

The Tien Shan Mountains & Deserts of Kazakhstan

Naturetrek Tour Report

30th April - 15th May 2005



Report compiled by Chris Kehoe



Naturetrek Cheriton Mill Cheriton Alresford Hampshire SO24 0NG England

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

F: +44 (0)1962 736426

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Naturetrek leader:	Chris Kehoe
Local guides:	Anna Ivashenko and Olga
Tour participants:	Elaine Cook Rollo Turner Claire Frew Patrick Frew John Geeson Judy Geeson Andrea Jackson Dave Riley Georgina Penticost Richard Penticost

Sunday 1st May

Great Almaty Gorge

Weather: Dry and bright, thunderstorms in evening

KLM delivered us to Almaty a little ahead of time at 01.30 and we quickly transferred the short distance to our comfortable city centre hotel, the Astana International. Those who chose to took a short pre-breakfast stroll near the hotel and discovered Almaty to be a leafy but modern city backed by the spectacular snowy peaks of the Tien Shan. Familiar species such as Greenfinches, Magpies and Blackbirds were supplemented by Common Mynas and a small selection of migrants including Hume's Warblers and Siberian Chiffchaffs. After a leisurely breakfast we set off by bus into the foothills of the nearby Tien Shan accompanied by Anna, our local botanist and Nazira, our superb interpreter. As we arrived at Great Almaty Gorge the birders and botanists alike were soon well into the swing of things, Anna pointed out a selection of interesting flowers, including the first primulas, and the birders occupied themselves with Golden Eagle, Red-fronted Serins and a Black-throated Accentor. Nearby, a rushing torrent gave us Brown Dippers and Blue Whistling Thrushes before we returned to Almaty for lunch and to prepare for our forthcoming overnight train journey. The weather was sticky and thundery as our train left Almaty at 1730 and began to rumble westwards across the steppe. The train moved slowly enough to allow many species to be identified as we went. A serendipitous stop next to a small wetland produced a gathering of Black-headed Wagtails and a single Citrine, while Rose-coloured Starlings and European Bee-eaters flew by. As night drew in we retired to our compartments and enjoyed some of the wine Dauren, from our ground agents Kan Tengri, had provided for us in recognition of the May Day holiday.

Monday 2nd May

Aksu Gorge

Weather: Dry and bright, breezy

With Soviet style efficiency we received our alarm calls twenty minutes early; unfortunately the train was running nearly two hours late so such efficiency was somewhat wasted. Nevertheless, birding soon resumed from the sometimes-moving train and produced an interesting haul that included a Little Bustard and Black Stork. Having finally arrived at Tulkubas station at 0900 we were quickly whisked off to our delightful guesthouse accommodation in Dzabagly Village and a late breakfast. As the weather looked good, albeit a bit breezy, we decided to take our chances and head straight into the mountains after breakfast. The first *Tulipa greigii* were spotted as we drove up a series of steep hairpins that took us onto a high plateau. Further tulips were seen before we reached the far edge of the plateau which dropped away suddenly at the spectacular Aksu Gorge. In bright sunlight we could admire great views of the gorge below, white drifts of *Eremurus lactiflorus*, and the snow capped Tien Shan beyond. Within a little while several good birds had been seen: White-capped Buntings were singing, several Hobbies moved through the gorge at or below eye level and a succession of interesting large raptors appeared above the ridge opposite, several Honey Buzzards indicating that a migratory movement was in progress. Moving further along the gorge, the botanical interest increased, with a selection of Iris and Fritillaria species being seen, and we ate our packed lunches surrounded by stands of *Tulipa greigii* as the birders scanned for raptors or watched a female Rock Thrush on the edge of the gorge. Soon after lunch a superb Lammergeier flew low across our path as we moved further on towards the snowline where a different plant community was found, as was a Black Stork and a couple of Short-toed Eagles. Botany stole the show today but the birders had had a good day too. An excellent meal back at the guesthouse, the first of many on this tour (with various jams, soups, fresh mushrooms and packed lunches from the guesthouse attracting particular praise), confirmed that Kazakhstan was definitely the place to be.

Monday 3rd May 2005

Chokpak and Berkara

Weather: Dry, bright and warm

Our original plan today had been to drive directly to Berkara and then to make our way back from there more gradually. A short stop at a roadside pool that is sometimes interesting for migrant birds soon resulted in a change of plans. It quickly became apparent that a significant diurnal migratory movement was taking place and, as we stood overlooking the pool, birds were flying east all the time; many were sparrows (of the migratory Indian form) but of greater interest were several Golden Orioles, White-crowned Penduline Tits and, notably rare in southern Kazakhstan, Long-tailed Tits. Bee-eaters and Rose-coloured Starlings were also much in evidence. The decision was taken there and then to visit Chokpak Ringing Station but before heading off there we had time to enjoy some of the birds on the pond itself, not least the Little Bittern and Moustached Warbler that showed very well. Soon after, we were at Chokpak Ringing Station where two immense Heligoland traps set at the head of a small valley sucked in many of the large flocks of migrants that were passing through. The helpful and friendly station staff were happy to show us their work and we

enjoyed in-hand views of several species, though the European Bee-eater was by far the most dramatic. Those who accompanied a mistnet round in a nearby wood were surprised to find an Eastern Rock Nuthatch calling loudly from a treetop. Hospitality demanded that we enjoyed a cup of tea or coffee and biscuits before leaving to follow up a hot tip we'd been given. At a nearby railway crossing we soon found the promised Yellow-breasted Tits that were breeding in a hole in a concrete telegraph pole. This is not always an easy species to find, or see well, so a 'staked-out' nest was a real bonus and the birds showed to perfection. Carrying on towards Berkara we had short stops to enjoy a 70 strong flying flock of Demoiselle Cranes, a fleeting Black Vulture and a Montagu's Harrier. Rather longer stops were needed to try to fathom the subspecific identity of several migrant Isabelline Shrikes in bushes along the roadside. At Berkara, the hoped-for Asian Paradise Flycatchers were quickly seen, though did not give good views away easily, but several Common Nightingales of the distinctive Central Asian race *hafizi* obliged us with very good views, as did 'Grey-headed' Goldfinches, so similar yet also so different from our own Goldfinches. Anna and the botanists went on a long ramble around the adjacent arid hillsides before we re-grouped and began the journey back to Dzabagly. Brief stops near Lake Bylikol and other nearby wetlands produced numerous migrating Siberian Stonechats, a splendid male Bluethroat, Montagu's and Marsh Harriers and a small group of Collared Pratincoles. Birding from the moving bus itself resulted in a couple of 'brakes on' moments as Black-bellied Sandgrouse, three Black Storks (on a roadside puddle!) and, best of all, four Little Bustards were seen, the latter flew across the road right in front of us.

Tuesday 4th May

Kishi Kandi

Weather: Dry, bright at lower elevations

A return to the mountains today saw us undertake a gentle hike at Kishi Kandi. This took us upwards towards the spruce and juniper forests that lay above rich flower meadows. White-crowned Penduline Tits and Rock Buntings gave themselves up on the lower slopes but the real avian specialities were higher up where Hume's Lesser Whitethroats, Blue-capped Redstarts and Rufous-naped Tits were all eventually seen. Yellow-breasted Tits were seen again and a couple of Greenish Warblers stood out amongst the more numerous Hume's. Of the raptors soaring around as we had lunch, Golden and Booted Eagles and Lammergeier were highlights. The return journey allowed second chances at anything missed on the way up and further opportunities to enjoy the rich botany of the area, including a fine stand of *Tulipa kaufmanniana*. As we were approaching our start point a calling 'wild' Common Pheasant was eventually tracked down and gave great views. A woodpecker that flew over was probably White-winged (Great Spotted not having been recorded here). We returned to the guesthouse in Dzabagly in time to enjoy the peace of the place before darkness fell but that calm was soon shattered, and showers abandoned, when a Brown Bear was spotted roaming around on a distant hillside; scopes were quickly trained on the spot and reasonable views were enjoyed for over half an hour before the light began to fade and dinner, or just aperitifs, beckoned.

Wednesday 5th May

Mashat Gorge

Weather: Light rain then dry and bright

Our final day at Dzabagly began with a scan of the hillside where yesterday's Brown Bear had been seen and, in addition to the bear which, surprisingly, was still present, a small group of ungulates, thought to be Siberian Ibex or Marco Polo Sheep, showed very distantly, but evocatively, standing on crags. After breakfast we made a return to the roadside pool that had been so productive for migrants a few days ago. In the event migration had all but stopped but just before we were about to leave sharp eyes picked up a small crane flying across the pool. A couple more small cranes were flushed as we went in pursuit before a superb male Baillon's Crane appeared creeping along the reed edge and allowed great scope views for several minutes. The rest of the morning was spent in rather overcast conditions with occasional rain as we explored Mashat Gorge. Anna kept the botanists entertained with new *Eremurus* and *Allium* species, while the birders enjoyed good views of Eastern Rock Nuthatches and Alpine Swifts. After lunch, the weather began to improve and sunny conditions encouraged raptors into the air, Honey Buzzards soon appeared and this time allowed good enough views for identification as Oriental Honey Buzzards. European Turtle Doves, Long-tailed Shrikes, Pied Wheatears and plenty of Rollers and Bee-eaters completed a star cast and several Hobbies showed well, including one perched in a roadside tree at close range. After an early dinner at the Guesthouse we transferred to the Tulkubas station where our train arrived on time shortly after 19.00.

Thursday 6th May

Almaty to Kolshengel

Weather: Bright, mainly dry, breezy at times

Arriving in Almaty on time at 09.00 we quickly made our way to the Astana International for breakfast and a wash and brush up before setting off for Sorbulak Lake and the steppe and desert beyond, our final destination being Kolshengel Camp on the edge of the Taukum Sands. Sorbulak quickly provided the hoped for Dalmatian Pelicans, along with Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Gulls, Red-crested Pochards and Ferruginous Ducks. Continuing our journey across the immense steppe (in places clad in vast swathes of poppies), a brief stop produced staple fare in the shape of numerous Calandra Larks, Long-legged Buzzards, Pied and Isabelline Wheatears, Tawny Pipits and Red-headed Buntings but a migrant Rock Thrush sitting on telegraph poles was more unexpected. After crossing tens of kilometres of flat, featureless steppe we pulled up next to a single tree at Aldarly in the late afternoon. Being the only real cover for many miles around, this tree, and some nearby bushes, had attracted a considerable number of small migrants: Hume's Warblers were numerous, and a couple of Yellow-browed's were mixed in with them; Lesser-Whitethroats, Blyth's Reed Warblers, a Common Nightingale, Common Redstarts and Spotted Flycatchers and several Isabelline Shrikes kept us entertained but the main highlight was a couple of Barred Warblers that eventually showed well. We finally arrived at Kolshengel Camp late in the evening, though with enough light left to enjoy the abundant breeding Lesser Short-toed and Bimaculated Larks there. Amongst occasional Black-bellied Sandgrouse flying by a particularly skinny looking sandgrouse gave hope for the following morning...

