

The Tien Shan Mountains & Deserts of Kazakhstan

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 April - 6 May 2012



Eversmann's Stock Dove, Turanga



Himalayan Rubythroat, Tien Shan



Rufous-naped Tit, Aksu



Saxaul Sparrow, Topa

Report and images compiled by Alan Curry



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Day 1

Sunday 22nd April

Calm, warm and hazy

After arriving at our smart Almaty hotel in the small hours following a smooth outbound journey, a slow leisurely start to the day was in order. So, with a typically eclectic Kazakh breakfast under the belt we then undertook a short bus ride through the Almaty suburbs to the entrance of the Ile-Alatau National Park nestling in the foothills of the impressive Tien Shan Mountains. Being a Sunday the park was bustling with locals intent on having a picnic in any likely open area, so we explored a small narrow wooded canyon close to the park entrance. Black-eared Kites soared above the canyon while the first of what would become many Hume's Warblers was located singing or maybe best described as wheezing from the stream side trees. A pair of Grey-headed Goldfinches alighted in a bare tree top giving a good appraisal of this distinctive local form which is regarded as a good species by Kazakh ornithologists.

It was not long before our first stroke of luck came to the fore as a nest-building pair of Azure Tits was observed repeatedly returning to a hole in a clay bank allowing some great telescope views of this highly desirable tour speciality. Nearby a brief Sulphur-bellied Warbler unfortunately quickly went to ground but compensation arrived quickly in the form of a brilliant Blue-capped Redstart singing from a dead stump. A pair of Blue Whistling Thrushes added more excitement, singing and occasionally showing well in scrub below a small dam. Soon it was time to return to the hotel for a brief lunch before heading for the railway station to catch the early evening sleeper train bound for Aksu Dzabagly.

With our train departing on time, and armed with our trusty pot noodles we soon cleared the expansive Almaty suburbs into a seemingly endless expanse of grassy steppe. Birding from the relatively slow moving train proved quite productive, if at sometimes frustrating, with so much of interest to be seen. Huge Rookeries were a feature of the track side plantations, sprawling for what seemed like vast distances and numbering into the thousands. As we moved slowly westward, small groups of Kestrels on the power lines proved a constant source of discussion, the brevity of the views never quite allowing a comfortable confirmation of identity. Add to these a brief flock of several hundred Demoiselle Cranes, a few Long-legged Buzzards, Calandra Larks and Pied Wheatears, it all made for a memorable evening until darkness finally took a hold.

Day 2

Monday 23rd April

Light easterly wind, sunny and warm

With our bus awaiting our arrival at Turkobas railway station, the transfer up to our homely guest house in nearby Aksu Dzabagaly was undertaken in a comfortably seamless fashion and as the first rays of dawn began to break, the keenest birders amongst us were primed and ready to go at the guest house gate! A pre-breakfast stroll to the south of the village produced a good number of Tree Pipits, Hume's Warblers and 'Tristis' Chiffchaff's in the more well wooded gardens, while a small group of Black-throated Thrushes alighted briefly on top of a tall Poplar tree.

As we left the village, the sound of Corn Buntings dominated the soundscape while a migrant party of over 40 Grey Wagtail's made a fine sight. A distant Siberian Stonechat was the first of many to come. Returning to the guest house for breakfast, gave some good but brief views of a White-winged Woodpecker in a dead tree while a first-summer male Bluethroat lurked under the hedge outside the dining room door!

Today's destination was the Taldebulak Valley within walking distance of the guest house, amid the foothills of the snow covered Tien Shan Mountains. A gentle walk across the heavily grazed plains gave us our first encounters with several species typical of the area including Tawny Pipit and Pied Wheatear before eventually reaching the rangers office at the valley entrance. Here, while our local guide sorted the inevitable paper work we were treated to a pair of Yellow-breasted Tits investigating a newly mounted nest box. Soon we were on our way but not for long as a pair of Golden Eagles, a dark morph Booted, an immature Lammergeier, two Black Vultures and several Sparrowhawks all vied for our attention. The sun was high now and passerine activity in the woodland was low, though regular bear droppings on the trail kept our attention levels high. A Dipper was heard but not seen as we eventually reached our intended lunch stop amid incredibly scenic surroundings.

