd seen down south. Similarly, the next bird to get our attention, singing from some scrub, was a fine little Booted Warbler, not the similar Sykes's that we had enjoyed so much down in the Taukum Desert. The interest continued with a steady stream of other good birds: a couple of singing Bluethroats, some Western Yellow Wagtails, a Red-backed Shrike, a pair of Siberian Stonechats, a Common Rosefinch and a Reed Bunting. Meanwhile, a Marsh Harrier quartered the reeds, a Cuckoo and a Hobby flew overhead, a Grasshopper Warbler sang from deep in the herbage and a Quail called in one of the fields. It was a good start!

Continuing on our way, noting Red-footed Falcons, Common Kestrels and Bee-eaters as we proceeded, we dropped down to an extensive shallow lake and marsh system spreading out on both sides of the road. There were birds everywhere! On one side of us a flock of over a hundred Ruffs, including males in full regalia (black, white, chestnut and chequerboard) were feeding and displaying, while on the other, a pair of Whooper Swans attended a nest and a couple of mighty Dalmatian Pelicans sat on a grassy island. Ducks of many species thronged the water, Black-necked Grebes popped up in front of us, dazzling White-winged Terns hawked back and forth, our first Black-winged Pratincoles flew over, and other waders included Wood Sandpipers, Temminck's Stints, Black-winged Stilts and even some Marsh Sandpipers, which were chasing around in courtship flights. It was a lot to take in, and utterly marvellous!

We ate a picnic lunch on the grassland nearby, with Steppe Marmots and Red-footed Falcons for company, and then continued on our way. A big target for all of us was Sociable Lapwing, and with this in mind we paused in an area of vast arable fields which we knew to be good for this rare and enigmatic species. "Needle" and "haystack" were words that came to mind as we scanned across the vastness of the landscape, but our information was good, and pretty soon we found our quarry, thankfully close to the road. A careful approach allowed everyone great views. We could see three, which appeared to be a pair and a second male. What we took to be the male of the pair seemed to be trying to divert the attentions of the second male, although it was hard to be sure. Whatever was happening, it was great to watch and, because we stood still and quiet, the birds actually came closer to us, allowing

us a perfect appreciation of the intricacies of their markings: what handsome creatures they are! Elated, we made ready to leave, just as a fourth bird appeared: this was a notable little gathering!



Sykes's Warbler



Sociable Lapwing

Meanwhile, as we stood in our arable field enjoying the lapwings, we also had our first decent views of Pallid Harriers and Black Larks, and along the road we added White-winged Lark to the list. Things were falling into place very nicely, and it was a happy crew that arrived at our guesthouse in Korgalzhyn village some little time later.

Korgalzhyn steppe extension Day 2

Sunday 24th May

Breakfasted and away shortly after dawn, we soon found ourselves out on the vastness of the steppe. White-winged and Black Larks were everywhere, which were a real treat for all of us, and, along with innumerable European Skylarks, the babel of lark song was an absolute joy to hear! Other common roadside birds included Northern Wheatears, Tawny Pipits, Booted Warblers (wherever there was a patch of scrub) and masses of Western Yellow Wagtails. There were White-winged Terns more or less everywhere too (such lovely birds!) and big colonies of Sand Martins in the banks of the meandering water courses. A couple of close Pallid Harrier fly-pasts added further quality to proceedings, and we also saw a sizeable herd of Saiga Antelopes, a Corsac Fox carrying prey, several Tolai Hares and a number of hefty Steppe Marmots.

As the morning progressed, we made a series of stops and short walks, mostly by lakes. Highlights were too numerous to mention, but included Dalmatian Pelicans, Pallas's Gulls, Demoiselle Cranes, Black and Gull-billed Terns, hundreds of Little Stints, a surprise male Ortolan Bunting and a couple of Steppe Eagles. At one notable lake, there was a nesting colony of Black-winged Pratincoles along the shoreline, and an astonishing 2500+ Red-necked Phalaropes out on the water! It was all pretty splendid, but all too soon we had to return to the guesthouse for lunch.

In the mid-afternoon we set out again in a different direction. A quartet of Eurasian Golden Orioles at the edge of the village delayed us for a while, but we were soon out on the steppe again with its Black Larks, Bee-eaters, Yellow Wagtails and Northern Wheatears. Heading out to an adjacent settlement, we enjoyed great views of Hoopoes, Lesser Grey Shrikes and Rosy Starlings on the approaches, and a brief Merlin (of the pale local form) in the village itself. The village sat by a lake, and the muddy shoreline was thronged with waders, including Little and Temminck's Stints, Terek, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers, Kentish Plovers and even a few Turnstones. There were a number of Slender-billed Gulls here too, and a European Honey Buzzard flew overhead.