Friday 7th May

Kolshengel

Weather: Dry and sunny, rather hot

Around dawn we set off to explore the desert around the camp; shrikes scattered around in the short scrub included a couple of migrant Red-backed's and we soon found an area of short sward favoured by Greater Sandpipers and a small group of sandgrouse. A small unidentifiable harrier soon appeared and began to scatter the sandgrouse, among which, it now became apparent, had been lurking three Pallas's. Pallas's Sandgrouse is always on the top of peoples wanted lists in Kazakhstan but finding them can be very tricky. The fact that they were even present in the Kolshengel area this year was encouraging but better views were certainly required. Within minutes the characteristic flight call of Pallas's Sandgrouse was heard overhead and a single bird gave grandstand views as it hurtled past. Straight after breakfast we took our camp chairs to a nearby sand dune overlooking an artesian well and waited expectantly to see what would come in to drink. A few Black-bellied Sandgrouse were already present and were occasionally joined by a few more, waders attracted to the muddy edges of the pool included Temminck's Stint and Green Sandpiper while larks included Greater and Lesser-Short-toed's and Bimaculated. A couple of Mongolian Finches suddenly appeared, not an expected species here, so far away from any of the typical rocky habitat of this enigmatic species, as did several Desert Finches. A Red-throated Pipit was a further bonus then, hey presto, a superb male Pallas's Sandgrouse was suddenly at the edge of the pool allowing every feather to be scrutinised, including its little white socks! Further Pallas's appeared within half an hour and just as we were about to leave the shrill calls of marsh terns drew attention to an overflying flock of breeding plumage White-winged Black Terns, some of which lingered briefly to hawk over the well. At nearby Kolshengel Village, a well-wooded oasis in the steppe, migrants had gathered in large numbers. Warblers were everywhere, mainly Hume's but with several Blyth's Reed's and a couple of Greenish, splendid red Common Rosefinches attracted admiring comments and we enjoyed good views of Common Nightingales and striking Oriental Turtle Doves. A single Brambling was a surprise late migrant. Driving north into the Taukum Sands we were in search of 'Steppe' Grey Shrikes and the cry of shrike eventually went up as we drove along. After a bit of searching three different shrikes were found including a mating pair. Also here was our first Great Gerbil and a range of interesting plants. It was a particularly hot afternoon, far hotter than any previously, and we were pleased to revisit the shade of Kolshengel Village before returning to camp. Amongst earlier seen migrants were a couple of Black-throated Thrushes and Bramblings had increased to two and were now joined by a female Chaffinch. Back at camp an evening session overlooking the well produced superb views of a Demoiselle Crane but bird numbers generally were not as high as in the morning. Far away in the desert a very out of place Whooper Swan was spotted!

Saturday 8th May

Illi Delta

Weather: Dry and bright, heavy rain in evening

A busy day began with an early breakfast before boarding the bus for a direct drive north for 2 hours towards the Illi Delta, home to several key birds. After a few minutes of searching we were watching Saxaul Sparrows at close range at Zhealturanghy. The arid scrub here also held numerous Syke's Warblers and chortling rather

than rattling Lesser Whitethroats, probably of the subspecies *halimodendri*. A distant falcon turned out to be a soaring Saker and remained in view, albeit not too close, for over fifteen minutes. It was now mid-morning, the air was warming rapidly and raptors were becoming active. A distant Aquila eagle was suspected to be a Steppe so we chased it down in the bus and enjoyed great views. Soon after, another eagle appeared, a juvenile Imperial that allowed a perfect comparison of features with its Steppe cousin. Moving on to an area of woodland where the Imperial Eagle had landed we immediately found ourselves watching Eversmann's Stock Doves on overhead wires until the eagle was located again in the top of a bare tree, as we watched it another juvenile Imperial flew by and further Steppe Eagles appeared overhead as a Turkestan Tit called nearby. A few kilometres further on we pulled up at a small grove of Turanga trees and within minutes had connected with both of our outstanding targets: White-winged Woodpeckers and magnificent Azure Tits. Our packed lunches were consumed at leisure before we began the return journey towards camp. Some of the interesting looking wetland habitat near Topar that we had passed in haste in the morning was now explored. One reed fringed pool held several Black-necked Grebes and various ducks and another pool held Black-winged Stilts and Black Terns. Soon after returning to camp birding was abandoned as rain set in for several hours but we were snug and warm in our restaurant tent where the wine flowed after a very successful day.

Sunday 9th May

Kolshengel to Almaty via Tamgaly

Weather: Dry, bright, warm

Further scanning of the desert near camp failed to produce any Macqueen's Bustards, perhaps we were here a day or two too early? However, a pair of flying Caspian Plovers were seen, though sadly not by everyone, and we all had prolonged good views of several Greater Sandpipers and a selection of larks and migrants during our pre-breakfast stroll. Back at the artesian well for a final session after breakfast we had great views of more Mongolian Finches and Pallas's Sandgrouse on the ground and just as we were leaving a male Pallas's flew around right above us giving cracking views of its Ferrari lines. A long drive over a high steppe plateau on a rather pot-holed road lay ahead and little was seen initially other than a sensational poppy covered steppe landscape. Eventually we dropped onto a lower plain with subtly different vegetation. Lark numbers had increased now; Calandra's were everywhere and before long a bird with more extensive white in the wing-attracted attention. The bus screeched to a halt and we were soon watching several White-winged Larks (recent and perhaps only temporary colonists of southern Kazakhstan). Most of the larks were flying around, sometimes in aggressive pursuit of Calandra Larks, but one obligingly sat on the road while scopes were trained. Lunch at Tamgaly, a lush shallow gorge, was followed by an inspection of some of the famous petroglyphs that adorn this UNESCO World Heritage Site, and some worthwhile botanising. We didn't linger to look for Eastern Rock Nuthatches here as these had been well seen previously. A roadside Steppe Eagle and a couple of White-winged Black Terns on a lake near Kopa were the only thing that then delayed our return to Almaty. After a couple of nights of camping it was nice to be checking-in once more to the luxury of the Astana International for a night, or most of it. Today saw the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Red Army's defeat of Hitler's Germany in the Great Patriotic War and major celebrations across the former Soviet Union were manifested in Almaty by a massive fireworks display in the stadium next to our hotel.

Monday 10th May

Almaty to Bartogai

Weather: Wet, then dry but breezy

An early start saw us heading east at dawn but plans to visit isolated drinking pools to look for various species were thwarted considerably by the fact that it was raining, and raining heavily. Sitting in a bus, listening to rain falling and trying to peer out of steamed up windows conjured up memories of school outings at home! Adjusting our plans, we went in search of breeding Pale Martins in the hope that the inclement weather might encourage them to perch and show their subtle plumage features off. We were in luck, a roadside colony was eventually found and birds were obligingly perching on the ground, sometimes alongside their larger, darker and more crisply patterned Sand Martin cousins. With rain still falling we decided that tea and coffee were the better part of valour and set off for the 'metropolis' of Basseit and its café. By the time we had finished our drinks, the rain had stopped and the sky was bright and broken. We set off for Nurly, our original early morning intention. Before reaching the barren scrubby landscapes near Nurly, a Montagu's Harrier was watched quartering agricultural fields and several Black-bellied Sandgrouse and a pair of Demoiselle Cranes provided further distractions. The chief highlight during our lunch break at Nurly was the discovery of a rather obliging singing Rufous Bushchat. After lunch there was a botanical stop to admire the magnificent stands of yellow *Eremurus tienshanica* as we passed through the spectacular Kokpek Pass and on across the vast Sogaty Plain. Rather windy conditions meant that scanning the Sogaty Plain was tricky so we headed for our nearby camp on the shores of Bartogai Lake. Immediately on arrival at camp we could hear Grey-necked Buntings singing from the adjacent hills and Isabelline Wheatears and Tawny Pipits were conspicuous. At a small pool near the edge of the lake, finches were coming down to drink, most were Linnets, of the rather distinctive race *bella*, but a couple of stunning Crimson-winged Finches (only recently discovered in this part of the Tien Shan) were much more welcome.

Tuesday 11th May

Sogaty Plain, Charyn Canyon, Kokpek

Weather: Dry, bright, warm

Bartogai Lake has some attraction for migrants that have just crossed the Tien Shan from Kyrgyzyr and this morning a White-winged Black Tern was patrolling the lake and small numbers of common waders included a Whimbrel. A pair of Greater Sandpipers were apparently on breeding territory and a Mongolian Finch was seen briefly. Finches coming to drink again included a pair of Crimson-winged Finches and while waiting for them a Bluethroat appeared singing from the top of pile of stones a few yards away. The arid hills around our camp had a fine show of interesting "hedgehog" plants while strange parasitic *Cynomorium songaricum* caught the eye. After breakfast we were on our way across the Sogaty Plain again and scanning in the hope of picking up a rare Goitered Gazelle. Mammals remained at a premium however and it was birds that once more stole the show, at the dramatic Charyn Red Canyon Lesser Kestrels, Booted Eagles, Pied and Desert Wheatears and Black Stork were highlights. A stroll in the desert failed to produce Desert Warblers but did turn up a couple of Tolai Hares and a pair of 'Turkestan' Isabelline Shrikes. A return to Kokpek Pass in the afternoon produced a few Crag Martins, a Rock Thrush and Golden Eagles before we returned to camp for

the evening. Crimson-winged Finches again obliged and White-winged Black Terns had increased to two and had been joined by a Common Tern.