Heading on up the valley after lunch, our walk was soon thwarted by high water levels in the stream de-barring any onward passage. There was nothing lost however, and we slowly retreated back the way we had come but not before an adult Himalayan Griffon Vulture was located soaring along a distant ridge and giving reasonable telescope views. It was a hot afternoon as we left the shelter of the valley, and the group was fortunate enough to avoid an unidentified but well photographed medium sized snake that was curled up sunning itself in the middle of the track.

On reaching the village, we then decided to explore the well vegetated stream bed that skirts the village in the hope of securing a few migrants. And find a few migrants we did, though they were nearly all immaculate Grey Wagtails continually rising up and dropping back down in front of us. A superb Long-tailed Shrike was located offering a prolonged appreciation as it hunted from its favoured bush and posed nicely for the photographers. Returning to our accommodation and a memorable evening meal, the day was rounded off nicely by duetting Scops Owls either side of the guest house garden.

Day 3

Tuesday 24th April

Calm, hot and sunny

A return pre-breakfast visit to the village stream bed produced a smattering of migrants where among the now regular Hume's Warblers and 'Tristis' Chiffchaffs, a single Grasshopper Warbler was located along with a couple of sightings of a handsome male Common Redstart. Overhead, two calling Bramblings flew over the village.

A gentle hike again beckoned after breakfast, this time our destination being the Kishi Kandi trail and with a continual snow covered mountain backdrop it proved a real pleasure! Gently rising from the grassy meadows to the lower Spruce and Juniper forests it allowed us a chance to catch up with several of the avian specialities of the area as well as engaging with some of the local Tulip species. With plenty of fairly fresh bear droppings along this trail as well, our large mammal awareness was also well engaged as the day went on! Star birds of the day came in the form of several Rufous-naped Tits, White-winged Grosbeak, Rock Bunting and a fair few vocal Hume's Whitethroats, although seeing the latter well, proved a bit of a challenge.

Lunch was taken by the Kishi Kandi mountain hut and with distant Ibex viewable on the snow covered slopes and vultures overhead it proved a moment to be savoured. Mid-way through our descent, an incredibly confiding Hoopoe joined the group a few metres ahead and led us down the trail for a good way before pausing on a rock and allowing us to pass. A photographer's dream if ever there was one! Reaching the lower slopes, the weather could be seen to be closing in on the higher elevations and a few raps of thunder could be heard. No matter, we had just enjoyed a splendid day in the Tien Shan!

Day 4

Wednesday 25th April

Calm, hot and sunny

This morning we explored the fields to the east of the village for our pre-breakfast amble. Highlights included a Wryneck sunning itself in a small bush, a migrant flock of Pied Wheatears, a female Citrine Wagtail and best of all a flighty male Little Bustard that led us a merry dance across the area before eventually giving reasonable telescope views.

Our destination today was a series of steppe lakes an hours drive to the north-east of the village, passing the dormant Chokpak Bird Observatory with its gigantic heligoland traps in the process. Another pair of Little Bustards in a roadside field en-route proved an irresistible attraction, but eventually we reached our first stop, the massive Ters-aschibulak Lake. It was difficult to know what to look at first, with large numbers of wildfowl, gulls and shorebirds on offer but it was the Demoiselle Cranes that initially drew the attention with several hundred resting on the shore and several noisy flying groups overhead. Away from the main group, four Common Cranes were located by a sharp-eyed Toby, a good Kazakh scarcity. Scanning the surrounding area it became clear that Steppe Eagles were in abundance with over 15 on view at any one time, we suspected that the eagles' presence in such close proximity to the crane flock was no coincidence. Scanning the far side of the lake revealed several distant Great Black-headed and Caspian Gulls, while occasional Collared Pratincoles drifted overhead. Below us in the scant waterside vegetation migrant Bluethroats and a Paddyfield Warbler lurked, enticing us to stay longer than we should have, but eventually we hit the road again and continued on towards Stone Lake.

