

Birding in Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan (plus Korgalzhyn extension)

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd May – 6th June 2026



Red-mantled Rosefinch



Caspian Plover



Wonder Gecko



White-winged Lark

Tour report by Chris Griffin



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: Chris Griffin and Harish Sharma (leaders) with eight Naturetrek clients

Korgalzhyn extension Day 1

Saturday 23rd May

After an overnight flight to Istanbul, we had another four-and-a-half-hour journey to Astana, and finally arrived in Kazakhstan. Getting through security was simple and painless, and we met up with leader Andy Smith and the rest of the previous Naturetrek group, who were doing the Korgalzhyn extension at the end of their trip, while we were doing it at the beginning of ours. We boarded the buses and began the drive out towards the Korgalzhyn steppe.

Along the way, we made a couple of birding stops. The first was a beautiful little roadside area with scattered scrub, reeds, and open fields. What was meant to be a quick twenty-minute stop turned into well over an hour: there was bird activity everywhere. Highlights included a Eurasian Penduline Tit: this is one of the few places in Kazakhstan where the species can reliably be found. We also enjoyed excellent views of Booted Warblers, which gave the previous group a good opportunity to compare them with Sykes's Warblers. Several singing Bluethroats showed brilliantly, while White-winged Terns passed overhead and numerous Blyth's Reed Warblers sang constantly from the bushes. Marsh Harriers drifted through regularly, making for a very enjoyable first taste of Kazakh birding.

Continuing on towards the steppe, we stopped at several roadside pools and wetlands. One particular lake proved especially productive. Here we encountered our first White-winged and Black Larks, two of the main target species for the extension. The lake itself was packed with birds, including large numbers of Ruffs in full breeding plumage. The variety was exceptional, with Temminck's Stints, White-winged Terns, Dalmatian Pelicans, and Demoiselle Cranes all appearing in quick succession. Earlier in the day, we had also seen Common Cranes. Wildfowl numbers were high: species included Pintail, Pochard, Tufted Duck, Mallard, Garganey, Shoveler and Shelduck. Black-winged Stilts called overhead, while Pallid Harriers quartered the surrounding grasslands alongside the ever-present Marsh Harriers. We also enjoyed our first Red-footed Falcons here.

A little further up the road, we stopped for a lovely roadside picnic lunch. Even as we ate, the birding continued, with Rosy Starlings, more Red-footed Falcons, Lesser Grey Shrikes and Tree Sparrows all around us. A short walk down to the water's edge added even more species, including Common Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plovers, more Temminck's Stints and Ruffs, additional Dalmatian Pelicans, and even a Whooper Swan.

For the remainder of the afternoon we made several roadside stops, scanning stubble fields for one of the key targets of the trip: Sociable Lapwing. Many of the fields held good birds, including more Pallid Harriers and Black Larks, but it was at the final field of the day where everything came together. Almost as soon as we stepped out of the van, Harish located a pair of Sociable Lapwings, which soon became three birds: a male and female accompanied by another male attempting to approach the female, while being chased off by the resident male. We carefully walked a little way into the field, and the birds gave exceptional views as they flew and landed nearby. The real highlight came when we located the female sitting down on what appeared to be a nest. To witness breeding behaviour from such a globally endangered species was a truly special experience, and an unforgettable end to the day. While watching the lapwings, we continued to enjoy excellent views of Black Larks and several male Pallid Harriers quartering the fields behind us.

Eventually, we tore ourselves away and continued on to our accommodation near Korgalzhyn. After an outstanding first day, packed with memorable birds and experiences, we looked forward to what the following morning would bring.

Korgalzhyn extension Day 2

Sunday 24th May

We made a 5.00am departure, and headed for Korgalzhyn National Park and the surrounding steppe. As soon as we left the main road, we made our first stop among the grasslands, where several Black and White-winged Larks were singing and displaying beautifully in the early morning light. Having only had brief views the previous evening, it was excellent to spend more time with these iconic steppe species, and enjoy much closer looks.

While scanning the open plains, we picked up a herd of Saiga antelopes: twenty-seven animals moving along the riverbank, before eventually crossing the road ahead of us and disappearing back into the steppe. Watching them run was fascinating; unlike most antelope, which tend to hold their heads upright, Saigas keep their heads lowered as they move, giving them a very distinctive appearance.

We took a short walk down towards the river, where a huge Sand Martin colony lined the banks. The surrounding grasslands held more Black and White-winged Larks, and we had particularly good views of the latter. We also enjoyed an excellent mammal sighting, when a Corsac Fox appeared, carrying what looked to be a Black Lark back towards its den, presumably to feed cubs. It was a fantastic and memorable sighting.

We made several brief roadside stops for more larks and other birds. Bee-eaters flashed past, Booted Warblers sang from scattered bushes, and Yellow Wagtails seemed to be everywhere. As the morning progressed, White-winged Terns became increasingly numerous overhead, while Black-winged Pratincoles began appearing over the grasslands.

A mid-morning tea and coffee stop provided more enjoyable birding, including additional Booted Warblers and Yellow Wagtails, and a very smart Red-backed Shrike. Shortly afterwards, we arrived at a shallow lake and walked out towards the shoreline. On the approach, we encountered a superb colony of around fifty Black-winged Pratincoles, showing exceptionally well as they wheeled around overhead. We enjoyed good views of a male Ortolan Bunting beside the track, along with a couple of Tolai Hares nearby.

The lake itself was dominated by Red-necked Phalaropes, with an astonishing flock of 2,568 birds spinning and feeding on the water. It was an extraordinary spectacle. The shoreline also held a good selection of waders, including Little and Temminck's Stint, Wood and Common Sandpipers, and Kentish, Little Ringed and Common Ringed Plovers. White-winged Terns continued to pass through in good numbers. As we returned to the vehicles, we discovered a Pintail nest tucked away in the grass containing nine eggs: a lovely find. Three Demoiselle Cranes then flew overhead, adding another memorable moment to an already excellent morning.

We continued deeper into the National Park, towards another lake. Along the way, we added more species to the growing trip list, including a Dalmatian Pelican flying low overhead, several more White-winged Terns, alongside a few Black Terns for comparison, and countless Black Larks. The grasslands continued to produce Black-winged Pratincoles, while a superb Steppe Eagle soaring overhead provided another highlight.

After a very productive morning exploring the steppe and wetlands of Korgalzhyn National Park, we eventually returned to the accommodation in time for lunch, and a chance to relax before the afternoon's activities. We returned to broadly the same area as in the morning, but exploring a different selection of lakes and wetlands. The weather remained hot and sunny for much of the afternoon, although cloud gradually built later in the day.

Just beyond the village outskirts, we stopped for four Golden Orioles feeding in trees beside the road. Our first proper stop produced a nice selection of waders, including several Curlew Sandpipers in breeding plumage, and a few Terek Sandpipers. The area also proved good for raptors: we briefly picked up a female Merlin, while a superb Honey Buzzard circled overhead, at one point joined by a pair of Dalmatian Pelicans: it was an impressive combination of species soaring together above the steppe. There were also plenty more Red-necked Phalaropes present, to add to the remarkable numbers seen during the morning.



Black Lark



Corsac Fox



Sociable Lapwing



Black-winged Pratincole

At another lake, we found a colony of Pallas's Gulls, alongside Caspian Gulls. Two Caspian Terns resting nearby provided excellent views, and were a welcome addition to the day's sightings. White-winged Terns were abundant once again, and yet more Red-necked Phalaropes covered the water. We estimated another 1,500 phalaropes at this site alone, bringing the day's total to somewhere in the region of 4,000 birds at the very least: it had been an extraordinary spectacle. We also added Grey Plover, a pair of Wigeons, and further of Little Stints, Ruffs, and several of the other wader species encountered earlier in the day. The surrounding grasslands continued to hold excellent numbers of Black Larks, giving repeated opportunities to admire this charismatic steppe specialist.

After another thoroughly enjoyable afternoon in the wetlands and grasslands of Korgalzhyn, we returned to our accommodation for the evening. A lovely meal awaited us at the hotel, after which we completed the day's checklist.

Korgalzhyn extension Day 3

Monday 25th May

We had another early start, though not quite as early as the previous morning's. After breakfast at 5.00am, we departed around 5.45am and headed in a completely different direction within Korgalzhyn National Park, exploring a series of lakes surrounded by extensive reedbeds. This would be our final morning in the region, and it proved to be a memorable one.

At our first stop, we walked across open grassland towards the lakeshore. Along the way we enjoyed superb views of White-winged Larks, including birds displaying, chasing each other, and even a nest containing several eggs. Pallid Harriers drifted across the grasslands nearby, adding to the atmosphere of the steppe.

At the lake itself, we began scanning the open water, and quickly picked up several Red-necked Grebes, along with an excellent White-headed Duck. This species had been missed by the previous group during the main tour, so it was a particularly welcome addition to our lists. We then explored the reedbeds in search of Bearded Reedlings, which eventually showed well. The reeds also held several Paddyfield Warblers, which gave very good views, alongside numerous Great Reed Warblers. White-winged and Black Terns fed actively over the water, while Bluethroats sang from the reeds and chased each other through the vegetation. A stunning male Pallid Harrier passing behind us, provided another highlight.