Wednesday 12th May

Bartogai/ Tien Shan

Weather: Dry, bright, misty with rain/snow in the Tien Shan

After a brief pre-breakfast birding session at Bartogai, where Mongolian Finches dropped in at the drinking pool, we were soon on the road and bound for Almaty once more. Arriving in Almaty by late morning left time for a quick look at the magnificent war memorials and the interior of the ornate wooden cathedral in Paniflov Park before we swapped buses for a sturdier machine that would carry us to over 3000m in the high Tien Shan. Because we had already explored Great Almaty Gorge we made rapid progress towards the Astronomical Observatory that would be our home for the next two nights. Arriving at the dam below the observatory, and the Bolshoi Almaty Lake beyond, the temptation to stop was too great and we were soon in pursuit of Ibisbills. Having walked through wonderful flower-filled turf (never to be seen again under the snow!) to a point from which the vast glacial moraine that is home to these birds could be viewed it only took a couple of minutes to find one, rather strangely it was wading around in still waters near the moraine edge and gave great views before cloud engulfed us. We returned to the bus for the last short uphill leg. Settling in and having tea and coffee took no time but by the time we stepped outside once more the visibility had been reduced to a few metres and the temperature was falling. Soon after, snow began to fall and continued to fall till darkness came. Some compensation for the inclement weather came in the form of the first of several fine meals provided by Rosa, the observatory's excellent cook.

Thursday 13th May

Tien Shan

Weather: Heavy snow, low cloud/poor visibility, mild

Snow was still falling at dawn, and beyond noon for that matter, but with perseverance several of the typical species of this altitudinal range were eventually found. White-winged Grosbeaks and Red-mantled Rosefinches were most conspicuous but an Eversmann's Redstart performed for a while, as did Brown and Black-throated Accentors. In such snowy conditions the journey to the Kosmostation, another 500m higher up is a little more complicated than when the road is clear but Nikolai, our driver, expressed no serious concern about giving it a try and after forty minutes of grinding up hill, and occasionally sliding backwards or sideways a bit, we were at the Kosmostation in near blizzard conditions. Nevertheless, the Gldenstadt's Redstarts were quickly found amongst the dilapidated buildings and showed very well. A couple of Brown Accentors were also found and Red-billed Choughs and Ravens were seen. Back on the bus we returned to the observatory and, with no improvement in the weather looking likely and no bird sounds at all audible, the warmth of the observatory, its coffee and its table tennis table won out to more time in the field.

Friday 14th May

Tien Shan/ Almaty

Weather: Hard frost, low cloud, brighter later

Although the snow had stopped and visibility was sometimes reasonable, a hard overnight frost had set a crust of snow over the spruces and junipers that were supposed to hold various insectivorous birds we were looking for, though a Red Pika showed well. Even yesterday's Eversmann's Redstart and Black-throated Accentors seemed to have fled downhill and after breakfast we did likewise, at least as far as the dam. A search through the spruce forest around and below the dam provided us with fair views of a Nutcracker and good views of a pair Songar Tits. Back at the Observatory for lunch there was still no sound of life but just as we were about to leave a small break in the cloud allowed a small section of hillside to be scanned and almost immediately provided us with our only view of a Himalayan Snowcock, distant it may have been but it was definitely animate! Our final afternoon saw us making our way slowly down to Almaty, exploring the spruce forests and birches as we went. The snowline was almost down to Great Almaty Gorge after the unusually wintry conditions and we had been told by an arriving Japanese birdwatching group that a Wallcreeper had been seen there earlier in the day, well below its seasonal altitudinal range; we sincerely hoped it would remain. Just below the observatory itself we had the first surprise of a bird filled journey; an accentor grubbing about under a snow field turned out to be Alpine rather than the more expected Altai, a further sign that birds were shifting their altitude in response to the conditions. With clearing skies, raptors that had been landbound for days were keen to fly and we saw several Golden Eagles and a couple of Lammergeires, including a perched bird, as we descended. Before reaching the snowline we had seen a couple more Songar Tits but just below the snowline it soon became apparent that that was where the insectivores had got to. In a small gully with a few scattered bushes we found no less than four superb Eversmann's and over eight Blue-capped Redstarts, along with a Black-throated Accentor and an Azure Tit for good measure. Just around the corner was Great Almaty Gorge where the search began for the Wallcreeper. Eventually the bird, a fine male, was located and gave a series of good views on the gorge walls before performing an extended flypast, superb. We returned to Almaty without further stops and checked into the Astana International, our city home. A final meal together at the hotel was followed by a transfer to the airport shortly after midnight, and flights home.

Bird list

Species order and nomenclature generally follows Beaman's Palearctic Birds (Harrier, 1994) except when widely accepted changes have occurred, i.e. the placement of Anseriformes and Galliformes at the start of the list, or when popular usage conflicts with Beaman's favoured names (in which case alternatives are given if confusion is possible). Taxonomy also follows Beaman except when Kazakh ornithology or subsequent major works (i.e. Helm family monographs) or BOU decisions differ in their treatment. Figures in brackets refer to the number of days out of 15 that the species was seen.

Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis* (1:15)

At the last moment a gap in a cloud at the Tien Shan Observatory allowed us to watch one sitting on a rock in the murky distance. Prior to this birds had very occasionally been heard in the surrounding hills but the weather did not prompt much 'wailing'

Chukar *Alectoris chukar kurdestanica* (2:15)

Several showed well at Kishi Kandi and at least one was at Mashat

[**Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix coturnix*

One or two were heard calling from the lower slopes at Kishi Kandi and a couple more were heard at Kolshengel. Isabelline Wheatear's do a very good impersonation of this species]

Common Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus (mongolicus group)* (4:15)

One at Kishi Kandi gave excellent views allowing the white wing-coverts and broad white 'breast-plate' of the *mongolicus* subspecies group to be appreciated, others were seen from the train as we returned to Almaty, at Sorbulak, Zhealturanghy and just above Great Almaty Gorge

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* (1:15)

A single very distant bird in the desert-cum-steppe near Kolshengel was an odd sight

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* (12:15)

Most wetlands held at least a few birds with the largest numbers, about 20, at Bolshoi Almaty Lake where this species breeds

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (1:15)

At least five were on Sorbulak Lake

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* (1:15)

Three migrants were attracted to Bartogai Lake

Gadwall *Anas strepera* (4:15)

Present in small numbers on a few wetlands, including a total of nine migrants at Bartogai Lake

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos* (6:15)

Scarce, found in very small numbers at a couple of wetlands with four migrants at Bartogai Lake

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta acuta* (4:15)

Late migrants were at Bartogai Lake, Topar and Sorbulak with a very out of place bird on Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Garganey *Anas querquedula* (4:15)

At least 20 were at Sorbulak Lake with smaller numbers at Topar and Bartogai

- Northern Shoveler** *Anas dypeata* (2:15)
One at Sorbulak was followed by two pairs at Topar Lakes
- Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* (2:15)
Only seen at Sorbulak (10) and Topar (40)
- Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* (3:15)
Six at Sorbulak showed well and a couple were seen at Topar and Bartogai
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* (1:15)
Two drakes were at Sorbulak
- Goosander** *Mergus merganser merganser* (3:15)
Up to four were found at Bartogai Lake
- Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus cristatus* (3:15)
Six at Sorbulak were followed by a couple at Topar Lakes and one at Bartogai
- Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis nigricollis* (1:15)
Three pairs were at Topar Lakes
- Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis* (2:15)
About 20 at Sorbulak were followed by one at Bartogai
- Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* (2:15)
About 20 at Sorbulak Lake were followed by close flight views of four birds near Zhealturanghy. A couple of very distant swimming pelicans on Bylikol Lake were either this species or Great White Pelicans *P. onocrotolus*
- [**Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris stellaris*
1 was heard at Topar lakes]
- Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus minutus* (1:15)
A male on the roadside pool near Dzabagly gave great views clambering about in the open
- Great Egret** *Egretta/Ardea/Casmerodius alba alba* (4:15)
Two or three were seen near Berkara, at Sorbulak, Topar and Bartogai
- Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea cinerea* (3:15)
A couple near Berkara were followed by four at Sorbulak and one at Topar
- Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra* (3:15)
A good haul, probably as a result of the relatively early dates of the tour this year. One from the train as we approached Chokpak was followed by one soaring at Aksu Gorge later in the day; three more were on a roadside pool near Berkara and at least three were soaring over Charyn Canyon, where this species breeds
- Oriental or Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis* (3:15)
At least three pale morph birds soaring over Mashat were certainly this species. Prior to this we had seen 15 distant *Pernis* sp, including a steady eastward movement at Aksu Gorge, at least some of which were presumably also this species. European Honey Buzzards *Pernis pernís*, do migrate through the western Tien Shan and at least a couple of birds were probably that species. Further confirmed Orientals were seen at Kolshengel and Zhealturanghy before a final *Pernis* sp, presumably a disorientated migrant, was glimpsed in the high Tien Shan
- Black (-eared) Kite** *Milvus (migrans) lineatus* (9:15)
The largest concentration, involving several hundred migrants going to roost in railside trees, were in the steppe west of Almaty as we passed by but up to 20 per day were seen around Kolshengel with smaller numbers elsewhere

- Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus barbatus* (3:15)
One or more were seen at each of Aksu Gorge, Kishi Kandi and in the Tien Shan above Almaty. In total six or seven were recorded, several of which showed very well
- Eurasian Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus fulvus* (1:15)
Of about six *Gyps* vultures seen in the western Tien Shan only two were really close enough to be confidently identified as this species, as opposed to Himalayan Griffon Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*
- Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus percnopterus* (2:15)
At least three were at Mashat Gorge, where apparently breeding, and another was at Charyn Canyon
- Eurasian Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* (5:15)
Most of the six recorded were in the western Tien Shan
- Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* (4:15)
After the first two at Aksu Gorge, further birds were recorded at Kishi Kandi, Mashat and Kolshengel
- Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus* (1:15)
One at Bylikol Lake was the only record
- Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* (2:15)
Two males were near Berkara and another over fields near Nurly. An unidentified immature harrier in the desert near Kolshengel was either this species or Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus* but its particular plumage stage defied attempts to clinch the identification and some features seemed ambiguous
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus melaschistos* (4:15)
Only seen in the western Tien Shan were birds may either have been migrants or breeding, over 10 were recorded. In addition to locally breeding *melaschistos* it is possible that some of those seen were northbound migrants of the races *nisosimilis* or *nisus*
- Shikra** *Accipiter badius cenchroides* (3:15)
One near Dzabagly was presumably a migrant but all of the remaining six seen were in breeding habitat between Kolshengel Village and the Illi Delta
- Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus rufinus* (10:15)
Quite common and widespread, the most regularly seen large raptor, only absent in the Tien Shan above Almaty. Breeding pairs were at Bartogai and Tamgaly
- Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis nipalensis* and/or *orientalis* (4:15)
At least four immatures were east of Zhealturanghy with adults near Tamgaly and Kokpek Pass
- Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca* (1:15)
Two immatures, probably 2nd-calendar year individuals, were near Zhealturanghy, an excellent raptor area that also held several Steppe Eagles and our only Saker Falcon
- Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos* (7:15)
A total of at least 10 individuals, of all ages, were seen at various locations in the western Tien Shan and from Kokpek Pass to the Charyn Canyon
- Booted Eagle** *Hieraetus pennatus harterti* (4:15)
One at Kishi Kandi was followed by a couple at Mashat with further birds at Kolshengel and Charyn Gorge
- Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* (5:15)
Most of the 50 plus kestrels seen as dusk fell as we travelled west from Almaty by train were probably this species but only a few were identified with certainty. Further records mainly came from the Bartogai and Sogaty/ Charyn areas. Less prominent than in some years

- Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus* (12:15)
Quite common and widespread with 5-10 seen on most days in the lowlands and with a pair in the vicinity of the Tien Shan Observatory
- Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo subbuteo* (12:15)
Quite common, several, perhaps as many as ten, at Aksu Gorge were probably migrants. Only absent in the high Tien Shan above Almaty
- Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug milvipes* (mountains) and *cherrug* (plains) (1:15)
A single bird gave prolonged but rather distant views from Zhealturanghy, not close enough to establish the subspecies involved but it was brown above with a conspicuously paler tail and rather plain underwing coverts
- Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla pusilla* (1:15)
After a couple of small crakes had been seen in flight at the roadside pool near Dzabagly a male of this species eventually emerged and gave great views along the reed edge. One of the crakes seen in flight appeared longer winged than the others and appeared to show pale mantle braces so it may well have been a Little Crake *Porzana parva* but views were insufficient to be quite sure of such a local rarity
- Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus chloropus* (3:15)
Scarce, found on just a couple of suitable wetlands with emergent vegetation, birds at the roadside pool near Dzabagly were probably migrants
- Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra atra* (3:15)
Gatherings of about 30 at Sorbulak and Topar were exceptional, otherwise, a migrant at Bartogai was the only one seen
- Demoiselle Crane** *Anthropoides virgo* (6:15)
A late flock of 75 migrants east of Chokpak formed a spectacular sight in flight with closer views at Nurly and especially at Kolshengel, where one visited the artesian well
- Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax* (2:15)
One seen in flight from the passing train east of Chokpak was followed by a group of four flying across the road in front of us as we returned from Berkara
- Ibisbill** *Ibidorhynchos struthersii* (1:15)
One gave better than usual views at Bolshoi Almaty Lake, the most accessible breeding site in the world
- Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus himantopus* (4:15)
A couple were seen from the train west of Almaty and up to 25 gathered at both Sorbulak and Topar with a couple more at Kolshengel
- Collared Pratincole** *Glareola pratincola pratincola* (2:15)
At least ten were on steppe lakes near Berkara and four briefly at Sorbulak
- Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius aronicus* (7:15)
Odd ones at several wetlands were followed by up to six at Bartogai where they were probably breeding
- Greater Sandplover** *Charadrius leschenaultii crassirostris* (3:15)
Up to seven per day were present in the desert near our camp at Kolshengel and a breeding pair were at Bartogai Lake, perhaps the first recorded breeding there
- Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus* (1:15)
Two flew past calling near our camp at Kolshengel but sadly didn't linger for all to see

- Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* (8:15)
Up to half a dozen at a time were found in low laying damper areas
- Temminck's Stint** *Calidris temminckii* (6:15)
Two or three were found at Kolshengel, Topar and Bartogai
- Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago gallinago* (1:15)
One was seen in flight near Topar
- Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* (1:15)
A single migrant was at Bartogai Lake
- Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus* (3:15)
Singles at Bartogai and Topar were followed by three together at the unusual location of Bolshoi Almaty Lake; presumably they had been caught in the poor weather while crossing the mountains
- Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus tetanus* and/or *ussuriensis/ eurhinus* (2:15)
Up to half a dozen were at Sorbulak and Topar
- Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* (1:15)
One was at Sorbulak Lake
- Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* (8:15)
Very small numbers were found at a variety of small pools throughout the lowlands
- Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* (5:15)
Seven at Bartogai was the highest count with just one or two at a further four sites
- Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus ridibundus* (4:15)
Singles and small groups were at a small number of wetlands but about 20 were at Sorbulak
- 'Caspian' (Herring or Yellow-legged) Gull** *Larus (argentatus/ cachinnans) cachinnans* (3:15)
Birds breeding at Sorbulak Lake are generally considered to belong to this taxon (rather than so-called Steppe Gulls *L. (c) barabensis*). At least 20 were present at the lake and a couple more were seen in flight near Topar and from the train as we returned to Almaty from the western Tien Shan
- Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica nilotica* (1:15)
A single, perhaps two, patrolled the shoreline at Sorbulak Lake
- Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo hirundo* (8:15)
Encountered quite often in the lowlands with concentrations of up to 20 at Sorbulak and Topar and smaller numbers near Dzabagly and on the steppe lakes near Berkara
- White-winged (Black) Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus* (4:15)
The final act of our first session at the Kolshengel artesian well was the surprise appearance of a northbound flock of these immaculate birds, no less than 35 flew north with some lingering briefly at the well. Others were seen at Bartogai Lake (over 20) and near Kopa (2)
- Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger niger* (1:15)
Three were at Topar
- Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterodes orientalis arenarius* (6:15)
One near Berkara was followed by frequent encounters in the desert and steppe at Kolshengel and near Nurly. At least 30 came to drink at the well at Kolshengel camp

- Pallas's Sandgrouse** *Syrhaptes paradoxus* (3:15)
A very good year for this much sought after Central Asian speciality. Very distant flight views of a strong candidate on the evening of our arrival at Kolshengel gave hope that the species might be present in this area this year. On subsequent mornings we were able to enjoy rare views of up to six birds on the ground at the nearby well while several others rocketed over calling
- Rock Dove** *Columba livia neglecta* or *gaddi* (or intergrades)/ **Feral Pigeon** (14:15)
Even the remotest areas contained birds that displayed characteristics of domesticated birds so no certain wild Rock Doves were recorded
- Yellow-eyed or Eversmann's (Stock) Dove** *Columba eversmanni* (1:15)
At least three showed very well on wires near Zhealturanghy and others were seen in flight in the nearby Turanga grove
- Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus casiotis* (7:15)
Quite common in the western Tien Shan where up to 30 per day were recorded but much scarcer further east
- Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto stoliczkae* (7:15)
Rather scarce with one or two seen at several widely scattered sites, usually in the vicinity of habitations
- European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur turtur* (2:15)
Two migrants flying over at Dzabagly were followed by a couple at Mashat. Some of the unidentified *Streptopelia* species seen distantly in flight at various sites may also have been this species
- Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis meena* (8:15)
Small numbers of migrants were seen at several sites but the largest concentration were of up to 50 at Kolshengel Village. Some taxonomists have proposed that *meena* be treated as a full species, Steppe Turtle Dove *S. meena*, but this does not appear to have widespread support. Exactly what happens where this race meets nominate *orientalis* in Siberia is unclear
- Laughing Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis cambayensis* (5:15)
Scarce, after one was seen from the moving train as we approached Dzabagly, a pair were resident in the guesthouse garden at Dzabagly
- Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus canorus* and *subtelephonus* (13:15)
Quite common and widespread, only absent in the high Tien Shan
- European Scops Owl** *Otus scops pulchellus* (1:15)
A pair near the Dzabagly guesthouse showed well in the spotlight. At least two were calling at Berkara in broad daylight but proved remarkably difficult to see. One was seen briefly in flight as we had lunch at Mashat
- Common Swift** *Apus apus apus* or *pekinensis* (3:15)
A group of 40 seen from the train as we headed west on the evening of day 1 were followed by a small northward movement of 20 at Kolshengel and four at Nurly
- Alpine Swift** *Tachymartia melba tuneti* (1:15)
Up to 20 were at Mashat Gorge
- Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis atthis* (1:15)
Two on the roadside pool near Dzabagly on our first visit were perhaps migrants
- European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster* (8:15)
Up to 50 per day were recorded during the early days of the tour, including eastbound migrants but fewer were seen in the east of the country. One was trapped at Chokpak Ringing Station

- European Roller** *Coracias garrulous semenowi* (10:15)
Rather scarce in the early days then increasingly common with birds frequently seen along roadsides in the lowlands, over 60 were logged
- Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops epops (saturata* a possible migrant) (12:15)
Small numbers were seen quite regularly in the lowlands; probably two pairs were nesting near Kolshengel camp
- White-winged Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucopterus* (1:15)
A couple of pied woodpeckers heard or seen briefly in the western Tien Shan should have been this species but a pair in Turanga woodland showed well near Zhealturanghy and certainly were
- Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa* (8:15)
Generally common in lush steppe, i.e. between Almaty and Kolshengel, but largely absent from drier or sandier areas, some of which were occupied only by Bimaculated Larks
- Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata* (4:15)
Rather localised. Common at Kolshengel Camp and at scattered drier sites between there and Tamgaly but generally far outnumbered by Calandra Larks
- White-winged Lark** *Melanocorypha leucoptera* (1:15)
At least four were seen during a 20-minute stop in the steppe between Kolshengel and Tamgaly, one landed on the road and allowed good scope views but most were intent on chasing off the much commoner Calandra Larks
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis* (3:15)
Rather localised. Quite common on the Sogaty Plain. At Kolshengel Camp a couple were often at the artesian well but may only have been migrants as none were obviously holding territory in that area
- Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens heinei* (5:15)
Very Common at Kolshengel Camp, where a nest was found right beside our tents; also seen at a couple of other sites where Bimaculated Larks were also present. Many of the small *Calandrella* larks flushed from roadsides between Kolshengel and Tamgaly may also have been this species
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata magna* (5:15)
A couple near Berkara were followed by half a dozen at Aldarly and Kolshengel Village and about ten at Nurly
- Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis dulcivox* (3:15)
Localised. Small numbers were found above Aksu Gorge, at Tamgaly and near Malybai
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris brandti* (plains) or *albigula* (mountains) or intergrades (3:15)
One flew east near Dzabagly during a large diurnal migration but the remainder were all seen on the Sogaty Plain. This part of Kazakhstan represents an area of overlap between the two subspecies groups (the *penicillata* group, incl. *albigula*, and *alpestris* group, incl. *brandti*). The birds seen showed rather pale and grey upperparts and white face markings (perhaps more typical of the *penicillata* group) but the actual extent of black on the face was variable but with none seen showing a discrete pale throat patch (which *penicillata* birds should show). In the past birds with a discrete white throat patch have been seen on the Sogaty Plain but given the fact that others there lack this feature it is likely that the Sogaty population represents an intergrade population with variable features
- Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia riparia* (1:15)
Several unidentified martins were probably this species, including a large colony at Sorbulak and migrants at Kolshengel, but about half a dozen definite birds could be compared side by side with Pale Martins near Malybai