Lunch was taken in a quiet valley out on the steppe while a curious Chukar viewed us from a nearby ridge. Our first Turkestan Shrike of the trip commanded attention sitting up nicely in an isolated bush. Moving on, we soon reached our next destination – a shallow lake with a colony of breeding Collared Pratincoles, many of which were observed hawking insects high in the sky. There were plenty of other distractions here, including our first close encounters with Calandra Larks and another accommodating male Little Bustard. Arriving at Stone Lake late afternoon, our main target in the extensive reed beds was Clamorous Reed Warbler and after a fair bit of effort one eventually gave some good telescope views and allowed a critical appraisal of the wing structure.

A small muddy area among the reed beds revealed a superb wagtail fest, where Yellow Wagtails of the forms 'beema', 'thunbergi' and 'melanogrisea' mingled with some delectable 'citreola' and 'calcaracta' Citrine Wagtails. Add to the mix several 'blakistoni' Water Pipits and Bluethroats, it all added up to an exhilarating end to the day.

Day 5

Thursday 26th April

Calm, overcast with light rain

The spectacular Aksu Gorge was to be today's destination and soon after our final breakfast at the guest house we set off in the bus hoping that the weather would brighten up a little bit. We arrived at the gorge in overcast conditions and although the rain had eased off, it was apparent it was not an ideal day for raptor migration! Still, an overhead Egyptian Vulture greeted us on disembarking, not a bad start at all! The steep descent to the gorge bottom is not for the faint hearted as it is a long way back up, so the collective decision was to walk down the trail to an obvious vantage point about half way down, a wise move indeed! In fact, it was the uppermost section of the trail that gave us most of our hoped for target passerine species with several sightings of Crag Martin, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, White-winged Grosbeak, White-capped and Rock Bunting.

Despite the conditions, raptors still managed to make an appearance with an immature Goshawk perhaps being the most unexpected along with our first Eurasian Griffon of the trip. Our targeted vantage point also came up trumps with a confiding Rufous-naped Tit performing admirably on arrival. Scanning the surrounding slopes produced some much closer views than previous of a solitary Ibex resting in a grassy clearing and better still was a pair of Wild Boar on the opposite slope with eight tiny striped piglets perhaps only a few days old scampering perilously along the steep rocky terrain. With the skies ominously beginning to blacken, it was now time to withdraw from the gorge. A tactful mid-afternoon retreat back to the guest house was in order, which at least it gave us plenty of time to get sorted for the evenings return sleeper train back to Almaty and show our appreciation to the friendly guest house staff.

Day 6

Friday 27th April

Overcast and calm

After an early morning arrival in Almaty and breakfast again at the Kazzhol, we were soon aboard the bus and on our way. First up was Sorbulak, a huge area of wetlands an hours drive to the north-west of Almaty, stopping first at a large shallow pool with a vibrant Caspian Gull colony and a multitude of common wildfowl and shorebird species. On the far shore a pair of White-tailed Eagles were resting while in the distance two Hobby's actively hunted in tandem relentlessly pursuing an unfortunate Little-ringed Plover. The main lake gave distant views of the small Dalmatian Pelican colony, some great Black and White-winged Black Terns and a handful of day glow Citrine Wagtails.

Moving on after lunch, a brief stop at the isolated Aldarly 'Magic Tree' gave a single Black-throated Thrush, a brace of Lesser Whitethroats and two Sulphur-bellied Warblers...a nice taster for our next stop, Kolshengel Village, yet another potential migrant hotspot. Here we found several of what could be described as early migrants such as Black-throated Thrushes, Bramblings and Common Rosefinch, perhaps an indication that it was a late spring, migrant wise this year. A striking 'Halimodendri' Lesser Whitethroat showed well along the fence line, appearing very different indeed to its fellow migrant 'Blythi' types.

Arriving at Kolshengel Camp by early evening we were greeted by a blustery cool wind, distant thunder and light rain, not quite everyone's image of camping in the desert! However, the cheerful camp staff and good warm food made it much more hospitable.