We continued, checking various areas of steppe and wetland, and once again hoping for more Sociable Lapwings, though without success. Nevertheless, there was still plenty to enjoy, including additional Dalmatian Pelicans and various waders. At one stop we watched a Hoopoe fly past, before encountering an unusual-looking warbler in the scrub. Initially puzzling, it later appeared likely to have been a melanistic Booted Warbler: it was an exceptionally dark individual which caused much discussion and careful examination of photographs later that evening.

Our final lake stop of the morning proved unforgettable. After pausing for a light snack and coffee, we walked down towards the muddy edge of the lake, which looked ideal for waders. A scan of the shoreline produced familiar species such as Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Terek Sandpiper and Black-winged Stilts. Then Harish called out a pair of what initially appeared to be Kentish Plovers. However, when we looked more carefully, we quickly realised they were in fact Caspian Plovers, a major target species and one that the previous group had feared they had missed entirely. The pair, a male and female, showed incredibly well at close range, and provided outstanding telescope views. We spent quite some time admiring these exceptional birds, before eventually moving away and allowing them to settle again. Later, we learned that these were the first Caspian Plovers recorded in the area since 2018, making the sighting all the more remarkable and a truly fitting finale to our time in Korgalzhyn.

We returned to the hotel for a proper lunch, having earlier only stopped for a light snack and coffee in the field. Following lunch, we packed our bags, loaded the bus, and began the drive back towards Astana through the Akmola region. Along the way we revisited a few productive sites from earlier in the trip. The Sociable Lapwings were still present, the female apparently still incubating while the male stood guard nearby.

At another roadside lake, with storm clouds and distant lightning building on the horizon, we decided to make one final stop. Almost immediately, we picked up a pair of Slavonian Grebes, a completely unexpected and excellent find. The lake was once again alive with birds, including Red-footed Falcons, large numbers of Garganey, more

Red-necked Phalaropes, displaying sandpipers, and several Black-necked Grebes. Even after several days of exceptional birding, the steppe continued to produce surprises right until the very end.

Eventually, we completed the journey back to Astana, checked into our hotel, and headed out for dinner. We had an extremely early start planned for the following morning!

Main tour Day 1

Tuesday 26th May

Our first day on the main tour began extremely early for those of us continuing from the pre-tour extension in Astana. We left the hotel at around 4.45am in order to reach the airport for our 7.00am flight from Astana to Almaty. Harish had travelled down the previous evening so that he could meet the remainder of the group, who were arriving on international flights shortly before us.

After landing in Almaty, the five of us from the extension joined up with the rest of the main group, and began the drive towards Ile-Alatau National Park. The journey out of the city took a couple of hours due to traffic, though we made a useful stop along the way to pick up coffees and some breakfast snacks for those who had arrived after long overnight flights and had not managed much sleep.

Even on the outskirts of Almaty there was plenty to see. Rollers perched on roadside wires, while Common Mynas fed around fields and alongside grazing horses. We arrived at the National Park, and got our permits. Eventually we reached a lovely spot beside a bridge crossing a fast-flowing river, swollen with snowmelt. While the driver prepared lunch, we began birding around the area.

It was not long before we heard what sounded like a Meadow Bunting singing from the hillside. Crossing the road to investigate, we instead found one of the day's key targets: an Azure Tit, which showed beautifully as it moved through the riverside trees. The Meadow Bunting continued singing in the background, and eventually we located it perched on a fence higher up the slope. Several members of the group enjoyed good telescope views before it dropped back into cover, and some of us climbed the slope in an attempt to relocate it. We eventually succeeded, obtaining further scope views as it perched out in the open on a bush. Those who decided not to make the climb were still rewarded with a superb flypast from a Golden Eagle. The surrounding area also held several Rollers, while a striking Blue Whistling Thrush showed well near the river: this bird was a lifer for several members of the group. Even under overcast skies, the bird's deep metallic blue tones were visible, and very impressive.

Following a much-needed lunch and coffee break, we set off for a walk further up one of the valleys. Near the start of the track, another Meadow Bunting flew across the path, although it disappeared into cover before everyone could get good views. As we continued along the valley, the raptor list steadily grew. A distant Cinereous Vulture circled overhead, while Hobby, 'Steppe' and Long-legged Buzzards, and Black Kite all appeared during the afternoon.

At one point we heard a Common Rosefinch singing somewhere within the valley, though frustratingly it refused to show itself, despite much searching. The valley also held a good selection of butterflies, including Queen of Spain Fritillary, Black-veined White, several unidentified blues, and what was likely a Spotted Fritillary. Our main focus during the walk, however, was White-crowned Penduline Tit. Eventually we heard one calling, though before reaching the area we enjoyed excellent views of a Chukar Partridge walking across the rocky slope.

Fortunately, Harish knew the location of two White-crowned Penduline Tit nests. At the first nest, we managed brief views of one of the birds nearby. Further up the valley, at the second nest, we were rewarded with outstanding views of one of the adults working on the nest entrance, repeatedly adding spider webs and adjusting the structure. After several minutes, the bird briefly emerged and perched at the entrance, before darting back into the surrounding vegetation. This was one of the principal target species of the day, and seeing it so well at the nest was a fantastic experience for the entire group.

By mid-afternoon the weather had begun to deteriorate, with rain moving into the valley, so we decided to return to Almaty. Given the very early start and overnight travel for much of the group, an earlier finish was much appreciated. Back at the hotel, everyone had a chance to rest before dinner at a nearby restaurant. It had been an excellent first day of the main tour, with a superb mix of low elevation species, raptors, and target birds.

Day 2

Wednesday 27th May

A relaxed start was much appreciated, and after breakfast at the hotel, we left Almaty around 7.00am and began the journey towards the Sogety Plains, our destination for the evening. Much of the morning was spent driving, though there were still birds to be seen from the vehicle, including several Marsh Harriers. During a brief comfort stop, we were pleased to watch a Shikra flying over a nearby embankment, providing an unexpected addition to the trip list. Later, we stopped in a small town while the driver and fixer picked up supplies for lunch. A quick look around some nearby trees produced an Azure Tit, along with numerous Rooks, and our first Laughing Doves of the trip.

Continuing towards the Sogety region, we made our first proper birding stop at Kokpek Pass. While lunch was being prepared, we took the opportunity to explore the slopes above the road. Before we had even started walking, a stunning male Red-headed Bunting was found perched on a roadside wire, singing brilliantly in the morning sunshine. A Lesser Grey Shrike also showed well from nearby trees. As we climbed the rocky hillside, we encountered several Chukar Partridges, and a smart family party of Rock Buntings. An Oriental Turtle Dove also flew past and eventually perched, allowing excellent scope views.

Our main target at the site was White-capped Bunting, a notoriously tricky species which favours rocky slopes and outcrops. Despite a thorough search, the bunting initially remained elusive. Instead, we found several Rock Buntings, while Rosy Starlings passed overhead. With temperatures rising rapidly, lunch eventually took priority and we returned to the vehicles for an excellent meal.

After lunch, we drove a short distance to another pass, and set off on a second walk. By now the day had become very hot, and the climb was steep in places. Nevertheless, the effort was rewarded almost immediately, when a superb male Rock Bunting perched prominently on a rock, providing excellent views. Further up the valley we encountered another Meadow Bunting, this time showing much more closely than the birds seen previously. Continuing through a narrow canyon and into a rocky gully, we added Common Rock Thrush and a pair of Blue Rock Thrushes to the day list.

Still, our focus remained on White-capped Bunting. It appeared we might leave empty-handed, until Harish heard a fragment of song from somewhere among the rocks. At around the same time, Chris caught sight of the tail end

of a bird sat behind a boulder. Unfortunately, the bird flicked off the rock and vanished before it could be identified, but the clues were promising enough to encourage us to persevere. The decision paid off. After a period of patient searching, the bunting called again and eventually flew into view. For a while it seemed determined to evade us, constantly dropping out of sight and allowing its song to echo around the canyon walls, making it difficult to pinpoint. Eventually, however, it settled in the open and gave outstanding views, allowing everyone to enjoy prolonged looks at this much-wanted species.

With the day's main target secured, we returned to the vehicles and continued on towards the Sogety Plains. Turning off the main road onto a dirt track, we headed towards a drinking pool beside a small farmstead. The track itself produced several good birds, including Isabelline Wheatears, a pair of Greater Short-toed Larks, and a single Horned Lark. As we arrived at the drinking pool, a Black-bellied Sandgrouse flushed from nearby and flew off, though fortunately most of the group managed to get onto it. A Rock Sparrow then appeared right beside the bus, and showed exceptionally well. Walking up to the pool, we found plenty of activity, including numerous Mongolian Finches and a Red-tailed (Turkestan) Shrike perched prominently on top of a bush. We settled into camp chairs overlooking the water, and spent the next hour watching birds come and go.