- Pale (Sand) Martin** *Riparia diluta* (1:15)
Good views were had of about 100 at a colony near Malybai, a handful of larger, darker Sand Martins present allowed the subtle features of this recently recognised species to be appreciated
- Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* (1:15)
At least ten were hawking over high crags in the Kokpek Pass
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica* (12:15)
Generally common and widespread but absent in the high Tien Shan and in short supply in the far southeast near Charyn Canyon
- Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica rufula* (5:15)
Uncommon. Up to ten were at Mashat Gorge with up to three at a handful of other sites
- Common House Martin** *Delichon urbica urbica* (5:15)
This species was seen quite regularly in hillier areas in the western Tien Shan but the only records elsewhere were of ten at Tamgaly
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris campestris*/ '*griseus*' (7:15)
Common at Bartogai Camp with small numbers at widely scattered locations elsewhere
- Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis schlueteri* (5:15)
Small numbers were in the Tien Shan Spruce forests with occasional migrants moving through at Dzabagly and Kolshengel
- Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* (1:15)
One dropped in at the well at Kolshengel and another was heard flying over there later on
- Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni* (2:15)
A handful were seen in flight at the Tien Shan Observatory, they were probably just fleeing the area as the snow continued to fall
- 'Masked' (White) Wagtail** *Motacilla (alba) personata* (12:15)
Small numbers were seen daily except in the high Tien Shan. Kazakh ornithologists split this distinctive taxon
- 'Eastern' White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alba*/ '*dukhenensis*' (5:15)
Small numbers of northbound migrants were encountered at Chokpak, Kolshengel and Bartogai
- 'Black-headed' Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava melanogrisea* (*feldegg* group) (3:15)
A 40 strong wagtail flock on a pool beside the railway track west of Almaty were mostly this form; others were seen at Chokpak, Topar and Kolshengel
- 'Northern Grey-headed' Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava thunbergi* (2:15)
Two at Chokpak were followed by one or more at Kolshengel
- 'Sykes's' Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava beema* (2:15)
Up to ten migrant Yellow Wagtails at Kolshengel contained a few males of this subspecies and several of the unidentified females may also have been of this form
- Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola calcarata* (breeding) and *citreola*/ '*verae*' (as migrants) (2:15)
One, thought to be *calcarata*, was seen with Yellow Wagtails on a railside pool as we headed west on the evening of day 1. A female trapped at Chokpak Ringing Station was the only other record
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*/ '*melanope*' (9:15)
Birds were in breeding habitat in the Tien Shan and at Tamgaly and at least 30 moved east near Dzabagly and Chokpak during a large diurnal migration

- Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii* (4:15)
Probably two pairs were in residence at Great Almaty Gorge and one or two were at Bolshoi Almaty Lake
- Winter Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* (subspecies uncertain) (1:15)
One was glimpsed at Great Almaty Gorge on day 1 but otherwise this species was only heard, both in the western Tien Shan and near the Tien Shan Observatory above Almaty
- Brown Accentor** *Prunella fulvescens dresseri* (1:15)
One or two were around the observatory in the Tien Shan with a pair or two at the Kosmostation during our snowy adventure there
- Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis huttoni* (3:15)
A singing bird at Great Almaty Gorge on day 1 was a good start and about half a dozen were seen when we returned to the Tien Shan above Almaty at the end of the tour, at least until the frost set in and many birds moved lower down
- Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris rufilata* (1:15)
One near the Tien Shan Observatory was well below its usual altitudinal range for the date, a measure of the severity of the wintry weather
- Rufous Bushchat or Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** *Certhioides galactotes familiaris* (1:15)
One of a couple heard at Nurly showed very well at times, especially given the rather blustery conditions.
- 'Eastern' Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi* (4:15)
Three were seen and several others heard at Berkara. Otherwise, this species was heard very frequently in appropriate habitat, including near the halfway house at Kishi Kandi, with migrants seen at Aldarly and Kolshengel Village
- Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica pallidigularis* or *tianschanica* (2:15)
Males at Bylikol Lake and Bartogai Lake both showed well, the latter singing
- Eversmann's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythronotus* (2:15)
A singing male braved the first day of hard weather at the Tien Shan Observatory but soon disappeared when the temperature dropped below zero. At least four refugees were seen near Great Almaty Gorge on our final day
- Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus aereolecephalus* (2:15)
A couple of pairs were on the juniper and spruce covered slopes at Kishi Kandi. In the Tien Shan above Almaty hard weather led to a concentration of eight birds just below the snowline as we descended
- Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus* (6:15)
Most of the ten birds seen where at the migrant traps of Aldarly and Kolshengel Village
- Güldenstadt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis* (1:15)
At least one pair showed very well in a near blizzard at the Kosmostation at 3200m in the Tien Shan, where they remain all year!
- 'Siberian' (Common) Stonechat** *Saxicola (torquatus) maurus* (6:15)
Ten migrants were at Chokpak and at least 25 in grassland near Lake Bylikol. Another ten were at Kolshengel camp but otherwise just a handful were found at scattered lowland sites
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* (9:15)
Locally common. One near Aksu Gorge may have been a migrant but birds in the desert near Kolshengel and at Bartogai and Sogaty were breeding. One bird used our tents as songposts at Bartogai

- Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica* (5:15)
Small numbers of migrants were at a few sites such as Chokpak and a pair were probably on breeding territory near the Tien Shan Kosmostation
- Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* (8:15)
After several had been seen near Berkara and Mashat in the west, this species was seen quite regularly in rocky area further east, especially at Tamgaly and Bartogai
- Desert Wheatear** *Oenanthe deserti deserti* (1:15)
At least one, a male, was at the east end of the Sogaty Plain
- Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis* (3:15)
A female was at Aksu Gorge, a pair of migrants were in the steppe south of Kolshengel and a male was at Kokpek Pass
- Blue Whistling Thrush** *Myophonus caeruleus* (subspecies uncertain) (3:15)
At least two pairs were around Great Almaty Gorge and a couple more were seen at Kishi Kandi
- Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula intermedius* (9:15)
Present in small numbers in Almaty, at Berkara and around Dzabagly Village
- Dark-throated Thrush** *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* (Black-throated Thrush) (2:15)
A couple of late migrants were at Kolshengel Village
- Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus bonapartei* (3:15)
Only seen, or more often just heard, in the Tien Shan Spruce forests
- Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti albiventris* (1:15)
One was glimpsed at the roadside pool near Dzabagly; otherwise this elusive species was heard at a wide range of locations where suitable habitat was found
- Common Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia straminea* (1:15)
One was seen briefly at Kishi Kandi where at least another two or three were heard
- Moustached Warbler** *Acrocephalus melanopagyn mimica* (1:15)
One at the roadside pool near Dzabagly showed very well
- Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (5:15)
One or two migrants were found in Almaty, at Aldarly and Kolshengel
- [**Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*
A reed-fringed lake near Berkara contained several singing large *Acrocephalus* warblers but due to rather windy conditions these were impossible to view. The songs heard sounded more like those of Clamorous Reed than Great Reed but both species do occur in this area and have recently been reported to be hybridising with c10% of pairs being mixed according to some reports]
- Sykes's Warbler** *Hippolais rama* (2:15)
Concentrations were found in suitable breeding habitat at Zhealturanghy and Nurly
- Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria merzbacheri* (2:15)
After one was seen briefly at Berkara, two migrants were at Aldarly
- Hume's (Lesser) Whitethroat** *Sylvia (curruca) althaea* (1:15):
Singing birds were rather common in the junipers at Kishi Kandi but seeing them was not always very easy. This form is regarded as a separate species by Kazak ornithologists (and others) but the taxonomy of the Lesser Whitethroat complex is far from straightforward (see below)

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca curruca*/'*blythi*' and *halimodendri*, *теленгетика* etc (7:15)

Apart from obvious (grey and white) *althaea* breeding in the mountains and singing a warbling song and giving a churring tit-like call (see above), migrants were seen at a number of sites. A minority of these birds gave tongue-clicking calls like birds in western Europe (including one in the centre of Almaty) and were presumably Siberia bound migrants (*curruca*/'*blythi*') but none were actually heard to give the familiar rattling song of *curruca* types in Europe. Some birds appeared rather pale and long-tailed and at least some of these gave churring calls like *althaea*, these may have been migrant *halimodendri*. At Zhealturanga birds that looked rather similar to *curruca* (though slightly paler and perhaps longer-tailed) were present which gave churring calls and had warbling songs (very like *althaea*). These latter birds are perhaps best included in *halimodendri* but as considerable effort is currently going into the vexed questions of Lesser Whitethroat systematics it is probably unwise to draw firm conclusions at present.

As things currently stand, none of the Lesser Whitethroats that should be occurring in Kazakhstan fall into the 'Desert' Lesser Whitethroat category (*minula* group) though the placement of *halimodendri* in the *curruca* group of races (rather than the *minula* group) seems rather arbitrary as it appears to form a bridge between the two groups. Kazak ornithology continues to recognise certain races that ornithologists in the west regard as invalid, i.e. *теленгетика*, and some of the birds seen may be better regarded as showing characters of such races

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis rubicola* (1:15)

One migrant was in the tree at Aldarly

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus* (3:15)

Birds were found in the western Tien Shan at Kishi Kandi and a migrant was at Kolshengel Village

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei humei* (11:15)

Common in the Tien Shan Spruce forests and always the commonest warbler where migrants gathered, for example, at least thirty were at Kolshengel Village and ten in the lone tree at Aldarly. One landed on a tripod leg in the middle of the desert near Kolshengel!

Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* (1:15)

One, possibly two, birds in the lone tree at Aldarly showed the typical appearance of this species, including yellow-toned supercillia and pale bare parts, but no calls were heard. The status of this species as a spring migrant in Kazakhstan is unclear, many Hume's Warblers in spring are much brighter in appearance than the euro-centric literature would suggest but there is no evidence that Hume's ever shows Yellow-browed-like bare parts as well. It seems likely that this species is a regular spring migrant in very small numbers but is usually overlooked amongst the abundant Hume's Warblers. In the past Yellow-browed Warblers have been seen and heard at Aldarly and Kolshengel in spring but none have been trapped at Chokpak Ringing Station

'Siberian' Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus (collybita) tristis* (6:15)

A couple in Almaty on our first morning sang their distinctive three-note songs. Thereafter, small numbers of migrants were found at several sites with birds in the western Tien Shan possibly breeding there

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus tristis* (1:15)

Of several heard, a couple were briefly seen in the Tien Shan Spruces below Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata sarudnyi* or *mongola* (breeding), *neumanni* (as a migrant) (7:15)

Most concentrations of migrants hosted a few migrant Spotted Flycatchers and up to ten at Berkara were presumably on breeding territory

Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Tersiphone paradisi* (subspecies uncertain) (1:15)

Three were found at their northern outpost of Berkara Valley. As usual all were rufous morph individuals

Great Tit *Parus major* (race uncertain, *major* group) (4:15)

Small numbers were present in Almaty and as high as Great Almaty Gorge. One at the Turanga Grove east of Zhealturanghy was in an area where Turkestan Tits breed. These two species have only recently come into contact in southern Kazakhstan after Great Tits began a range expansion (or were introduced) but all of the evidence so far is that they are keeping their distance and that hybridisation is rare

- Turkestan Tit** *Parus bokharensis turkestanicus* (3:15)
One or two were occasionally around the guesthouse garden at Dzabagly with others nearby at Chokpak. At least three were in the Turanga Grove east of Zhealturanghy
- Coal Tit** *Parus ater rufipectus* (*aenodius* group) (2:15)
Small numbers were heard and seen in the Tien Shan Spruces at and below the Tien Shan Observatory
- Rufous-naped Tit** *Parus rufonuchalis* (1:15)
At least half a dozen were seen at Kishi Kandi and several others were heard there
- Azure Tit** *Parus cyanus tianshanicus* (2:15)
A couple of in the Turanga Grove near Zhealturanghy showed very well, another accompanied the 'redstart flock' near Great Almaty Gorge on our final afternoon
- Yellow-breasted (Azure) Tit** *Parus flavipectus flavipectus* (2:15)
A pair that showed well at a nest near Chokpak were followed by more fleeting encounters with three at Kishi Kandi
- Songar Tit** *Parus songarus songarus* (1:15)
A good total of six of these easy to miss birds were seen in the Tien Shan Spruces above Almaty
- Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithola caudatus caudatus* (1:15)
About 20 flew east at the roadside pool near Dzabagly during a large diurnal migration. Views were not ideal but some at least seemed to have white heads indicating nominate *caudatus* from Siberia. This species seem to be erratic in its appearances in southern Kazakhstan (several *caudatus* were seen at two sites in May 2002, for example) where it is presumably an occasional winter visitor and passage migrant, though it is classed as a vagrant by Harrap and Quinn in Tits, Nuthatches and Treecreepers (Helm, 1996) and is not listed as a species ever trapped at nearby Chokpak Ringing Station!
- White-crowned Penduline Tit** *Remiz coronatus coronatus/ stoliczkae* (2:15)
An overhead movement of migrants near Dzabagly included at least 30 of this species during a 40 minute watch. Birds were on breeding territory at Kishi Kandi and Berkara but not always easy to see well. The split of this species from European Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus* is now widely accepted
- Eastern Rock Nuthatch** *Sitta tephronota tephronota* (2:15)
An out of place bird at Chokpak Ringing Station was presumably migrating. A noisy pair showed very well in Mashat Gorge
- Wallcreeper** *Tichodroma muraria nepalensis* (1:15)
A superb male, well below its usual altitudinal range at Great Almaty Gorge, was some compensation after a couple of very wintry days in the high Tien Shan
- Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio* (probably *collurio*) (3:15)
A group of five migrants were on railside wires as we travelled back to Almaty from the western Tien Shan and one or two were seen at on a couple of occasions in the desert near Kolshengel Camp
- Isabelline Shrike** *Lanius isabellinus phoenicuroides* (incl. so called '*karelini*') and *isabellinus* (7:15)
A rather bewildering array of birds were present in the first days of the tour. Between Chokpak and Berkara about six birds were watched well, none were obvious 'Turkestan' Shrikes (*L. i. phoenicuroides*) - the local breeding race in southern Kazakhstan. The rather obvious grey tones on the crown and upperparts, pale buff washed underparts but white-cheeks, left so-called '*karelini*' as a tempting explanation for most of these birds (while also blurring the distinctions between the canonical forms !). The possibility that some 'Chinese' Shrikes (*L. i. arenarius*, formerly *L. i. isabellinus*) may move through southern Kazakhstan in spring adds further complications and some of the birds seen did seem to be candidates for that race.

One bird near Berkara was identified as a certain 'Daurian' Shrike *L. i. isabellinus* (formerly *L. i. speculigerus*), it showed extensively rich buff underparts (including the cheeks), a solid black mask (but little supercillium), an extensive white primary patch and pale grey buff upperparts with a faint yellow buff wash on the crown, a very similar bird was at Bartogai. Several typical 'Turkestan' Shrikes were seen in breeding habitat at Bartogai and on the Sogaty Plain with several migrants found in the desert at Kolshengel

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach erythronotus* (3:15)

One was seen from the westbound train, a pair became resident at the Dzabagly Guesthouse garden and a couple more were at Mashat

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (11:15)

Common, up to ten per day were seen in the lowlands, often along roadsides, but absent at higher elevations

'Steppe' (Southern) Grey Shrike *Lanius (meridionalis) pallidirostris* (2:15)

Only seen in the Taukum Sands where three birds showed well. In the likely event of a split (Kazak ornithologists already regard it as a full species) this taxon will become *Lanius pallidirostris* but there is uncertainty about the English name as 'Steppe', 'Saxaul' and 'Desert' Grey Shrike have all been suggested. Historically this taxon has been known as 'Steppe' (Great, then Southern) Grey shrike in Europe, though it does not actually occur in true steppe, preferring sandy deserts with Saxaul bushes. Rather confusingly, Illustrations of this taxon on the literature tend to depict only immature birds

Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica bactriana* (12:15)

Present in small numbers in many wooded contexts, including the centre of Almaty, but absent in more arid parts

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes rothschildi* (*caryocatactes* group) (1:15)

One seen at Bolshoi Almaty Lake gave a couple of brief perched views between short flights

'Russian' Eurasian Jackdaw *Corvus monedula soemmeringii* (10:15)

Locally common in low lying areas, often around habitations

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis* (1:15)

A couple were around the Kosmostation in the high Tien Shan

Rook *Corvus frugilegus frugilegus* / 'ultimus' (10:15)

Locally common in areas of steppe with some tree cover, many were breeding in trees bordering the railway line between Almaty and Tulkubas. Apparent migrants were seen moving north over Kolshengel on a couple of occasions

(Eastern) Carrion Crow *Corvus (corone) orientalis* (14:15)

Fairly common around Almaty, and as high as the Tien Shan Observatory, but generally rather scarce away from urban areas

Common Raven *Corvus corax tibetanus* (7:15)

Half a dozen were seen in the Tien Shan above Almaty and at Bartogai

European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus* (11:15)

Frequently seen during the early days of the tour, many, perhaps mostly migrants, being present in and around Dzabagly Village but subsequently scarcer and greatly outnumbered by the next species

Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* (11:15)

Flocks of migrants were at widely scattered locations but the largest concentrations, involving several thousand birds, were in the grasslands bordering Sorbulak Lake, where this attractive species breeds, and in the steppe west of Almaty and viewed from the train

- Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis tristis* (13:15)
Locally common, prominent in Almaty, large numbers were observed moving east with other diurnal migrants near Dzabagly. At least one pair were at 2500m in the Tien Shan
- Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus kundoo* (4:15)
Migrants were frequently seen at and near the Dzabagly guesthouse with birds perhaps breeding at Berkara And Mashat. The race eastern race *kundoo* differs consistently in plumage from western *oriolus* but exactly what happens where the races meet is unclear
- Saxaul Sparrow** *Passer ammodendri ammodendri* (1:15)
At least half a dozen of these very smart birds showed well at Zhealturanghy Village
- House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus domesticus* (7:15)
Apparently confined to urban contexts, especially Almaty, where uncommon
- 'Bactrian' Indian Sparrow** *Passer indicus bactrianus* (7:15)
Large flocks were found at many locations with a noticeable eastward movements detected at Chokpak and Nurly. This was the most frequently encountered sparrow in rural areas. Kazakh ornithologists have long regarded the 'House' Sparrows in India (where migratory *bactriana* winters) as separate from *Passer domesticus* of Europe
- Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus* (3:15)
At least 50 were trapped at Chokpak while we were there and a couple of migrants were noted at Kolshengel
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus dilutus* (7:15)
Small numbers were found at a variety of locations from central Almaty to Zhealturanghy
- Common Linnet** *Carduelis cannabina bella* (3:15)
Only seen at Bartogai where up to 15 came to drink, a rather striking and attractive subspecies.
- 'Grey-headed' (European) Goldfinch** *Carduelis (carduelis) parapanisi (caniceps group)* (5:15)
One flying over Almaty city centre was the first. A couple at Berkara were nesting there and a flock of 15 were at Mashat. The final encounter was with about 20 near Malybai. Kazakh ornithologists regard members of the *caniceps* subspecies group as a separate species to European birds
- European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris turkestanicus* (2:15)
Very localised, small numbers were singing in Almaty
- Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus* (2:15)
Four at Great Almaty Gorge on day 1 where followed by a couple there on our final day
- Hodgson's Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola altaica* (3:15)
A roving flock of at least 100 was present in the mountains above Almaty. Initially these birds were just above Bolshoi Almaty Lake but after heavy snow they had moved downhill towards Great Almaty Gorge
- Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis* (7:15)
Regularly seen in lowland areas. Migrants passed through the guesthouse garden in Dzabagly each day and others were heard singing in most wooded areas. At least 20 migrants, including many spectacular males, gathered at Kolshengel Village
- Brambling** *Fringilla montanus* (1:15)
Two late migrants were at Kolshengel Village
- Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs* (probably *coelebs*) (1:15)
A single female was amongst migrants at Kolshengel Village

- Red-mantled Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rhodochlamys rhodochlamys* and/ or *kotschubei* (2:15)
Regularly seen at the Tien Shan Observatory where at least half a dozen were present
- Crimson-winged Finch** *Rhodopchys sanguinea sanguinea* (2:15)
Two or more came to drink quite regularly at Bartogai
- Mongolian (Trumpeter) Finch** *Rhodopchys mongolica* (4:15)
This is often a difficult species to catch up with so we were lucky when up to ten gathered at the artesian well at Kolshengel and another four were found at Bartogai
- Desert Finch** *Rhodopchys obsoleta* (3:15)
The artesian wells at Nurly and especially Kolshengel produced the bulk of 30 or so recorded and a few birds were always around Kolshengel Village, a very attractive finch when seen well
- White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas carnipes carnipes* (2:15)
This species showed no concern at the snowy weather in the Tien Shan and at least ten remained in the observatory area throughout
- Grey-necked Bunting** *Emberiza buchanani neobscura* (4:15)
Common at Bartogai where its simple and slightly soporific song was a constant background noise
- White-capped Bunting** *Emberiza stewarti* (2:15)
At least two singing males showed very well at Aksu Gorge and another was at Kishi Kandi
- Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia par* (2:15)
Fairly common at Kishi Kandi in the western Tien Shan with a couple more at Kokpek Pass in the east
- Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* (6:15)
A trapped female at Chokpak Ringing Station was the first but this attractive Central Asian speciality became an increasingly frequent sight in the lowlands as the tour progressed, up to 100 per day were found as migration peaked
- Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra buturlini* (5:15)
Large numbers were in the lowlands below the western Tien Shan where up to 40 per day were seen. Much scarcer further east where just one was seen near Nurly