We finished up at another nearby lake, with an island hosting a large mixed gull colony. Most were Caspians, but at one end there were around a hundred gorgeous Pallas's Gulls, many with downy chicks. They presented a wonderful spectacle in the late afternoon sunshine. Elsewhere on the lake there were a couple of Caspian Terns, another 1500+ Red-necked Phalaropes, and a sprinkling of other waders, including a number of Pied Avocets and some Grey Plovers in stunning breeding plumage. More than content with our 'Big Day' we returned to the guest house for dinner.

Korgalzhyn steppe extension Day 3

Monday 25th May

Today we took yet another direction out of the village. Vast rolling steppes once again opened out before us, offering a magnificent prospect. White-winged Larks proved particularly numerous in this stretch, and we enjoyed some fabulous views of them, alongside a couple of close Pallid Harriers and a flock of flying Greater Flamingoes. We spent a bit of time walking down to one interesting reed-fringed lake and found a host of great birds, including a few White-headed Ducks, a Ferruginous Duck, several Red-crested Pochards, both Whooper and Mute Swans, dozens of Glossy Ibises and a Red-necked Grebe. Four Pygmy Cormorants flying over were a bit of a surprise, and in the reeds we found Paddyfield, Great Reed and Savi's Warblers, Bluethroats and Bearded Reedlings.

We finished the morning at another shallower, mud-fringed lake where we enjoyed a nice range of waders, plus a couple of Caspian Terns and other bits and pieces. We were just about to leave, when we noticed a couple of small plovers hunkered down in a hollow in the broken ground quite close to us. A closer inspection showed them to be a pair of Caspian Plovers: how amazing! They were such beautiful little birds: long-legged, long-winged, slender-billed and elegantly marked. The male particularly, with his orange breast and black cummerbund, was an exquisite-looking thing. We all enjoyed great views of these very special birds, made all the more special for those of us at the end of our tour who had missed them down south.

After lunch at the guest house, we took our leave and retraced our steps to Astana. Needless to say, we made a series of stops en route, and enjoyed repeat encounters with lots of the birds we'd seen on the way out a couple of days previously. These included great views of Pallid Harriers, Red-footed Falcons, Demoiselle Cranes and Sociable Lapwings, plus another Red-necked Grebe (this one on a nest), a pair of Slavonian Grebes, and even a couple of Eurasian Bitterns in some kind of courtship flight. It was all very rich. Soon enough, we arrived in high-rise Astana and settled into our comfortable hotel.

Korgalzhyn steppe extension Day 4

Tuesday 26th May

Chris and his contingent departed for Almaty in the small hours, ready for their main tour around Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, while the rest of us had a more leisurely start. Our check-in went smoothly, our flights were on time, and we all arrived safely back at Heathrow several hours later. It had been a brilliant trip!

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek email list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers.

naturetrek.co.uk/e-newsletter-signup

Scan to
sign up!



Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, Bluesky and X and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers, exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



[instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays](https://www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays)



[facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays](https://www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays)



naturetrek.bsky.social



x.com/naturetrektours (formerly Twitter)

Species lists

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026													
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>														4
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>													3	15
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>				2			2					3	10	10
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>													14	15
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>										4		5	30	8
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>			2	70		8	60	4	5	30	2			
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>													3	
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>								20		2				15
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>				4			4							1
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>												3	70	100s
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>				5			10					2		5
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>							2			4		8	1	25
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>				1								10	5	35
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>				50			100	5				5	10	10
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>													2	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				20		3	20	15				15		10
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>												3		2
Common Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>							4							
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>	2			1	2	3	4	1		1				
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>												2H	2H	
Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	10	1	4	4			2			2				
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>														70
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>														2
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>														3
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>								25		1		4	10	6
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				6			15	2				3	1	12
Asian Houbara	<i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>										1				
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	3	1	3	2	3		3	3		5		7	6	3