The spectacle was superb. Around forty or fifty Mongolian Finches regularly visited the pool, joined by several brilliantly coloured Linnets, additional Horned Larks, Tree Sparrows, and Red-tailed Shrikes. The highlights, however, were the sandgrouse. At least four Pallas's Sandgrouse appeared during our watch. Two males flew overhead, while a pair eventually walked down to the water's edge and provided outstanding views through the telescopes. Later, a female Black-bellied Sandgrouse briefly dropped in. A few Grey-necked Buntings also visited the pool, including one individual which showed particularly well at close range.

As the afternoon progressed, the weather began to change. Clouds gathered, the wind strengthened considerably, and conditions became increasingly overcast. We decided to leave the pool and make our way to the night's accommodation. Just after setting off, another Black-bellied Sandgrouse flushed from vegetation beside the track. Although only some of the group managed to see it before it disappeared, it was a welcome final sighting and gave us hope of even better views later in the tour.

The drive to our overnight accommodation, located among woodland near Charyn Canyon, was relatively short. On stepping off the bus, we were greeted by the songs of (Eastern) Nightingales, which made a lovely soundtrack to the evening. After settling in, we travelled into the nearby town for an excellent dinner, before returning to complete the checklist and retire for the night after another highly successful day.

Day 3

Thursday 28th May

A little after dawn, the group took an early morning walk around the lodge, setting out at 6.00am to explore the surrounding woodland before breakfast. It did not take long for the birds to appear, with several Azure Tits showing exceptionally well around nest boxes beside the neighbouring lodges. We soon added a Great Spotted Woodpecker, along with several Grey-crowned Goldfinches. We then came across a delightful family party of Turkestan (Great) Tits, which allowed prolonged views as they moved through the trees. Nightingales were singing throughout the area, while a handsome Common Whitethroat perched prominently on top of a tamarisk bush. A Greenish Warbler was also found, although it proved rather elusive and only offered brief views. Returning towards the lodge, we enjoyed even better views of the Grey-crowned Goldfinches and once again caught up with both

Azure Tits and the Great Spotted Woodpecker. A pair of Pied Wheatears feeding nearby rounded off a very enjoyable walk.

After breakfast, we headed out into the Sogety Plains. Following a short drive, we stopped beside a patch of scrub to search for one of the morning's targets: Asian Desert Warbler. Almost immediately we found one, although it quickly flew across the road and refused to return, despite our efforts. Fortunately, a second bird proved far more cooperative, and eventually showed superbly at close range, allowing everyone excellent views. The area also held several Isabelline Wheatears, including birds carrying food for chicks, providing a fascinating glimpse into their breeding behaviour. Five Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew overhead.

After spending some time searching the scrub, we found a Sunwatcher Agama lizard basking among the vegetation, before we returned to the bus and headed down a rough track towards Charyn Canyon. The journey produced several notable sightings. A 'Steppe' Grey Shrike showed well on roadside wires, while our first attempts at finding Desert Wheatears resulted only in distant views. Persistence paid off later when another individual appeared much closer. We also briefly encountered several Goitered Gazelles, although they were distant and quickly disappeared behind a ridge before everyone had managed to see them.



Blue Whistling Thrush



Himalayan Rubythroat



Mountain Weasel



Azure Tit

At Charyn Canyon, we were greeted by Alpine Swifts speeding overhead. We enjoyed a leisurely walk down through the spectacular gorge towards the viewpoint approximately one-and-a-half kilometres away. The canyon produced a steady stream of highlights. A Golden Eagle drifted over the ridge, several Pied Wheatears were seen among the rocky slopes, and further down the canyon we enjoyed magnificent views of a Bearded Vulture soaring overhead. The bird later appeared to descend towards a rocky outcrop, possibly indicating a nearby nesting site.

At the viewpoint itself, a singing Grey-necked Bunting provided outstanding telescope views as it threw back its head and delivered its song. A Mongolian Finch also appeared nearby, while additional Pied Wheatears and further views of the Bearded Vulture kept everyone entertained. Eventually, with temperatures rising, we made the walk back up the canyon. Black Kites and more Alpine Swifts were seen overhead, before we returned to the bus and enjoyed a well-earned lunch.

Rather than retracing our route along the rough track, we travelled back via the road. This proved productive, with a Steppe Eagle and several Long-legged Buzzards perched on the ground, although further searches failed to relocate any gazelles. A little later, we had superb views of a Steppe Eagle circling overhead, one of the best raptor sightings of the day.

Later in the afternoon, we returned to the drinking pool that had been so productive the previous evening. The site once again delivered excellent birding almost immediately. Mongolian Finches arrived in numbers, accompanied by Grey-necked Buntings, Linnets and a pair of Ruddy Shelducks. As we settled in, a Pallas's Sandgrouse appeared and flew around behind the pool, ensuring another day with excellent views of this sought-after species. More Mongolian Finches continued to visit, alongside Horned, Greater Short-toed and Crested Larks, and Tree Sparrows. One particularly enjoyable moment came when an Ortolan Bunting appeared and was soon joined by a second bird, allowing a useful comparison with the nearby Grey-necked Buntings, which can appear surprisingly similar under certain conditions. The final highlight came from the ridge overlooking the pool, where a pair of Golden Eagles appeared together, soaring effortlessly on the wind and providing a spectacular end to the afternoon's birding. Eventually it was time to leave. On the walk back, we took a look at an unusual parasitic plant, the Desert Thumb.

After a brief break back at the lodge, we headed into town for dinner. However, one final surprise awaited us. On the drive into town, Harish and Edwin caught sight of a Pallas's Cat running across the road and disappearing into roadside scrub. They were the only two people who managed to see it before it vanished. Traffic behind us meant it was unsafe to stop and search, making the tantalising sighting a little frustrating. Nevertheless, simply knowing that one had been present added an extra sense of excitement to the evening.

Day 4

Friday 29th May

Today was primarily a travel day: we left Kazakhstan and made our way towards Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, it proved to be another highly rewarding day with plenty of wildlife sightings along the route.

We first crossed the Charyn Plains, keeping a close eye out for Goitered Gazelles, represented here by the Turkestan subspecies. Eventually, we located a couple of individuals, although the increasing heat haze made viewing conditions challenging. Despite the distance, it was still good to catch up with this characteristic species of the region. A little further along the road we stopped at a Long-legged Buzzard nest. Two well-grown chicks were visible, and while we watched, one of the adults arrived carrying what appeared to be a jird. Rather than disturb the birds, we moved on quickly and left the adults to feed the young in peace.

The journey continued with regular sightings of Rollers, Tawny Pipits and other roadside birds before we reached the Temirlik River Canyon. Our first stop was intended primarily as a scenic viewpoint, allowing everyone to appreciate the impressive landscape. However, the birding immediately stole the show, when we found a Grey-

necked Bunting perched prominently on a rock and singing unconcernedly in front of us. It provided outstanding views and excellent photographic opportunities. We also picked up two Cinereous Vultures circling over the ridge, accompanied by a couple of Booted Eagles and several Black Kites.

We continued down to the river bridge, and as soon as we stepped out of the vehicle, we were surrounded by an extraordinary number of Scarce Tortoiseshell butterflies. They seemed to be everywhere, fluttering around the river valley in remarkable numbers, with several even landing on members of the group. It felt as though we had arrived during a fresh emergence. We walked onto the bridge in search of White-throated Dipper, although unfortunately this species failed to appear. There was plenty to compensate, however: a Chukar Partridge flew through and was later seen again near the car park, while a pair of Azure Tits showed exceptionally well among the willows.

As we watched the riverside vegetation, an adult Black Stork drifted overhead, but the best sighting was still to come. A White-crowned Penduline Tit suddenly appeared and flew down to a nest hidden among the branches directly in front of us. We spent a considerable time watching the bird, which providing a great encore after our excellent encounters with the species earlier in the trip.

We continued our journey towards the Kyrgyz border. Along the way we repeatedly encountered enormous flocks of Rosy Starlings, sometimes numbering in the hundreds. By the end of the day, we estimated that we had seen several thousand birds, creating one of the most impressive spectacles of the journey so far.

Before reaching the border, we stopped briefly in the town of Kegen to refuel. This produced a few additional sightings, including a juvenile male Goshawk, more Rosy Starlings, and several Red-tailed Shrikes.

The border crossing itself was straightforward, although while making our way through, an Upland Buzzard flew overhead. Frustratingly, we were unable to access binoculars or cameras at the time, but it was still a welcome addition to the trip list.

Once back on the bus in Kyrgyzstan, we began adding species to our empty country list almost immediately, with swallows, Common Mynas and Hoopoes all appearing along the roadside. A short distance beyond the border we arrived at Lake San-Tash, where we stopped for lunch. The first birds to catch our attention were three Common Cranes. Two eventually flew off, but one remained, allowing excellent telescope views and providing a memorable welcome to Kyrgyzstan. The lake held a good variety of waterbirds, including Ruddy Shelduck, Black-necked Grebe, Garganey and Tufted Duck. A pair of Whooper Swans rested at the far end of the water, while several Common Terns patrolled overhead. One particularly exciting discovery was a pair of Citrine Wagtails feeding in a ditch beside our lunch spot. Their brilliant yellow plumage made them stand out immediately.