Day 7

Saturday 28th April

Strong SW wind, mainly overcast

A cool morning, but the day got off to a good start with distant views of a male Macqueen's Bustard performing his bizarre display ritual on an isolated dune top. Larks always feature strongly here and despite the cool conditions the soundscape positively reverberated with the songs of Calandra, Bimaculated, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed, with the odd Crested Lark thrown in for good measure! Nearby, we were fortunate to locate a small group of the endangered Goitered Gazelle quietly grazing in a dune slack.

Moving to the artesian well immediately post-breakfast, we obtained some great views of Black-bellied Sandgrouse coming in for their morning drink. Better still, in among them were a handful of the much more difficult to get to grips with Pallas's Sandgrouse, offering exceptionally prolonged views at the waters edge as well as flying by at close range. A pair of Isabelline Wheatears was obviously feeding young in the well-head structure and a striking male Desert Wheatear paraded nicely along the access track.

Our primary destination today was a fairly lengthy drive across the Taukum Sands to the Turanga Forest, a site that is best visited before the heat of the day has too much of an impact. En-route, a pair of Steppe Grey Shrikes gave some good roadside views while passing the Topar Lakes revealed a good selection of common waterfowl including good numbers of Ferruginous Ducks and a few Red-crested Pochards. The Turanga Forest makes a great shady picnic site and over a leisurely lunch period we were able to explore the general area. Bird wise, the Turanga's main specialities slowly gave themselves up with Eversmann's Stock Dove, White-winged Woodpecker and Turkistan Tit all being seen well, while a pair of Shikra displayed over a clearing for a lucky few. Saxaul Sparrow was the one remaining un-seen target species and with the afternoon sun now cooling we returned to a nearby open scrubby area where a small group of over twenty performed to perfection, allowing us all some premium viewing of this superb sparrow. With both 'Halimodendri' Lesser Whitethroats and Sykes's Warblers also competing for our attention in the adjacent vegetation it made for a great end to the afternoon.

Day 8

Sunday 29th April

Calm, cool and overcast

First-up today was second helpings of some of the camp's star birds. The Macqueen's Bustard again strutted his stuff while at the artesian well both the Black-bellied and Pallas's Sandgrouse again allowed us to fill our boots at our leisure. Setting out in the bus after breakfast, we headed for an area of dry lake beds where we hoped to encounter some Greater Sandplover action and if our luck was in, Caspian Plover. We were not to be disappointed on the sandplover front, and after a short while scanning some appropriate areas, a pair in gorgeous breeding plumage were located giving some good telescope views, however the highly desirable Caspian eluded us today.

Returning towards the main road, a glimpse of a Redshank-like wing pattern from the bus window gave us all some brief views of a flighty White-winged Lark that somehow gave us all the slip as we piled off the bus! We need not have worried however, as little further on we encountered a much more accommodating individual by the roadside, giving us all a great chance to get to grips with this Kazakh speciality.

Kolshengel Village was to be our afternoon destination, a classic 'migrant-trap' in an almost treeless desert it rarely fails to deliver. I think most folk would accept it is not the prettiest of places but to birders it is known as 'El Dorado' and today was no exception! In a sheltered corner out of the now strong wind an impressive selection of migrants were encountered and in among the throng of Hume's Warblers and 'Tristis' Chiffchaff's were a handful of Paddyfield Warblers, 'Blythi' Lesser Whitethroats, Barred Warblers, Common Redstarts, Bluethroats and even a Robin! A pair of migrant Scops Owls was discovered roosting in a small tree, glaring at us at eye-level allowing the photographers a rare treat, while an immature Steppe Eagle soared overhead. Returning to the camp feeling well content with our afternoon exploits, a brief stop at the artesian well revealed a brace of migrant Ruff including a spanking breeding plumaged male. A good end to a good day all round!

Day 9

Monday 30th April

Wind moderate SE, sunny

Our final morning at the camp began again with the Macqueen's Bustard performing on his favoured dune, as we gathered our belongings and loaded the bus for our post-breakfast departure. It would have been rude not to linger at the artesian well for a final time and again the Pallas's Sandgrouse put on a great show flying around giving their distinctive flight calls. There was a bit more visible migration on offer today, with a pair of Gull-billed Terns passing over, several Caspian Gulls, and best of all, a peach of a male Lesser Kestrel was hawking insects over the camp itself.