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>									7					
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>		2	5	3				20	75	40	20			
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>		1												
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis meena</i>	5		1		1	4	5		2		30			
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>														2
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	1	1	H	1	2		2	3		1				
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus casiotis</i>	5	1	2	1	2	3	5							
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	10	10	10	25	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-eyed Pigeon	<i>Columba eversmanni</i>										6				
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>				3			1	30	50	2	15	1	3	4
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>												1		
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>												1H		
Corn Crake	<i>Crex crex</i>							2H							
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>								1						
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				50			50	10		1			10	10
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>													17	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>								2		2		15	50+	100+
Ibisbill	<i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>						3								
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>								1						
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>													20	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>													2	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Thinornis dubius</i>							1	6	7				6	H
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>				9			6	12		2		15	25	50
Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>												4		2
Caspian Plover	<i>Anarhynchus asiaticus</i>														2
Greater Sand Plover	<i>Anarhynchus leschenaultii crassirostris</i>								1	15	4	1			
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>													4	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>														2
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>												1	1	2
Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>										27			12	15
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				1		4		1				2		

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>													4000	2+
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>												15	10	10
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>												10	5	10
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				1				1		1			2	2
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>														1H
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>													3	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>												300+	50	50
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>													2	2
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>								8	6	2		10	12+	5
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>													25	
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>													300+	70+
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>												10	50	30
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>								12						2
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>													2	2
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>								15					2	
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>												250	100+	100s
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>								25					5	30
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>				2			1	8				5		2
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>													20	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>							5	50				10	100+	100+
Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyiaetus ichthyiaetus</i>								1				3	100+	3
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>												1	2	
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>				1				20	3		7	25	100s	50+
Lesser Black-backed (Steppe) Gull	<i>Larus fuscus barabensis</i>													2	
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>				1										
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>														4
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>								100+		2		10	50+	
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>													50	70
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>										250				
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>								30				4	7	7
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>														2

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026													
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	1						1							
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>								5		2	1	2	1	3
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				1			3	6		2		3	2	2
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>				2										
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	H	2		2	10		15			3	4	3	10	10
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>									1		1			
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>		2H	2											
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>					1	1								
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>							1							
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>													1	
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	20													
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>	2													
Himalayan Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>				1										
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>							1							
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>		1												
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	1	1	1				1							
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>		1	2										2	2
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>		1	1	1			1							
Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>										1				
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	2		1		2	1			2				
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>												7	5	10
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>							2	3				20	5	12
Black(-eared) Kite	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	10	2	5	15	5	3	25	15	5	30	40	10	1	3
Common (Western Steppe) Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>						2	2							
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>				1			6							
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>			4	2	3		3	3	14	15	10	1		
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>				1			1	3	4	5	3		4	1
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	12	15	2				5	30	3	12	5			1
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>		2						5	10	H	6	12	10	6
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>				1						1				
White-winged Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucopterus</i>										4				

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026													
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>				1			25							
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	1	1	2	3			2	8	3	12	2	10	6	10
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>												25	5	15
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>													1	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	1			1				1		2	1	5	2	
Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>									1					
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>													4	
a golden oriole	<i>Oriolus sp.</i>							1							
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			1								2			
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>		2	1				1	10	2	4	3	1	5	1
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>								1	1		1	1	1	3
Red-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>			6	2		2	10	8	1	2	1			
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>					10									
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis</i>					2									
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	10	10		15	35	25	20	10		1	2	30	10	10
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula soemmerringii</i>	15	20	2	50	✓		50	25	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>									6	1	20			
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax tibetanus</i>				4	1	1						3		
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>	6	2		5	5	6	10	5		5				
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone sharpii</i>												10	5	2
White-crowned Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz coronatus coronatus</i>	2+H									1				
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>												1		
Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus tianschanicus</i>	2		4	5										
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	5	8	6	3		1	4	1			2			
'Turkestan' Tit	<i>Parus major turkestanicus</i>										6				
Willow (Songar) Tit	<i>Poecile montanus songarus</i>					1	2								
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>														3+
White-winged Lark	<i>Alauda leucoptera</i>												10	30	50+
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis dulcivox</i>				6			4H					25	100+	100s

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata magna</i>		1	1	2				5	5	20	4			
(Brandt's) Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris brandti</i>		6												
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis</i>		5	5						✓					
Bimaculated Lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata</i>									2	4				
Black Lark	<i>Melanocorypha yeltoniensis</i>												15	100s	30+
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa</i>								6	50	10	25			
Turkestan Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala heinei</i>									✓	✓	25			
Booted Warbler	<i>Iduna caligata</i>												5	7	5
Sykes's Warbler	<i>Iduna rama</i>							1		2	3	1			
Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>							8	3H	1H			1H		3+2 H
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	5H			1H	1		1+3 H	20	3	10	25	2H	3H	1+1 H
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus</i>														1
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi</i>								1H					1	3+4 H
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>														1H
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia straminea</i>							1+H					1H		
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				10			2	20	30			20	100s	50+
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>			2											
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	35	20	6	30	4	3	15	50	20	15	5	✓	100+	50+
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		1		10				15						
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>		8			2			2						
White-browed Tit-warbler	<i>Leptopoecile sophiae</i>					1									
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti albiventris</i>				1H		1H				1H				
Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>			3	5	3	20	5	3	1	1	30			
Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>					3									
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita tristis</i>								1	1		2			
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus</i>			1	1	2		2	5						
Barred Warbler	<i>Curruca nisoria merzbacheri</i>								2		3	1			