As we enjoyed lunch in the sunshine, surrounded by the lush green hills and fertile landscapes of Kyrgyzstan, another surprise appeared. A Black Kite drifting overhead attracted the attention of a small bird, which rose from the grass and began actively mobbing it. The bird turned out to be a Richard's Pipit, one of the day's key target species. After lunch, we carefully investigated the area and eventually relocated the pipit. Initially hidden in the grass, it eventually emerged onto a track and gave distant but satisfying views, before disappearing back into deeper vegetation.

With the Richard's Pipit secured, we resumed our journey towards Karakol, our base for the next few nights. The drive offered further views of the beautiful Kyrgyz countryside before we arrived in the town during the evening. After checking in, we enjoyed dinner at a lovely local restaurant before returning to the hotel. With another very early start planned for the following morning, it was not long before everyone headed to bed.

Day 5

Saturday 30th May

By 4.45am, we were on the road heading west from Karakol towards Barskoon and the high passes of the Tian Shan Mountains. This would be our first opportunity to explore the higher elevations of the trip, and search for some of the region's most sought-after mountain species. The journey proved considerably longer than expected, due to extensive roadworks. Around 220km of the main road were being redeveloped simultaneously, resulting in significant delays and effectively doubling the usual travel time. Despite this, there was plenty to see along the way, including numerous Rooks, Red-tailed Shrikes perched on roadside wires, and other familiar species of the foothills.

As we entered the Barskoon Valley and began climbing towards pass, we added a couple of Oriental Turtle Doves and several Common Pheasants. These were particularly notable, as they represented genuinely wild birds, rather than the introduced feral populations familiar in the UK.

Our first stop in the valley focused on some scrubby slopes holding a number of mid-elevation specialities. It was not long before we located a stunning male Himalayan Rubythroat. The bird perched prominently on top of bushes, singing continuously and displaying its brilliant ruby-red throat while flicking its tail. A female remained nearby, and it was clear the male was doing his utmost to impress. It was a superb encounter and one of the highlights of the morning. The area also produced several Common Rosefinches, our first Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Grey-necked Buntings, and a Turkestan Red Pika. Mammal honours, however, went to a Mountain Weasel which dashed across the rocks, providing an excellent sighting and a new species for many members of the group.

We climbed higher into the mountains in search of the main target of the day: Himalayan Snowcock. Our first stop at around 2600m involved careful scanning of the surrounding ridges, but despite extensive searching, there was no sign of the snowcock. Harish did, however, locate a pair of Brown Accentors behind us, which showed very well. Eastern Black Redstarts and a soaring Golden Eagle added further interest.

Moving higher up the valley, we continued searching the slopes. More Grey-necked Buntings appeared, along with additional views of Sulphur-bellied Warbler. Despite ideal-looking habitat, the snowcock remained elusive.

Then came the breakthrough. Kate located an Ibex standing on a distant crag some two kilometres away. As scopes were trained onto the animal, another shape was noticed on the same escarpment. To our delight, it proved to be a Himalayan Snowcock! Initially difficult to relocate as it moved among the rocks, the bird eventually gave satisfactory telescope views for everyone. After a prolonged search, finally connecting with this iconic mountain species was immensely rewarding, and one of the major successes of the trip.

Encouraged by our success, we continued climbing to approximately 3800m. Here, beside a partially frozen mountain lake, we set out in search of two further high-altitude specialities: Altai Accentor and Güldenstädt's Redstart.

The redstart proved remarkably cooperative. A stunning male was quickly located on the slope above us and showed beautifully through the scopes. The accentor took a little more effort, but after some patient searching and a little encouragement, a male eventually appeared on a rocky escarpment above us, singing from an exposed perch before disappearing back over the ridge. Two more major targets had successfully been found. The high-altitude stop also produced Himalayan Griffon and Cinereous Vulture.

We then descended to lower elevations for lunch beside a mountain river. While relaxing in the sunshine, we enjoyed watching several Tolai Hares on a nearby ridge. Alpine and Red-billed Choughs were constantly active around us, and we discovered a pair of the latter nesting inside an old, partially collapsed building: we could see three chicks. A pair of Golden Eagles then appeared and provided an entertaining spectacle as they briefly pursued an Alpine Chough, before drifting away together along the valley.

After lunch, we returned to the lower valley and revisited our original morning site to search for another key target: White-browed Tit-Warbler. Initially the area seemed quiet, and we spread out along the scrub-covered slope in an effort to locate any movement. Eventually, persistence paid off, and a male White-browed Tit-Warbler was found. The bird proved every bit as elusive as expected, repeatedly diving into dense bushes and only briefly appearing in the open. With patience, however, most eventually enjoyed good views. When it did emerge, the bird revealed its exquisite plumage, with striking purples and blues glowing in the afternoon light. It was undoubtedly one of the most beautiful birds of the trip, and a fitting finale to a highly successful day in the mountains.



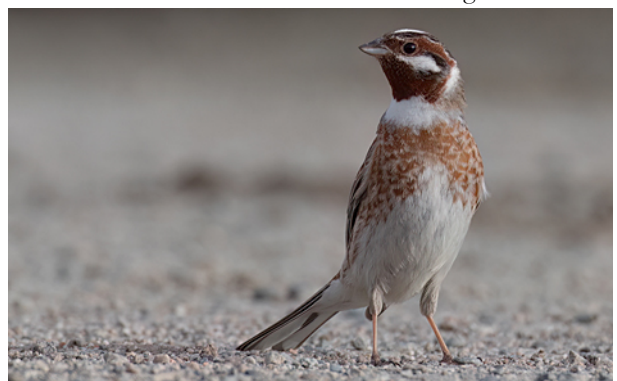
White-browed Tit-warbler



White-winged Grosbeak



Roller



Pine Bunting

Just before the tit-warbler was located, Harish, Edwin, and Johanna also briefly connected with a pair of Red-mantled Rosefinches, although the birds quickly disappeared back into cover before most of the group could get onto them.

With all the major targets secured, we finally began the long journey back to Karakol. Ongoing roadworks and heavy traffic made the return slower than anticipated, so we headed straight back to the hotel rather than making any additional stops.

We enjoyed another excellent dinner at a local restaurant. After a long but immensely rewarding day in the Tian Shan Mountains, everyone retired tired but delighted, following one of the most successful birding days of the tour so far.

Day 6

Sunday 31st May

We had yet another early start from our guesthouse near Karakol. Shortly before 5.00am, we were on the road, heading towards the Aksu Valley in search of some of the region's mountain specialities. Despite the ongoing roadworks which had become a familiar feature of travel in the area, the journey offered plenty to enjoy. The route passed through beautiful open farmland interspersed with scrub and scattered trees, and we made several brief stops along the way. These produced excellent views of singing male Pine Buntings, perched prominently on wires and bushes. Oriental Turtle Doves were also seen flying overhead as we continued into the valley.

Our first stop within the valley was in an area of mixed trees and scrub. A handsome male Common Rosefinch appeared briefly, while several Greenish Warblers sang around us from the surrounding vegetation. After a short walk, we continued further up the valley towards the conifer forests.

Our next stop was in an area where White's Thrush had been recorded singing a few weeks earlier. Bird activity was excellent, with more Common Rosefinches, Common Whitethroats, and Greenish and Hume's Warblers present throughout the forest. A fly-over Mistle Thrush was a welcome surprise, while glimpses of warblers provided plenty of entertainment as they moved through the trees. Edwin also saw what he thought could have been a large thrush flying into cover, but didn't get a good enough view to identify it at the time.

The highlight of this stop was undoubtedly a stunning male Blue-capped Redstart. The bird appeared in the trees directly in front of us and showed exceptionally well through the telescope, allowing everyone prolonged views of one of the day's principal target species.

We decided to head back to the bus to carry on up the valley, but just as we got to it, a White's Thrush began singing nearby. Its beautiful, fluting whistle echoed through the forest and created a truly atmospheric moment. Despite searching carefully, we were unable to locate the bird itself. Given the species' notoriously secretive nature, this was hardly surprising, but hearing its song on what was likely a breeding territory was still a memorable and evocative experience.

We climbed to around 2600m and stopped beside the river. Here we enjoyed excellent views of one of Central Asia's most iconic birds: the Ibisbill. The bird flew across the river and landed on a shingle bank, where we were able to study it well before continuing our ascent.