Mammal list

Compiled with the help of John and Judy Geeson using Duff and Lawson's *Checklist of the Mammals of the World* (Yale, 2004)

- Turkestan Red Pika** *Ochotona rutila*
One was seen in boulders at the Tien Shan Observatory
- Tolai Hare** *Lepus tolai*
One or two were seen near Zhealturanghy and on the Sogaty Plain
- Red Squirrel** *Sciurus vulgaris*
One was in spruces beside the Tien Shan Observatory
- Grey Marmot** *Marmota baibacina*
A group of about eight were on a hillside just above Great Almaty Gorge on both occasions we visited this site

Long-toothed Suslik or Yellow Ground Squirrel *Spermophilus fulvus*

Colonies were fairly common in the steppe: recorded near Berkara, at Sorbulak, in Turanga woodland near Zhealturanghy, at Tamgaly and on the Sogaty Plain

Great Gerbil *Rhombomys opimus*

After the first was seen in the Taukum Sands this species was regularly encountered at Bartogai, even amongst our tents, and on the Sogaty Plain

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* or **Golden Jackal** *Canis aureus*

Views of a couple of canines in the Taukum Sands and the Tien Shan above Almaty were too fleeting to allow specific identification

'Isabelline' Brown Bear *Ursus arctus isabellinus*

One gave prolonged scope views on a hillside visible from Dzabagly Guesthouse garden on the evening of day 4; surprisingly, it was still present in the same area the next morning. The undoubted mammalian highlight of the tour

Siberian Ibex *Capra sibirica* or **Marco Polo Sheep** *Ovis ammon*

Up to half a dozen animals on a distant hillside viewed from Dzabagly Guesthouse defied attempts at specific identification, all appearing to be females or immatures

Bat spp

Small, Pipistrelle-sized, bats were recorded at the Dzabagly Guesthouse garden and the ringers at Chokpak Ringing Station caught a larger species that had them scouring the literature

Plant list

Many hundreds of species of flowering plants were seen; this list (largely compiled by Judy Geeson, with assistance from John Geeson and Claire Frew) includes most of the more striking and photogenic ones. A few more significant species, which were seen only in leaf, are also included. For simplicity, plant families and species within each family are presented in alphabetical order.

Gymnosperms

Pinaceae

Picea tienshanica

Tien Shan Spruce. This very distinctive tall, slender spruce dominates the mid-altitude slopes of the Central Tien Shan Mountains above Almaty.

Cupressaceae

Junipers were typically growing at high altitudes in the Tien Shan where the following were recorded:

Juniperus sabina (syn. *J. indica*)*Juniperus pseudosabina**Juniperus semiglobosa**Juniperus turkestanica*

Monocotyledons

Amaryllidaceae*Ixiolirion tartaricum*

This very striking purple/ blue lily was common to abundant in grassland and arable fields

Umgernia sewersowii

Present at Kishi Kandi but not in flower

Asphodelaceae*Eremurus anisopterus*

This large, white-flowered species was found in the Taukum Sands

Eremurus cristatus

Characterised by its dense brownish-red spikes, widespread on dry steppe and at roadsides

Eremurus indeziensis

Found at the Taukum Sands, its pink-brown flowers were only just opening

Eremurus lactiflorus

Stands of this spectacular cream-flowered plant were found on hillsides above Aksu Gorge

Eremurus regeli

Very tall spikes with darkish red flowers were found at Mashat and Tamgaly

Eremurus soghianus

A very distinctive plant with long pedicels, found at Mashat Valley

Eremurus tianshanica

Stands of this species, which is strikingly tall (c1m) with yellow spikes, were found in Kokpek Pass

Hyacinthaceae*Scilla puschkinoidea*

Pale blue, flowering beside a receding snow patch at Aksu Gorge

Iridaceae*Crocus alatavicus*

In flower where snow had recently melted at Aksu Gorge

Iris caerulea

This pale blue 'Juno' Iris was found at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi

Iris orchioidea

A yellow 'Juno' Iris, also found at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi

Iris soghiana

Anna and Olga identified two seemingly different plants as this species: Anna considered plants with pale cream-yellow, delicate flowers (resembling a 'florists' Iris), found on the roadside at Mashat to be *soghiana* while Olga identified masses of clumps of pale blue/mauve irises on damp ground beside the main road near Issyk to be this species

Iris songarica

Tall, slender and pale mauve-cream, found on stony slopes near Tamgaly

Iris tenuifolia

Found in the desert around Konshengel but not in flower.

Iris tianshanica

One plant of this purple '*reticulata*-type' Iris was flowering above Aksu Gorge

Liliaceae***Allium atrosanguineum***

Clumps of this striking plant with very deep maroon, almost black, inflorescences, were in flower from around Bolshoi Almaty Lake up to beyond the observatory, before it was buried in snow

Allium decipiens

In flower in the desert at Kolshengel

Allium drobovii

Only found at Aksu-Dzabagly reserve

Allium fetisovii

In flower at Konshengel.

Allium illiense

Its bright pink flowers on long pedicels were found at Kolshengel

Allium inconspicuum

A well-named plant! Found on very dry slopes in the western Tien Shan

Allium karataviense

Very distinctive, having broad oval grey-green leaves and large spherical inflorescences, always found growing in scree patches in full sun; a few were at Kishi Kandi above the resthouse, but it was abundant at Mashat

Allium pallasii

Found in the desert at Kolshengel

Allium sewersowii

Only seen at Kishi Kandi

Asparagus persicus

Found at Mashat Valley

Fritillaria karelinii

Present in the desert near Kolshengel but not in flower

Fritillaria severtzovii

Found in the western Tien Shan at Aksu Gorge, Kishi Kandi and at Mashat; the racemes of pink/ green/ brown flowers were easily overlooked

Fritillaria stenantha

Two plants were found above Aksu Gorge and one or two at higher levels at Kishi Kandi; a real little jewel of a plant, only a few centimetres high with pale pink bells

Gagea divaricata

Present in the desert at Kolshengel

Gagea filiformis

Extremely common on short turf in the Tien Shan mountains

***Gagea* spp.**

Many similar looking yellow *Gagea* species were seen in the Tien Shan

Polygonatum severtzovii

Very similar to *P. verticillatum* in the UK; seen at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi

Tulipa behmiana

A distinctive tulip with very wavy-edged grey-green leaves, common in desert around Kolshengel; one beautiful yellow cup-shaped flower was found

Tulipa bubseana

Another early-flowering small white tulip, common in the desert at Kolshengel, but all in fruit

Tulipa dasystemon

A slender, small, yellow tulip, common to abundant in meadows and mountain grassland up to Bolshoi Almaty Lake in the central Tien Shan

Tulipa heterophylla

Abundant in short turf around and below Bolshoi Almaty Lake, distinguished from the previous species by a dark stripe on the reverse of each petal

Tulipa greigi

Almost certainly the most striking plant of the tour. Some lower slopes above Aksu Gorge and at Kishi Kandi were red with this species, like poppies in a cornfield! There were a few (less than 1 %) yellow, or yellow/red striped variants in the population

Tulipa kaufmanniana

The 'Waterlily Tulip' grown in gardens. The colour ranged from delicate cream, through to yellow, with or without a pink stripe on the reverse of the petals, a few were even almost uniform pinkish red. Typically found at higher altitude than *T. dasystemon* or *T. greigi*, flowering soon after snow melt

Tulipa greigi* x *T. kaufmanniana

Hybrids occurred where the two grew together (Anna was very enthusiastic!)

Tulipa turkestanica

A small, pale yellow tulip, with narrow upright leaves, and a smell of almonds; a few were growing beside an area of recent snow melt at Kishi Kandi

Orchidaceae***Orchis pseudolaxiflora***

Only found in damp grassland near Lake Bylikol

Dicotyledons**Aceraceae*****Acer negundo***

Present at Mashat.

Acer semenovii

Only found at Aksu Gorge

Anacardiaceae*Pistacia vera*

Only found at Aksu Gorge

Apiaceae (Umbelliferae)

Lots of large, very attractive umbels were at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi including:

*Aegopodium tadshikorum**Ferula karatavika**Ferula leucographa**Ferula penninervis**Ferula tenuisecta**Oedibasis apiculata**Scandix pecten-veneris*

Shepherd's Needle, a rare British native

*Scandix stellata**Srenkiana golickeana*

This looked just like British fennel *Foeniculum vulgare*

Two umbels found in the desert areas were:

*Oedibasis apiculata**Schumannia karelinii*

Found in the Taukum Sands and characterised by its large, leggy, flowering heads and very thin leaves

Asteraceae*Artemisia absinthium*

Only found at Aksu Gorge

Artemisia dracunculus

Only found at Aksu Gorge

*Artemisia karatavica**Artemisia rutifolia*

Only found at Aksu Gorge

Artemisia terrae-alba

Present at Kolshengel but not in flower

Centaurea iberica

Present at Mashat

Chicorium intybus

***Cousinia* species**

Several species, with very large, downy leaves, were seen, including:

Cousinia alata

Found in the desert at Kolshengel

Cousinia umbrosa

The leaves of this species look like burdock; common in arable fields near Dzabagly

Echinops karatavicus

Present at Aksu Gorge but not in flower

Echinops ritro

Only found in the stony desert above Charyn Canyon

***Ligularia* species**

This was abundant on the lower slopes of the Tien Shan at Great Almaty Gorge

Tussilago farfara

Coltsfoot. Widespread away from the deserts visited

Berberidaceae***Berberis oblonga***

Found in the western Tien Shan but not in flower

Gymnospermum alberti

A special plant of the Tien Shan mountains; found at Kishi Kandi; it emerges and produces orange bell-shaped flowers around receding snow patches