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca halimodendri</i>							1	5	6	8	8	2		
Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Curruca nana</i>			5											
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis rubicola</i>			2	2		1	3			2			1	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes tianschanicus</i>						1H								
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus</i>				15	5		10	50		25		50	100+	50+
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>		70		50	1		50	100s	50	25	100+	70	60+	50+
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	30	20	5	20	6		10	10	8	20	15	5		
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus leucogaster</i>				1	3	1								
Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>	3			2										
White's Thrush	<i>Zoothera aurea</i>						1H								
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i>			2			3								
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula intermedius</i>	1	1		2	5	3	2	1			1			
Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes familiaris</i>								1		4				
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			1					20	12	30	10		2	
Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi</i>		3H	6H	15H			1H	2	1	3H				
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica pallidogularis</i>												2		3
Himalayan Rubythroat	<i>Calliope pectoralis ballioni</i>					2	2+H								
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>	2					2								
Eversmann's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i>						5								
Blue-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus coeruleocephala</i>					2	1								
Güldenstädt's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogastrus</i>					2									
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides</i>				1	3									
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>				1										
Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>		1	1											
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>			2	3		1	4					2	4	3
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>			20											
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>		10	20	10					1	1	1			
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica</i>				2	1	1	3					1	12	20
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>		12	25	25			12	6	50	25	15	1	4	2
Altai Accentor	<i>Prunella himalayana</i>					3									

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026													
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Black-throated Accentor	<i>Prunella atrogularis huttoni</i>					2	1								
Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>					1									
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>		7												
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus dilutus</i>		8		10	1	5	10	15			1	5	50+	30+
Saxaul Sparrow	<i>Passer ammodendri</i>										4				
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus</i>										2+				
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>			5				1	5	10		5	5	20+	5+
'Bactrian' Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus bactrianus</i>										25				
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea melanope</i>	2			1	1	4			1					
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>								1				15	100+	100+
Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>								3		3	1			
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>				2			5	3						
White (Masked) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba personata</i>		1	1	3		1	2	1		1	1			
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>		3	10				2		7	2	1	2	5	3
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>							1							
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>						1								
White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>						3								
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis</i>			1H	5		1H	3	50	30	5	1	1		
Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>						5								
Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>		4	14											
Plain Mountain Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>					10									
Desert Finch	<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>											2			
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris turkestanica</i>				1			1							
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina bella</i>		10		4			10						3	
Grey-crowned Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis caniceps parapanisi</i>		2	2	8			2							
Red-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>				10		2								
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>												1		1
Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>		3					1		12	20	2			
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra buturlini</i>							15							
Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	2H													

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia par</i>		4												
Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani buturlini</i>			20	1H			1							
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>			1					1					1	
White-capped Bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>		1+1 H												
Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>						3								

Mammals

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>			3		1					2			2	4
Turkestan Red Pika	<i>Ochotona rutila</i>					1									
Grey Marmot	<i>Marmota baibacina</i>					30									
Bobak Marmot	<i>Marmota bobak</i>												10	5	
Common Muskrat - I	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>													1	1
Great Gerbil	<i>Rhombomys opimus</i>		2	10											
Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>													1	
Goitered (Turkmen) Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa</i>			15					2	10	5				
Saiga Antelope	<i>Saiga tatarica</i>													27	8

Amphibians & reptiles

		May 2026													
Common name	Scientific name	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Balkhash Water Frog	<i>Pelophylax sp. nov.</i>		H	H	H										
Horsefield's Tortoise	<i>Testudo horsfieldii</i>									3					
Steppe Agama	<i>Trapelus sanguinolentus</i>			✓						✓					
Przewalski's Toad-headed Agama	<i>Phrynocephalus przewalskii</i>		2						1	2					
a spiny-footed lizard	<i>Acanthodactylus sp.</i>			✓							1				
Sand Lizard	<i>Lacerta agilis</i>													2	2