A short distance further on, we set off on foot across beautiful alpine meadows covered in wildflowers. The walk led us towards a plateau dotted with juniper scrub: this was ideal habitat for several of the mountain species we were seeking. The birding here was exceptional. Black-throated Accentors appeared intermittently among the

bushes, while White-winged Grosbeaks called overhead and occasionally perched on exposed branches. Another male Himalayan Rubythroat sang from a prominent perch, adding further colour to the morning. As time passed, more and more birds appeared. We spent well over an hour exploring the plateau and were rewarded with outstanding views of several Red-mantled Rosefinches. While this is usually a rather elusive species, these birds showed remarkably well, with at least three pairs providing prolonged and often close views. Their rich colours and attractive plumage made them one of the highlights of the day.

A small group continued higher up the slope and enjoyed even more rewards, including additional views of Himalayan Rubythroat, and a superb male Eversmann's Redstart. Perhaps best of all was a male White-winged Grosbeak feeding in the open at close range. Those who remained slightly lower down continued to enjoy excellent views of Red-mantled Rosefinches, Hume's Warblers and several other species. We also encountered a Mountain Chiffchaff, a particularly noteworthy find for the area.

Eventually it was time to descend. We made our way back down through the flower-rich meadows and stopped for lunch in a sheltered hollow, protected from the wind and surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery. It was a beautiful place to relax and enjoy a meal before the afternoon's journey.

After lunch, we began travelling west towards Jeti-Ögüz. By the time we arrived, the weather had become noticeably windier and more unsettled, but we immediately headed to the river in search of our main target: Brown Dipper. The search proved short-lived. Within minutes, we had located an adult bird feeding in the fast-flowing water. The bird foraging in the powerful current without being swept away was remarkable enough, but as we moved to gain a better view, we discovered a recently fledged youngster sheltering behind a riverside boulder. We were then able to watch the adult returning repeatedly to feed the chick, providing a wonderful and intimate wildlife encounter.

Before leaving Jeti-Ögüz, we spent some time admiring the area's famous geology. The dramatic red sandstone formations were spectacular, particularly beneath the darkening skies. Among the most impressive features was the famous "Broken Heart" rock formation, a huge cleft in the cliffs which made for some striking photographs.

With the weather continuing to deteriorate, we decided it was time to head back. We returned to Karakol after another highly successful day in the mountains, and enjoyed a superb dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 7

Monday 1st June

Today marked our return journey from Kyrgyzstan back into Kazakhstan, and ultimately to Almaty. Although primarily a travel day, it included several memorable birding stops and some excellent wildlife encounters along the way.

Our first stop was in Kyrgyzstan, in fields west of Taldy-Su. As soon as we stepped out of the vehicle, we were greeted by a cacophony of birdsong. The area consisted of reed-fringed field margins interspersed with scrub and scattered trees, creating ideal habitat for a variety of species. Paddyfield Warblers sang from deep within the reeds, while Common Rosefinches delivered their songs from prominent perches in the surrounding trees. A stunning Citrine Wagtail landed in a nearby ditch, and a Muskrat was discovered feeding quietly before disappearing around a bend, providing unexpectedly good views.

However, our main target here was a much more elusive species. We walked further into the fields towards the reedbeds, and used a little playback in the hope of attracting a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. The response was immediate. Despite having only recently arrived on their breeding grounds, at least two or three birds appeared. Several showed out in the open, allowing everyone to study the rusty rump, pale-tipped tail feathers and other distinctive features. Given the species' notoriously skulking nature, the views were exceptional and represented one of the highlights of the day.

While searching the reedbeds, we could also hear Corn Crakes calling from the surrounding fields. For many participants, hearing this evocative sound was particularly special, recalling a bird that was once widespread across farmland in Britain but has now become a rarity there.

After enjoying our success with the Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, we wandered back towards the bus. Just before boarding, Chris picked up the song of another *Locustella* warbler from some distance away. Intrigued, we followed the sound along the roadside and eventually found a Common Grasshopper Warbler singing from the centre of a shrub. The bird showed beautifully through the telescope, providing a superb opportunity to compare the two grasshopper warbler species in the same field.

We then resumed our journey towards the border. Before crossing, we made a stop at Lake San-Tash, where we had previously enjoyed lunch on our journey into Kyrgyzstan. The lake once again proved productive. Ruddy Shelducks, Shovelers, Citrine Wagtails and several Sand Martins were present, while a Pale Martin passed through with a hirundine flock. The highlight here was the discovery of three drake Teals. This species is considered a rarity in Kyrgyzstan, making the sighting particularly noteworthy. As usual, a few Black Kites drifted overhead while we enjoyed another excellent lunch prepared by Giza and Sergei, accompanied by wonderful views across the surrounding countryside.

Following lunch, we continued to the border. As with our outward journey, the crossing was remarkably straightforward, with no queues and very little delay. We were soon back in Kazakhstan and continuing west towards Almaty. While making the crossing on foot, we watched a Hobby chasing swallows and Linnets overhead, providing an entertaining diversion as we completed the formalities.

Back on the road, we travelled through the canyons and grasslands of eastern Kazakhstan. After a fuel stop, we came across one of the day's most spectacular sights: a vast breeding colony of Rosy Starlings nesting among cliffs and boulder fields. We spent nearly an hour watching and photographing these beautiful birds. Their striking combination of glossy black plumage, shaggy crests and soft salmon-pink bodies made them irresistible subjects. The colony appeared immense, and we estimated that between three and four thousand birds may have been present. The constant movement and noise created an unforgettable spectacle.

We made one final stop at a small cemetery, which hosted a colony of Lesser Kestrels. Here we enjoyed excellent views of the birds, allowing easy comparison with the more familiar Common Kestrel. Another smaller colony of Rosy Starlings was also present nearby.

With a long drive still ahead, we eventually continued westward. Along the route we passed once again through the Charyn region, where additional Goitered Gazelles and several Long-legged Buzzards were seen from the vehicle.

As evening approached, we finally arrived back in Almaty and checked into the same hotel where we had stayed at the beginning of the tour. After a long but rewarding day on the road, it was good to settle in for the night and reflect on another excellent day, packed with memorable wildlife encounters.

Day 8

Tuesday 2nd June

Today began at a more relaxed pace than some of our recent mountain excursions: we left Almaty and headed north-west towards the vast deserts of central Kazakhstan. Our destination was the Taukum Desert, where we would spend the next few nights exploring one of the most distinctive habitats of the tour. The day was largely devoted to travelling, but several carefully chosen stops ensured there was plenty of wildlife to enjoy along the way.

Our first notable stop came near Kapshagay Reservoir. At a petrol station shortly before reaching the reservoir, we stretched our legs and immediately found several Red-rumped Swallows flying around the buildings. Small flocks of Glossy Ibises were also seen passing overhead, representing a welcome addition to the trip list.

Upon arriving at Kapshagay Reservoir, we stopped beside an extensive reedbed. The noise from the breeding birds was remarkable, with Great Reed Warblers seemingly singing from every available perch. Paddyfield Warblers were also present, while a Cetti's Warbler briefly showed itself to a few fortunate members of the group. Andy then picked up a pair of Little Bitterns disappearing across the reeds, providing an excellent sighting of these elusive birds. Walking around to a more open section of water, we found a couple of drake Ferruginous Ducks, while a female Bearded Reedling carrying food was watched disappearing into the reedbed, suggesting a nearby nest. A singing Savi's Warbler also responded briefly to playback, appearing momentarily before vanishing once more into cover.

The reedbeds remained busy throughout our visit. Cormorants and additional Glossy Ibises passed overhead, while striking Black-headed Wagtails performed display flights above the marsh. Along the water's edge, several Black Terns hawked for insects, accompanied by Grey Herons and numerous gulls, including Caspian and Black-headed.

After exploring the reedbeds, we moved to a nearby picnic area overlooking the reservoir for lunch. The walk in was enlivened by numerous dragonflies, while the adjacent lagoon held Little Terns and Great Crested Grebes, including adults carrying small chicks on their backs. Although the surrounding bushes were relatively quiet, a few Tree Sparrows were present and a Kingfisher was seen by some members of the group. During lunch, several Black Terns continued to pass overhead, while a Dalmatian Pelican drifted majestically across the reservoir. A pair of Lesser Grey Shrikes also appeared in the bushes beyond our picnic spot, providing an enjoyable addition to the afternoon.

After lunch, we resumed our journey towards the Taukum Desert, and we began to encounter the first signs of the increasingly arid landscape ahead. Crested Larks appeared along the roadside, and shortly before reaching the desert we enjoyed excellent views of a family party of Demoiselle Cranes, including a chick.

Later in the afternoon we stopped at the Kurti waterhole. Bird activity was relatively subdued, but the site still produced a selection of interesting species. Little Ringed Plovers and Lapwings frequented the water's edge, while

a pair of Red-headed Buntings was found nearby. As we explored the area, we encountered our first camel spider of the trip, a fascinating desert specialist which attracted considerable interest.

The approaching weather appeared to trigger a major movement of Black Kites. Hundreds of birds were gathering to roost in the surrounding trees, creating an impressive spectacle. Many were perched openly, allowing excellent views of this abundant raptor.