Leontica incerta

Already in fruit in the desert at Konshegel

Betulaceae***Betula turkestanica***

The dominant tree of the central Tien Shan below the Spruce zone

Boraginaceae***Aznebia decumbens***

A very small, hairy plant with dark-spotted yellow flowers, present around Bartogai campsite

Lappula microcarpa***Lithospermum arvense***

Common in the western Tien Shan

Myosotis asiatica

Present in the western Tien Shan at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi

Onosma dichroanthum

Found at Mashat and Konshengel, its flowers varied from creamy to orange

Rindera echinata

This red-flowered 'Hounds Tongue' was found at Aksu Gorge

Rindera oblongifolia

Only found in the western Tien Shan

Solenanthus circinnatus

Present at Aksu Gorge

Trachelanthus korolkowii

This ancient 'borage' was found in wild apple areas of the western Tien Shan

Brassicaceae (Cruciferae)

Lots of these were encountered, especially in desert areas

Caprifoliaceae***Lonicera nummularifolia***

Only seen at Mashat

Lonicera tianshanica

This small-flowered, shrubby honeysuckle, recalling Pyrenean Honeysuckle *L. pyrenaica*, was found at Kishi Kandi

Caryophyllaceae***Cerastium cerastoides***

Only found at Great Almaty Gorge

Cerastium bungeanum

Present in the western Tien Shan at Kishi Kandi and elsewhere

Celastraceae***Euonymus koopmannii***

Only found at Aksu Gorge

Chenopodiaceae

Lots of these beet relatives, especially ones adapted for dry/saline conditions, were found in the desert, including some *Salsola* and *Suaeda* (Sea Blight) species

Cistaceae***Helianthemum songaricum***

These 'Hedgehog' rockrose shrubs were common at Bartogai

Convolvulaceae***Convolvulus arvensis***

Field Bindweed. Not uncommon

Convolvulus fruticosa

Pale pink and similar to *C. tragacanthoides*, but more straggly and less spiky; found on stony roadside near Masak (E of Almaty), abundant on parts of the Sogaty Plain

Convolvulus lineatus

Pale pink, found on dry roadside banks near Mashat

Convolvulus tragacanthoides

This pale pink 'hedgehog' shrub was common at Bartogai

Cynomoriaceae*Cynomorium songaricum*

This weird parasitic plant, with dark red phallus-like spikes, was found in the stony desert near Bartogai campsite

Euphorbiaceae*Euphorbia rapulum*

Present in dry areas at Kolshengel

Euphorbia talastavica

Only found in the western Tien Shan

Fabaceae (Leguminosae)*Astragalus* spp.

At least 15 species were identified by Anna in the first week; they were seen in all habitats and some were very striking and attractive; they included:

Astragalus abolinii

Only at Mashat

Astragalus anisomerus

Only at Kishi Kandi

Astragalus atrovinosus

Only at Kishi Kandi

Astragalus flexus

Found in desert steppe in the west

Astragalus chaetodon

Found in desert steppe in the west

Astragalus macrotropis

Present at Aksu Gorge

Astragalus schanginianus

Its yellow flowers were observed at Great Almaty Gorge

Astragalus severtzovii

Only seen at Mashat

Astragalus sieversianus

Its tall, striking yellow flowers, and hairy pods, were seen at Berkara and Mashat

Astragalus suidunensis

Only seen at Bartogai.

Halimodendron halodendron

One of the most attractive plants encountered; large shrubs, (up to five feet tall), covered in pink flowers, and attracting many insects, were on roadsides near Mashat

Onobrychis grandis

Only found at Mashat. Very similar to the related Sainfoin *O. viciifolia* in the UK.

***Oxytropis* spp.**

Another genus with many species seen in most habitats, including:

Oxytropis baissunensis

Present at Great Almaty Gorge

Oxytropis pilosissima

Only found in the western Tien Shan

Robinia pseudoacacia

False Acacia Tree. Present at Berkara and Mashat in the western Tien Shan but not yet in flower.

Trifolium repens

White clover. Common here too!

Vicia subvillosa

Widespread

Fumariaceae***Corydalis glaucescens***

Its pink and white flowers and pale grey leaves were found at Great Almaty Gorge

Corydalis ledebouriana

Similar to the previous species, found around melting snow at Aksu Gorge, Kishi Kandi and in Great Almaty Gorge

Fumaria vaillantii

A more typical pink fumitory, present in the desert at Konshengel

Gentianaceae***Gentiana olivieri***

Only seen at Berkara

Geraniaceae***Erodium cicutarium***

The Common Stork's-bill of the UK; widespread

***Geranium transversale* (syn. *G. tuberosum*)**

The only *Geranium* of note, common in the western Tien Shan

Hypericaceae***Hypericum scabrum***

Found at Aksu Gorge and Kishi Kandi

Lamiaceae (Labiatae)

A very large and diverse family, including 'dead-nettles, mints and sages'; amongst the more noteworthy examples were:

***Erenostachys* spp.**

Several species of this *Molucella*-like 'Bells of Ireland' look-alike were growing in drier areas at Kolshengel, Bartogai and on the Sogaty Plain

Lagochilus platycalyx

Another 'Bells of Ireland'-like plant growing on stony ground near Tamgaly

Phlomis brachystegia

This purple-flowered 'sage' was found at Berkara and Mashat

Scutellaria immaculata

Recorded at Kolshengel

Scutellaria katherinae

This mat-former, with yellow & purple flowers, was found near Tamgaly

Scutellaria kursanovii

Widespread in the western Tien Shan, also found at Great Almaty Gorge

***Scutellaria* sp.**

Found at Bartogai, another species with very pretty yellow and purple flowers

Malvaceae***Alcea nudiflora***

Common in the mountains and just coming into flower at Mashat

Malva neglecta

Dwarf Mallow. This uncommon British native was common and widespread

Orobanchaceae***Orobanche cumiana* -**

This mauve-flowered 'broomrape' was found at Kolshengel

Orobanche kotschyi

A yellow-flowered 'broomrape', also found at Kolshengel

Papaveraceae***Hypocoum parviflorum***

This yellow horned poppy was present in the desert around Kolshengel

Papaver pavonium

The typical red poppy seen in arable fields .

Roemeria hybrida

A very distinctive small purple poppy, found in the desert, particularly around the campsite at Kolshengel

Roemeria refracta

A stunning red poppy with a black centre; a common and widespread arable weed, also found in huge, spectacular drifts on grassy steppe, especially south of Kolshengel

Plumbaginaceae***Limonium michelsonii***

Olga was very excited at finding this Red Data Book species growing around the Bartogai campsite; a rather straggly Sea Lavender, recalling *L. bellidifolium* of dry saltmarsh in the UK

Polygalaceae

Polygala hybrida

This common purplish-blue Milkwort was found throughout the Tien Shan

Polygonaceae

Rheum tartaricum

This distinctive 'rhubarb' with large heads of red fruits, was found at the Taukum Sands and on the Sogaty Plain. The leaves were so buried in blown sand that only the flat leaf blade was visible

Primulaceae

Androsace septentrionalis

Found on the lower levels of the Tien Shan above Almaty.

Androsace setacea

Present in turf in the mountains above Almaty

Primula algida

A very pretty small lavender-pink 'drumstick-type' *Primula*; like a miniature version of *P. denticulata*; abundant in short turf in the Tien Shan Mountains above Almaty up to Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Primula kaufmanniana

A pretty, pink-flowered *Primula* with drooping heads, common in the mountains above Almaty but not extending so far uphill as *P. algida*

Ranunculaceae

Aconitum leucostomum

Leaves only were found at Aksu Gorge

Aconitum songaricum

Only found at Aksu Gorge; again, leaves only at this season

Adonis sp.

Pheasants-eye. An arable weed, also found in desert areas

Anemone petiolulosa

This small yellow *Anemone* was recorded beside the trail at Kishi Kandi

Clematis orientalis

A common plant, its delicate cream-yellow flowers scrambled over bushes and shrubs in the lower section of Great Almaty Gorge

Delphinium camptocarpum

This dainty, pink larkspur was found in the Taukum Sands

Delphinium songaricum

Present at Konshengel

Pulsatilla campanella

The cream flowers of this species were seen in short turf around Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Ranunculus albertii

This small yellow buttercup was the most abundant flower growing in short turf up to and around Bolshoi Almaty Lake

Ranunculus arvensis

Corn Buttercup. Although a rare arable weed in Britain, this species was abundant in cultivated fields between Mashat and Dzabagly, growing with *Ixiolirion* and *Adonis*

Ranunculus regelianus

Only recorded at Aksu Gorge

Thalictrum isopyroides

Present at Kishi Kandi

Thalictrum minus

Present at Kishi Kandi, also a British native

Rosaceae***Crataegus* spp.**

Bushes of several species were commonly recorded

Malus sieversii

Another Red Data Book endemic; these small apple trees were quite abundant on one section of the Kishi Kandi Trail

Prunus (Cerasus) tianshanicus

This low-growing, pink-flowered shrub was found in the mountains of the western Tien Shan

Rosa corymbifera

A bright pink, bushy wild rose, observed at Mashat

Rosa kokanica

Bushy mounds of bright buttercup-yellow flowers were found at Mashat

Rosa persica

A bright yellow, red-eyed, low growing plant with greyish foliage, looking more like a rockrose. One of the dominant ground-cover plants in the desert at Kolshengel and around lakes near Berkara

Sorbus tianshanica

Recorded in the central Tien Shan

Spirea happurizifolia

This shrub with small white flowers was only found at Kishi Kandi

Salicaceae***Populus diversifolia***

The Turanga tree of woodlands in the Illi Delta

Populus talassica***Salix alba*****Scrophulariaceae*****Linaria dolichocephala***

Yellow Toadflax. Present at Konshengel

Linaria transiliensis

Present at Konshengel

Parentucellia flava

Recorded at Mashat

Pedicularis korolkovii

The pale-pink spikes of this species were observed in the mountains above Almaty

Pedicularis olgae

Its pale pink flowers were seen at higher elevations at Kishi Kandi

Verbascum songoricum -

With its tall branched spikes of yellow flowers and pale silver downy leaves, this species is very similar to Hoary Mullein *V. pulverulentum* of Eastern England; common at Mashat

Tamaricaceae*Tamarix ramosissima*

Only recorded only in the western Tien Shan

Violaceae*Viola acutifolia*

The bright yellow flowers of this species were found in the mountains above Almaty

Viola modestula

A small, pale-yellow violet, only recorded at Kishi Kandi

Viola rupestris

This species, the 'Teesdale Violet' of N. Britain, was seen in the mountains above Almaty