A brief visit to 'El Dorado' revealed a sharp drop in passerine numbers compared to yesterday but still gave some great looking breeding plumaged Barred Warblers to savour. A juvenile Goshawk that flew from the wood proved surprising, and a small flock of Desert Finches sat up well in an isolated tree.

It was now time to move on and take the scenic bumpy road to Tamgaly, crossing initially an area of rolling hills before dropping on to much more flatter and lush vegetated steppe. Larks dominated our attention along the journey, and with every subtle habitat change the species mix would fluctuate between Skylark, Calandra, Bimaculated, Short-toed and Lesser Short-toed. In the lush areas, White-winged Larks became apparent often initially located by their aggressive behaviour towards other lark species. Lesser Kestrels were also a feature, suggesting that there was some passage occurring with sporadic sightings as we slowly travelled along.

Arriving at Tamgaly around mid-day we encountered one of the rarest sightings of the trip – a coach full of tourists! Unfortunately for us, it meant we had to share the normally quiet and secluded valley with a host of noisy folk visiting the ancient petroglyph's that adorn the low cliff faces, the implication of this being a particularly quiet walk bird-wise! We did however obtain some reasonable views of the resident Eastern Rock Nuthatches on their traditional breeding cliff and encountered our first Ortolan and Red-headed Bunting of the tour, so it wasn't too bad after all! Lunch was taken in a much quieter valley nearby, the afternoon was very hot now and bird activity quite low. Boarding the bus after lunch, we began the long drive back to Almaty where the comforts of the Kazhol Hotel were beckoning!

Day 10

Tuesday 1st May

Calm and overcast

Departing east from Almaty, feeling well rested after the luxury of a hotel room, our destination today was the scenically stunning Charyn Gorge, a long drive for sure but hopefully well worth it! The journey took us through the Kokpek Pass, a great site for some of the scarcer buntings in its own right, but as we had cleaned up with these earlier in the trip at Aksu we continued on towards the gorge, crossing the magnificent Sogaty Plain in the process. Magnificent that is, if you were looking out of the left hand side of the bus. On the right hand side now resides an awful and intrusive brand new set of power lines dissecting the whole plain, madness! Just before the gorge itself was our first stop, a huge monument of a Kazakh warrior on horseback and home to breeding Rock Sparrows. With these little beauties safely under the belt we soon turned our attentions to the sound of singing buntings drifting from the hill side, however they eluded us entirely and we eventually conceded defeat and returned to the bus.

Eventually reaching our destination (and lunch), we set out to walk to the edge of the gorge where a small colony of Himalayan Griffon Vultures could be viewed on the cliffs below. Good views of an adult on a breeding ledge were on offer, while overhead a good selection of raptors put on a show including several more Himalayan and Eurasian Griffons, Black Vultures, Lammergeier, Booted Eagle and Black Kite. A handful of distant Alpine Swifts were an unexpected bonus hawking around the cliffs. A picnic on the steppe above the gorge amid visually stunning surroundings was memorable - a great place indeed! Siberian Meadow Bunting is known to occur in the scrub here but our searches today after lunch were to prove unsuccessful. Compensation however, came in the form of some great views of Lesser Kestrels on the roadside telegraph poles as we undertook the return drive to our plush guest house in the small village of Bayseit.