As we prepared to leave, a ringtail harrier appeared and began circling nearby. Careful observation revealed it to be a first-summer Montagu's Harrier, a welcome addition to the trip list and one of the highlights of the stop. Continuing deeper into the desert, we began to encounter increasing numbers of characteristic desert birds. Calandra Larks and Greater Short-toed Larks were regularly seen from the vehicle, while Rollers and the occasional Bee-eater appeared along roadside wires.

One final stop at a small petrol station produced an unexpected bonus. The bushes behind the buildings held several Sykes's Warblers and a few rosefinches. As light rain began to fall, Edwin and Chris simultaneously picked up a bright yellow bird perched in one of the sparse trees. After prolonged views and careful consideration, it proved to be a Golden Oriole. Finding such a striking woodland species was a reminder that even the smallest areas of cover can attract migrants in these arid landscapes.

As evening approached, we finally entered the heart of the Taukum Desert. In the fading light, the distinctive white yurts of our desert camp gradually emerged on the horizon. Arriving at camp felt like entering another world: we were surrounded by dunes and vast open landscapes stretching in every direction.

After settling into our yurts, we enjoyed an excellent evening meal before gathering for the daily checklist. With a full day of desert birding planned for the following morning, excitement was high as we retired for the night, ready to begin exploring this remarkable habitat.

Day 9

Wednesday 3rd June

As our first full day in the Taukum Desert broke, tea and biscuits were available from 4.45am, before we departed at 5.00am. We headed out into the desert in search of one of the region's most sought-after species: Asian Houbara. We travelled west for forty-five minutes before we left the main road and ventured into the vast expanse of semi-desert habitat. We made numerous stops, scanning the landscape carefully in the hope of finding a bustard. Despite considerable effort, the species remained elusive, but there was no shortage of other wildlife to enjoy.

Black-bellied Sandgrouse were particularly prominent throughout the morning. Their distinctive calls were often heard long before the birds themselves appeared, and groups regularly flew overhead, while others could be seen feeding on the ground at some distance. Although they could be difficult to approach, we enjoyed many excellent flight views as birds travelled between feeding and drinking areas.

At one stop, centred around a crumbling concrete structure, we spent some time scanning the surrounding grasslands. Chris picked out a Corsac Fox hunting through the vegetation, providing another excellent mammal sighting. Around us, the desert was alive with birdsong. Calandra, Turkestan Short-toed and Crested Larks seemed to be everywhere, creating a surprising contrast to the apparent emptiness of the landscape.

We visited an area which can be productive for Caspian Plover: time was limited, and despite a thorough scan, we were unable to locate the species. Lapwings were present, however, and a small flock of Greater Sand Plovers provided excellent telescope views before they eventually disappeared into the distance. With the morning progressing, we returned to camp for breakfast.

Afterwards, we visited a nearby waterhole and an abandoned farmstead. Activity at the waterhole was rather subdued, perhaps because overnight rain had left water available elsewhere in the desert. Nevertheless, there were still a few Black-bellied Sandgrouse passing through, along with Lapwings and a particularly showy Red-headed Bunting. A Sykes's Warbler also performed well in the surrounding bushes. Although we spent some time waiting in the hope that more birds would arrive to drink, the site remained relatively quiet. By the end of the day, we estimated that we had seen around fifty Black-bellied Sandgrouse, but comparatively few had actually visited the waterholes.

We returned to camp for a hearty lunch, before enjoying a well-earned siesta during the hottest part of the day. Later in the afternoon, we headed out once more, this time to a different waterhole near a small farmstead. The site immediately felt more productive. A pair of Black-winged Stilts fed around the water's edge, accompanied by a fine male Citrine Wagtail, and an immature bird. Little Ringed Plovers were also present in good numbers.



Horsefield's Tortoise



Mongolian Finch



Rosy Starling



Pallas's Sandgrouse

Before reaching the waterhole itself, however, we made an important stop. A confiding Lesser Grey Shrike showed exceptionally well beside the track, but even more exciting were several small birds perched in bushes behind it. These proved to be Desert Finches, one of the principal targets of our stay in the Taukum Desert. The birds had evidently just visited the waterhole and paused briefly in the bushes, before disappearing back into the desert. Everyone managed excellent telescope views of this attractive and highly localised species.

Back at the waterhole, activity continued throughout the afternoon. More Black-bellied Sandgrouse arrived to drink, while Red-headed Buntings appeared in impressive numbers, eventually reaching double figures. The highlight was undoubtedly a Bimaculated Lark, which came down to the water and remained long enough for everyone to appreciate its short tail, striking head pattern and bright yellow bill. It was a superb sighting of a species that can often prove remarkably difficult to observe well on the ground. Rollers were also regularly seen around the area, adding flashes of brilliant blue to the desert landscape.

Later in the afternoon, we explored the bushes and trees surrounding a nearby farm. The first corner alone proved very productive, and kept us occupied for some time. Spotted Flycatchers, Chaffinches, Blyth's Reed Warblers, Common Rosefinches, Starlings and an Oriental Turtle Dove all showed well. The presence of Chaffinches was particularly noteworthy, given the desert location.

As we continued along the boundary, Chris briefly found another Desert Finch at close range, although it disappeared before most of the group could get onto it. Further searching produced Hume's Warblers, additional Common Rosefinches, and several shrikes. One particularly interesting shrike showed only briefly and appeared to have a rather weak facial mask, raising the possibility of Daurian Shrike. Unfortunately, the views were too fleeting for a conclusive identification, and it remained one of the day's unresolved mysteries.

Eventually, we relocated the Desert Finches behind the farm buildings. Two birds were feeding around the feet of some horses and repeatedly perched on exposed bushes nearby. This time, everyone enjoyed prolonged and excellent views through the telescope, providing a fitting finale to a successful afternoon.

After returning to camp, we enjoyed another excellent dinner, before setting out again after dark. Once night had fallen, we walked across the open ground near the yurts in search of some nocturnal desert wildlife. Our first success came quickly. Several jerboas were found bounding across the desert in the torchlight. Watching these extraordinary little mammals hopping effortlessly through the darkness on their elongated hind legs was a real highlight, and delighted everyone.

Along a nearby track, Chris spotted distant eye-shine. Investigating revealed a beautifully marked Wonder Gecko. The intricate patterning on this remarkable reptile was spectacular under torchlight, and provided an excellent end to the day.

With another early start planned for the following morning, we returned to camp. After a day filled with desert birds, mammals and reptiles, everyone retired to their yurts for a well-earned sleep.

Day 10

Thursday 4th June

Tea, coffee and biscuits were provided at dawn, allowing us to break our fast before setting off into the Taukum Desert and heading north towards the famous Turanga Forest, one of the region's most important and distinctive habitats. The journey took us across extensive dune systems dotted with sparse vegetation. Despite the seemingly harsh environment, the desert was alive with birds. Calandra, Turkestan Short-toed and Crested Larks were abundant throughout, their songs carrying across the dunes. Occasional Bimaculated Larks were also encountered, allowing useful comparisons with the more numerous Calandra Larks, and highlighting their distinctive structure and flight style.

Our first major stop came when Chris spotted a bird disappearing into a bush, prompting a rapid halt and a careful search of the surrounding dunes. The bird soon reappeared and proved to be a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin. Although initially seen only briefly by a few members of the group, patience paid off and most people eventually enjoyed good views as it perched atop bushes, before disappearing over the sandy ridges. While searching for the scrub robin, we also enjoyed excellent views of a Central Midday Jird busily excavating its burrow system. The animal appeared completely unconcerned by our presence, and provided prolonged views as it went about its daily routine.

Just as we were preparing to leave, Andy relocated the Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, giving the group another opportunity to admire this attractive desert scrub specialist. A singing Bimaculated Lark overhead provided a useful opportunity to compare its voice to that of the surrounding Calandra Larks, before we resumed our journey towards the forest.

Along the route we paused to admire a Long-legged Buzzard nest situated remarkably close to the road, complete with two well-grown chicks. The adults remained nearby, keeping watch over their offspring.

As the first stands of Turanga Forest began to appear, we made a stop at a roadside shelter, which hosted one of the day's principal targets. Almost immediately, we located several Saxaul Sparrows. Further observation revealed at least two pairs nesting within the bus shelter itself. The birds showed exceptionally well, allowing everyone to appreciate their neat appearance, chestnut plumage and rather delicate structure, compared with more familiar sparrows.

We then continued into the heart of the Turanga Forest, arriving in time for a slightly delayed breakfast. No sooner had we arrived than another major target presented itself. A Yellow-eyed Pigeon was quickly located perched in a nearby tree. This species can be notoriously difficult to find, and some groups have spent hours searching without success, making such immediate views particularly satisfying. The bird showed beautifully through the telescope before moving to another tree, where it was relocated and admired again.

While watching the pigeon, we heard the distinctive calls of a White-winged Woodpecker. Before long the bird was located, and it gave us excellent views as it moved through the trees. Its extensive white wing patches and subtly different plumage from Great Spotted Woodpecker were readily appreciated through the telescope.

With two of the forest's key specialities already secured, breakfast was enjoyed in the shade of the remarkable saxaul trees. These hardy desert trees are now protected, having once been heavily exploited for fuel due to their exceptionally dense hardwood, which burns slowly and produces long-lasting heat.

Following breakfast, we explored the forest further. Lesser Whitethroats, Sykes's Warblers and additional Saxaul Sparrows were all encountered, but perhaps the most exciting moment came when a Pallid Scops Owl began calling nearby. An intensive search followed, with everyone examining every likely tree. Just as we were beginning to lose hope, a small owl suddenly burst from cover and flew into another tree. Careful searching eventually revealed the bird sitting quietly within the foliage. It was indeed a Pallid Scops Owl, one of the forest's most sought-after residents. Unfortunately, before a telescope could be set up for the entire group, the owl dropped from view and disappeared. Nevertheless, several participants enjoyed brief but valuable views of this elusive species.

We eventually departed, and stopped for lunch near a small town. The area produced several Common Mynas, numerous Black Kites and a Hobby. Particularly noteworthy was a striking erythristic Black Kite. Reduced dark pigmentation gave the bird an unusually ginger appearance, making it stand out dramatically among the surrounding kites.

Following lunch, we began the journey back towards the desert camp, making several stops along the way. One productive stop was at a bridge crossing over a narrow water channel bordered by reeds. Here, we enjoyed excellent views of a Short-toed Snake Eagle flying low overhead. Penduline Tits were calling from the reeds, and although we attempted to coax them into view, they remained hidden. A Cetti's Warbler did show well, however, while numerous dragonflies, including several Lesser Emperors, patrolled the water beneath us.

A little later we encountered another Short-toed Snake Eagle, this time carrying a snake still partially protruding from its bill. The spectacle of the bird flying with its prey only partly swallowed was fascinating.

As evening approached, we revisited the waterhole explored the previous day. A few Little Ringed Plovers remained around the margins, while Black-bellied Sandgrouse continued to arrive intermittently to drink.

The final birding highlight came just before we reached camp. Three sandgrouse flushed from the track ahead of the vehicle and flew across our field of view. They proved to be Pallas's Sandgrouse, allowing everyone to appreciate the distinctive wing pattern and structure that separate them from the more frequently encountered Black-bellied Sandgrouse.

Back at camp, another excellent dinner was enjoyed, before we set out for a second nocturnal excursion. The desert once again proved rewarding. Several jerboas were found, including one particularly confiding individual which bounced around almost at our feet. We also located another beautifully patterned Wonder Gecko, allowing those who had missed the previous evening's excursion to catch up with this remarkable reptile.

After another highly productive day which had delivered an excellent range of desert specialities, forest birds, mammals and reptiles, we returned to our yurts and settled in for the night.

Day 11

Friday 5th June

On our final full morning in the Taukum Desert, we set out early once again, after a brief tea and coffee at camp. With the familiar backdrop of larks already in full song, we made our way out for one last attempt to reconnect with some of the desert's key specialities.

Our main focus was once again the Caspian Plover area, and we were fortunate to find activity almost immediately after arriving. A female plover was located on the ground and, on closer observation, was clearly incubating a clutch of eggs. At intervals she stood, carefully turned the eggs, and then resettled. Her behaviour suggested that hatching may have been imminent, as she appeared restless, frequently adjusting position and making short foraging movements nearby, before returning to the nest scrape. We spent some time watching her discreetly, while Black-bellied Sandgrouse continued to pass overhead in loose flocks. It was another excellent reminder of how productive this seemingly empty landscape can be.

Eventually we left the plover to it, and continued our search for Asian Houbara. Although initial scans produced nothing, the morning soon delivered another highlight when Chris called the bus to a stop, having noticed a potentially bustard-shaped bird in the distance. While attention was focused on his sighting, Edwin spotted movement on the opposite side of the vehicle, and we quickly realised that Corsac Fox cubs were present very close by. We enjoyed prolonged and intimate views of three young foxes, initially playing and engaging in mock hunting behaviour before exploring the surrounding area together. Their confidence and curiosity provided a memorable wildlife encounter, made all the more special by their proximity. One of the cubs appeared noticeably younger and less confident than its siblings, keeping in cover while the others moved more freely.

After further scanning, and with sandgrouse still moving through the area, we resumed our search. On a final stop, Chris once again picked up what initially appeared to be a potential bustard in the grass. Careful observation revealed that it was in fact an Asian Houbara chick! The sighting was extraordinary: a single, small chick moving independently through the long grass, intermittently visible as it navigated the sparse vegetation. No adults were seen nearby, possibly having dropped into cover as our vehicle approached. We watched the chick for some time as it moved steadily through the habitat, before it eventually disappeared from view. It was a remarkable and unexpected finale to our desert birding.

Shortly afterwards, we made our way back towards camp for breakfast; a female Montagu's Harrier passed through briefly, the identification confirmed by excellent and rapid photographic skills from David.

After breakfast, it was time to pack up camp and begin the journey back towards Almaty. The drive out of the desert was largely uneventful in birding terms, but still produced regular sightings of Rollers, larks, Long-legged Buzzards and flocks of Rosy Starlings as we retraced our route. A final stop near the main road produced Glossy Ibis and Caspian Gull overhead, providing a last few additions before we left the desert behind. We continued towards Almaty, marking the end of an exceptional desert phase of the tour, rich in both expected specialities and several memorable surprises.

Lunch was taken at a simple but pleasant roadside stop. The site was nothing more than a small shelter beside the main road, but it provided a welcome break from travelling and a chance to reflect on the morning's final desert sightings. We were accompanied by a very friendly puppy at the stop, which proved a charming distraction and attracted considerable attention from Edwin and Johanna, who were both strongly tempted to take it home. Despite a brief search of the surrounding bushes, bird activity was limited, suggesting that the main passage of migrants had already moved through the area. Nevertheless, a Roller was seen nearby, offering a final splash of colour and a reminder of the region's characteristic open-country birdlife.

After lunch, we continued the journey southwards, gradually leaving the desert landscapes behind and descending back into the greener surroundings of Almaty. We arrived in the city in the mid to late afternoon, and checked back into our hotel, allowing time to rest and prepare for an early dinner.

The evening meal also provided an opportunity to say farewell to Harish: the group expressed their sincere thanks for his expertise, good humour and support throughout the trip. His knowledge of the region's birds and habitats had been invaluable, and his company greatly enhanced the experience for everyone involved.

With flights departing early the following morning, the tour proper concluded in Almaty on a note of quiet satisfaction, after an exceptionally successful journey.

Day 12

Saturday 6th June

We left the hotel early in the morning and made our way to the airport in time for a 5.30am flight. The departure went smoothly, with no issues, and the journey back to the UK proceeded without incident.

After a long day of travel, we eventually arrived at Heathrow at around 4.00pm, slightly earlier than scheduled. On arrival, the group exchanged goodbyes and took a moment to reflect on what had been an outstanding trip, full of memorable encounters and remarkable birding.

The tour had produced an impressive total of nearly 200 birdspecies on the main itinerary, rising to approximately 236 species including the extension. These included a wealth of specialities from both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, alongside unforgettable experiences across steppe, desert, wetland, and mountain habitats.

With final farewells said, the group departed with many shared memories of striking landscapes, outstanding wildlife encounters, and excellent company throughout. It was a fitting conclusion to a highly successful journey across Central Asia.

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Species lists

Korgalzhyn extension

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		23	24	25
Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>		14	2
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>		3	15
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	4	9	10
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	5	20	6
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>	8	1	25
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	10	5	35
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	7	10	8
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>		2	
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	16	2	✓
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	3	1	4
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>			20
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	5	50	✓
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	2		2
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	2		6
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>		4	
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>			5
Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	H	H	H
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3	✓	2
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	6	8	3
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	30	20	✓
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			2
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis meena</i>			1
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>			H
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	2	6	10
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>	1	3	5
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	6		
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>			3
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	3	8	6
Horned Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>			2
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	3	1	8
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>			50
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	12	50	✓
Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		17	
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>		25	
Common Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>		1	
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	2	6	6
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	15	✓	✓
Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>	4		2
Caspian Plover	<i>Anarhynchus asiaticus</i>			2
Kentish Plover	<i>Anarhynchus alexandrinus</i>		4	
Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	1		2
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	2	1	2
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>		1	

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		23	24	25
Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>		4000+	20
Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>		25	20
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1		
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	20	8	10
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	8	10	
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		6	20
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>			H
Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		8	
Ruff	<i>Calidris pugnax</i>	200	20	30
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>		4	8
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	8	10	15
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>		50	3
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>		300	70
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	9	60	40
Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>			2
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>		2	
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>		2	2
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>		2	30
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	200+	100	300
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	3		2
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus genei</i>		25	
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	7	✓	✓
Pallas's Gull	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>	1	100	3
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>	1	1	
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	30	✓	✓
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus barabensis</i>		2	
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>			4
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	20	✓	1
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>		53	70
Eurasian Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			2
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	2	1	3
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	3	2	2
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	4	7	7
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>		1	
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>		2	2
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	7	2	8
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	20	5	12
Black (Black-eared) Kite	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	5	2	4
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	1		
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		3	2
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>			1
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	4	12	2
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	10	6	12
Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	16	2	15
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>		1	
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	5	2	
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>		4	
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	1	5	1
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	1	4	4