Day 11

Wednesday 2nd May

Calm and overcast

After an early breakfast at the guest house, we were soon aboard the bus and heading back up the pass for a day exploring the Sogaty Plain. Shortly after reaching the plain, a huge Steppe Eagle was encountered roosting on a roadside post, which politely posed nicely for the photographers, a good start! Our primary target for the morning was Mongolian Trumpeter Finch, a species that can be difficult to locate on the vast open plain and best looked for when they come to drink and bathe at selected 'watering holes' in the morning and late afternoon. Our chosen site, which was no more than a leaking pipe at a cattle trough, was accessed by a long winding track across the plain. Along this track we encountered the first Shore Lark of the tour, of the monochrome 'brandti' form which are very different in appearance to the birds we see in western Europe. While watching the lark, a now familiar call was detected, Pallas's Sandgrouse! As a cracking male flew close by and then alighted close to the track a short distance ahead, giving us some great views in the process. On arrival at the cattle trough, it was now time to sit back and see what turned up finch-wise. A pair of Turkestan Shrikes sang and displayed on the nearby hillside, while Pied and Isabelline Wheatears entertained around the trough. Occasional Linnets would drop in and a group of three Grey-necked Buntings gave us our first close encounter with this local speciality. However, the Trumpeter Finches failed to appear and it was decided by late morning to move on and pay a return visit in the late afternoon.

Back-tracking across the plain, lunch was taken at the west end of Bartogay Lake where a large number of the commoner wildfowl and wader species were on offer spread along the lake shore. After a short walk, we lingered at the bridge, watchful of any raptor activity over the nearby ridge but rewards were scant for our efforts with sightings of Common Kestrel and Black Vulture the best we could come up with. Returning to the cattle trough by late afternoon, it was apparent that most of this morning's fayre were still on offer but still no Trumpeter Finches! We lingered for an hour or so, but with darkening skies we reluctantly accepted that conditions were not in our favour and that a return to the guest house was beckoning.

Day 12

Thursday 3rd May

Calm and sunny

Another early start - this was to take advantage of any potential migration activity at nearby Nurly. First up was a flooded pit adjacent to the newly constructed railway line that was positively throbbing with sandgrouse! Among the throng of Black-bellied we quickly detected the distinctive calls of Pallas's and there at the waters edge was several pairs resting and soaking up the morning sun. The Pallas's Gods were certainly on our side this year! In some nearby scrub, a singing Sykes's Warbler offered up text book viewing while a handful of Desert Finches vied for our attention. A migrant flock of House Sparrows of the distinctive form 'bactrianus' fed by the roadside generating some interesting taxonomic discussion, while two male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes sat on an overhead power line. A Lesser-grey Shrike sat nicely in a roadside tree while one-or two Eurasian Rollers were glimpsed from the bus window. Despite these, general migration was little in evidence today again suggestive of a late-spring in south-east Kazakhstan this year. By mid-morning it was now time to hit the road and begin the long uneventful journey back to Almaty...

Arriving in Almaty by early-afternoon, we quickly swapped buses for a sturdy four-wheel drive model before entering the Ile-Alatau National Park. Lunch was taken in the Almaty Gorge with breeding Azure Tits offering a great side show, before embarking on the climb up to the Tien Shan Observatory. It was a gorgeous afternoon to be in the mountains, so taking advantage of the good weather we elected to take the trail across the dam and along the shore of the Bolshoi Almaty Lake. The gravel beds at the head of the lake are home to one of the tour's most iconic species and soon we were being treated to great telescope views of two pairs of Ibisbills amid some spectacular surroundings! The 'loon-like' calls of Himalayan Snowcocks reverberated from the mountain sides above us but remained un-seen as we retreated back to the bus, but not before good views were obtained of a Songar Tit calling from a track side spruce. Completing the short hop up to the observatory, we were soon settled in our appointed rooms and after a brief hot drink there was still time to briefly explore the immediate surroundings and lap up the atmosphere. Snowcocks continued to tantalise but despite our best efforts they continued to elude up on the high slopes as dusk settled around the mountain tops.

Day 13

Friday 4th May

Deep overnight snow, cloudless and bright sun

After heavy overnight snow, it was a very different scene that greeted us as we stepped out from the observatory door for our pre-breakfast amble. Wading at times knee-deep through the snow, it was very still, and very quiet. However, the sun had yet to break over the mountains and we knew it would improve!

Slowly, the Snowcocks again began to wail and eventually after some intense scanning we had a pair sat up nicely in the telescope – brilliant! The spruces were also coming to life and a walk (or was it wade) around the grounds revealed many of the regular inhabitants. White-winged Grosbeaks were numerous as were Black-throated Accentors, while a pair of Brown Accentors proved a welcome encounter. Flighty Red-fronted Serins and Red-mantled Rosefinches also tantalised among the sparse spruce woodland before a retreat for breakfast was in order.