Common name	Scientific name	May 2026		
		23	24	25
Red-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>			1
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula soemmerringii</i>	✓	✓	✓
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	14	✓	✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix sharpii</i>	✓	5	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax tibetanus</i>	3		
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	1		
Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			4
White-winged Lark	<i>Alauda leucoptera</i>	6	20	50
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis dulcivox</i>		✓	✓
Black Lark	<i>Melanocorypha yeltoniensis</i>	20	✓	20
Pale Martin	<i>Riparia diluta</i>	✓		
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi</i>		1	6
Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	H		8
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	✓	3	H
Common Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus</i>			1
Booted Warbler	<i>Iduna caligata</i>	5	5	6
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>			H
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia straminea</i>	H		
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca halimodendri</i>	2	1	
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis rubicola</i>		1	
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓		
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	50	80	40
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>		1	
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica pallidogularis</i>	2		3
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>	6	4	3
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica</i>	1	8	15
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	1	5	2
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus dilutus</i>	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	✓	✓	✓
Masked (White) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba personata</i>		1	
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	2	3	8
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis</i>	1		
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>			2
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina bella</i>		3	
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>	1		
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>		1	
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	1		2

Mammals

		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>	✓	✓	3
Bobka (Steppe) Marmot	<i>Marmota bobak</i>	✓	✓	
Common Muskrat - I	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>			1
Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>		✓	
Goitered Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa gracilicornis</i>		✓	
Saiga	<i>Saiga tatarica</i>		27	8

Reptiles

		May 2026		
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25
Sand Lizard	<i>Lacerta agilis</i>			2

Main tour

Birds (H=heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>								✓			
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>								✓			
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>								✓			
Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>							✓	✓	✓		
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓		
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>								✓	✓		
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>								✓			
Ferruginous Duck	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>								✓	✓		
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>								✓			
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>								✓			
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Himalayan Snowcock	<i>Tetraogallus himalayensis</i>					✓						
Chukar Partridge	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			
Egyptian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus aegyptius</i>								✓			
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarpis melba</i>			✓								
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>		✓	✓					✓		✓	
Asian Houbara	<i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>									✓		
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>										✓	
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>				✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Feral Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow-eyed Pigeon	<i>Columba eversmanni</i>									✓		
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus casiotis</i>	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓			✓
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis meena</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>								✓			

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>								✓			
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>				✓			✓	✓			
Corn Crane	<i>Crex crex</i>							H				
Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>		✓	✓				✓				
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>								✓			
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>								✓			
Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>								✓			
Ibisbill	<i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>						✓					
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>								✓			✓
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>				✓				✓			✓
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>							✓	✓			✓
Caspian Plover	<i>Anarhynchus asiaticus</i>									✓		
Greater Sand Plover	<i>Anarhynchus leschenaultii crassirostris</i>		✓		✓					✓		
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓							
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>							✓				
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				✓				✓			
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>								✓			
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>								✓	✓		
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>								✓	✓		
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>					✓			✓	✓		
Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>								✓			✓
Pygmy Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo pygmaeus</i>								✓			
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓				✓	✓		
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>								✓			
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>								✓			
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>							✓	✓	✓		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓		
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>								✓			
Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>								✓			
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>			✓								
Cinereous Vulture	<i>Aegypius monachus</i>				✓							

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Himalayan Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>					✓						
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓						
Short-toed Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	✓								✓		
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>			✓	✓					✓		
Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>						✓					
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>		✓							✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓					
Hen Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>						✓					
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>										✓	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>								✓	✓		
Black (Black-eared) Kite	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>									✓		
Common (Steepe) Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Upland Buzzard	<i>Buteo hemilasius</i>					✓						
Eurasian Scops Owl	<i>Otus scops</i>			✓								
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>			✓	✓							
Eurasian Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>		✓									
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				✓				✓	✓		✓
White-winged Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucopterus</i>									✓		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓								
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>							✓				
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	✓			✓				✓			
Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>				✓							
Great Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>			✓					✓			
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>				✓						✓	✓

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Red-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach erythronotus</i>		✓									
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis</i>					✓	✓					
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>					✓	✓					
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula soemmerringii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix sharpii</i>		✓									
Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>		✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax tibetanus</i>	✓										
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater rufipectus</i>						✓					
Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus tianschanicus</i>	✓		✓	✓							
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					
Turkestan (Great) Tit	<i>Parus major turkestanicus</i>									✓		
Eurasian Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>									✓		
White-crowned Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz coronatus coronatus</i>	✓								✓		
Oriental Skylark	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>				✓							
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis dulcivox</i>				✓		✓	✓				
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata magna</i>			✓					✓		✓	✓
Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris brandti</i>		✓	✓								
Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Bimaculated Lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata</i>										✓	✓
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓
Asian Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala cheleensis</i>			✓								
Turkestan Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala heinei</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>				✓			✓	✓		✓	
Pale Martin	<i>Riparia diluta</i>				✓			✓				
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>					✓						
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			✓

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
European Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula</i>	✓	✓						✓			
White-browed Tit-warbler	<i>Leptopoecile sophiae</i>					✓	✓					
Hume's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>					✓	✓					✓
Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>					✓						
Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi</i>								✓			
Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>							✓				
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	✓										
Sykes's Warbler	<i>Iduna rama</i>								✓	✓	✓	✓
Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Helopsaltes certhiola</i>							✓				
Common Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia straminea</i>						✓					
Barred Warbler	<i>Curruca nisoria merzbacheri</i>										✓	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca halimodendri</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓		✓
Eastern Orphean Warbler	<i>Curruca crassirostris</i>			✓								
Asian Desert Warbler	<i>Curruca nana</i>			✓							✓	✓
Common Whitethroat	<i>Curruca communis rubicola</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓				✓
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i>	✓				✓	✓					
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula intermedius</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>			✓	✓					✓	✓	✓
Himalayan Rubythroat	<i>Calliope pectoralis ballioni</i>					✓	✓					
Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>	✓										
Eversmann's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i>					✓	✓					
Blue-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus coeruleocephala</i>						✓					
(Eastern) Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros phoenicuroides</i>					✓						
Güldenstädt's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogastus</i>					✓						
Common Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>			✓		✓						
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		✓									
Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓				
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>			✓								
Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
White-throated Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus leucogaster</i>	✓				✓	✓					
Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>						✓					
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>							✓				
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>								✓			
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus dilutus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Saxaul Sparrow	<i>Passer ammodendri</i>									✓		
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus</i>										✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓										
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus bactrianus</i>	✓							✓		✓	✓
Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>					✓						
Black-throated Accentor	<i>Prunella atrogularis huttoni</i>					✓	✓					
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓		
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea melanope</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓					
Masked (White) Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba personata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>				✓							
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta blakistoni</i>					✓	✓					
White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>					✓	✓					
Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguineus</i>						✓					
Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>		✓	✓								
Plain Mountain Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>					✓	✓					
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>					✓	✓					
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris turkestanica</i>		✓						✓			
Desert Finch	<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>											✓
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina bella</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				
Grey-crowned (European) Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis paropanisi</i>		✓	✓								

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Red-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>					✓	✓					
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>											✓
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra buturlini</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓				
Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>						✓					
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia par</i>		✓									
Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	✓										
White-capped Bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>		✓									
Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani buturlini</i>		✓	✓								
Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Tolai Hare	<i>Lepus tolai</i>			✓		✓						
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>						✓					
Long-tailed Marmot	<i>Marmota caudata</i>					✓	✓					
a jerboa									✓			
Common Muskrat - I	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>								✓			
Central Midday Jird	<i>Meriones meridianus</i>			✓	✓						✓	✓
Great Gerbil	<i>Rhombomys opimus</i>								✓			✓
Altai Mountain Weasel	<i>Mustela altaica</i>					✓						
Corsac Fox	<i>Vulpes corsac</i>									✓		
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>								✓			
Goitered Gazelle	<i>Gazella subgutturosa</i>			✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓

Reptiles

Common name	Scientific name	May - June 2026										
		26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5
Horsefield's Tortoise	<i>Testudo horsfieldii</i>									✓		
Wonder Gecko	<i>Teratoscincus scincus</i>								✓			
Caspian Racerunner	<i>Eremias velox</i>									✓		
Four-lined Racerunner	<i>Eremias lineolata</i>										✓	
Sunwatcher Toad-headed Agama	<i>Phrynocephalus helioscopus</i>			✓						✓		
Steppe Agama	<i>Trapelus sanguinolentus</i>										✓	
Caspian Whipsnake	<i>Dolichophis caspius</i>								✓			
Dice Snake	<i>Natrix tessellata</i>								✓			