With the road above the observatory rendered impassable due to the snow, a return to the dam area after breakfast was called for. A large mobile flock of Hodgson's Mountain Finches graced the dam wall along with Water Pipits of the distinctively pale form '*blakistonii*', and perhaps all were snow-driven refugees from the higher ridges. A pair of stunning Eversmann's Redstarts was in the scrub below the dam, allowing some prolonged appreciation. Further along the trail, a group of Red-fronted Serins fed low down in some Juniper where again the Songar Tit performed nicely. Second helpings of Ibisbill proved irresistible and if possible appeared even more appealing in the snow.

After a memorable observatory lunch, and with the snow clearing nicely we undertook the steep bus journey up to the Kosmostation, a decaying ex-soviet research station located among some superlative mountain scenery. Here among the dereliction resides another key target and one that does not get much better on the eye – the mighty Guldenstadt's Redstart. Fortunately for us, we located two pairs with ease and although always keeping their distance we were treated to some prolonged telescope views. Red-billed Choughs were also present around the buildings and Water Pipits proved numerous on the adjacent slopes. A brightly plumaged close-range Alpine Accentor was presumably of the form '*rufilata*' and again was probably snow-driven from the higher elevations.

On descending from the Kosmostation, another pair of Himalayan Snowcocks was encountered this time at a much more acceptable distance and giving a great display calling from a nearby ridge. Returning to the observatory with a couple of hours of good light remaining there remained one extremely significant gap to be filled on the trip list, Himalayan Rubythroat! A hike over to the distant Juniper-laden 'bat' slope was called for, and even though the sun had now left the appropriate slope it remained our best bet by far. After initially checking a couple of areas without any luck, a final attempt and a short burst of playback produced a sensational response with a superb male flying down the slope and alighting on the boulders almost within touching distance! Now in full flow, it continued to sing with gusto from the Juniper tops in full view, allowing the photographers to fill their boots! Tremendous!

Day 14

Saturday 5th May

Light warm easterly wind, cloudless

A beautiful mild sunny morning in great contrast to yesterday and a chance for a final catch up around the observatory. Almost the first bird encountered on leaving was a singing Himalayan Rubythroat on top a spruce at the entrance gate, what a start to the day! Strangely, whether due to a change in wind direction or temperature, the slopes remained silent today without a Snowcock to be heard. A few singing Black-throated Accentors and the odd Hume's Warbler lifted proceedings but it proved quiet indeed. After a good final breakfast, it was now time to pack our bags, say our good byes to the observatory staff and board the bus for the downward descent. As usual, it had certainly proved a memorable visit to this great place.

With the best part of a whole day ahead of us we elected to disembark the bus above the dam and begin a long casual amble down the access road hoping for the chance encounter with one of the spruce-zone specialities we had yet to catch up with. Hume's Warblers abounded as did the local form of Coal Tit 'rufipectus' with its distinct crested appearance. On a narrow rocky stretch of the stream, a pair of 'leucogaster' White-bellied Dippers performed admirably, currently regarded as a sub-species of the familiar White-throated Dipper of Western Europe, its taxonomic status could well be re-evaluated in the future. Mid-way down, a haunting piping whistle reverberated from the spruce slopes – a singing White's Thrush but unfortunately always destined to remain unseen.

Arriving at the Almaty Gorge, the stream runs much more powerfully here, with a greater chance to encounter our final new species of the trip, Brown Dipper. How lucky were we, when not only did we have a Brown Dipper in view among the boulders but also a White-bellied at the same time?! Two species of Dipper in view at the same time, a truly novel experience!

After a final picnic lunch amid the weekend hordes in the Almaty Gorge, it was time to return to our hotel and prepare ourselves for the overnight return flight home and the chance to reflect upon a memorable jaunt around south-eastern Kazakhstan

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Demoiselle Crane, Aschibulak

Systematic Bird List

Nomenclature and species order generally follows Beaman's Palearctic Birds (Harrier, 1994). Figures in brackets refer to the number of days out of fourteen the species was seen.

- Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis* (2:14)
 Heard frequently in the high mountains and pairs were eventually located on a ridge above the Tien Shan Observatory and near the Kosmostation.
- Chukar** *Alectoris chukar* (perhaps *kurdestanica*) (4:14)
 Seen most regularly in the western Tien Shan.
- Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix* (1:14)
 A pair on agricultural fields near Aksu Dzabagly.
- Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus* (*mongolicus* group) (5:14)
 Recorded most frequently in the western Tien Shan.
- Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* (4:14)
 Heard at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel Camp.
- Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor* (1:14)
 A single was at the Kopa Lakes.
- Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* (2:14)
 Two first summers were at Sorbulak and an adult at the Topar Lakes.
- Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* (9:14)
 Seemingly present at any wetland locality, even as high as the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.
- Eurasian Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna* (2:14)
 Ten at Sorbulak was the maximum count.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera* (3:14)
 Sorbulak, Topar Lakes and Bartogay.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos* (6:14)
 Widespread.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca crecca* (4:14)
 A handful seen at Ters-aschibulak, Topar Lakes and Bartogay.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta acuta* (3:14)
 30 were at Ters-aschibulak and 25 at Bartogay.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* (4:14)
 40 was the maximum count at Ters-aschibulak.
- Garganey** *Anas querquedula* (5:14)
 A flock of 80 was the maximum count at Ters-aschibulak.
- Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* (3:14)
 At least 40 were with the dabbling duck flock at Ters-aschibulak
- Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina* (1:14)
 Four were at the Topar Lakes.
- Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina* (4:14)
 Three were at Ters-aschibulak and small numbers around the Topar Lakes.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* (2:14)
 30 were at Sorbulak.

Ferruginous Duck <i>Aythya nyroca</i> Small numbers were seen at the Topar Lakes.	(2:14)
Goosander <i>Mergus mergus mergus</i> Small numbers present at Ters-aschibulak, Topar and Bartogay.	(3:14)
Slavonian Grebe <i>Podiceps auritus</i> Present at Sorbulak and Topar Lakes.	(2:14)
Black-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i> Four were at Sorbulak and ten at Bartogay.	(2:14)
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis</i> A single at Ters-aschibulak was the only one recorded.	(1:14)
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus cristatus</i> Ters-aschibulak, Sorbulak Lake, Topar Lakes and Batogay all held good numbers.	(5:14)
Black-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i> Two at both Topar and Sorbulak Lake	(2:14)
White Pelican <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i> Eleven at Sorbulak was the only record.	(1:14)
Dalmatian Pelican <i>Pelecanus crispus</i> 45 were at a breeding colony at Sorbulak and a single soared over the Turanga Forest.	(2:14)
Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis</i> 500+ at Sorbulak was the highest concentration.	(3:14)
Eurasian Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i> Heard booming at the Topar Lakes.	(1:14)
Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i> Recorded at Sorbulak and Kolshengel Village.	(2:14)
Great White Egret <i>Ardea alba alba</i> 10 at Topar was the highest concentration.	(3:14)
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea cinerea</i> Recorded at several wetland sites.	(3:14)
Black Stork <i>Ciconia nigra</i> A single seen in flight distantly near Kopa Lakes.	(1:14)
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i> Widespread.	(10:14)
White-tailed Eagle <i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i> Two together at Sorbulak.	(1:14)
Lammergeier <i>Gypaetus barbatus</i> Singles were seen at Aksu Dzbagaly and the Charyn Canyon.	(2:14)
Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i> A single was seen at the Aksu Gorge.	(1:14)
Himalayan Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps himalayensis</i> Recorded at Aksu Dzabagly and at a breeding colony in the Charyn Gorge.	(3:14)
Eurasian Griffon Vulture <i>Gyps fulvus fulvus</i> A single in the Aksu Gorge and up to four in the Charyn Canyon.	(3:14)

Eurasian Black Vulture <i>Aegypius monachus</i> Frequent in upland areas.	(7:14)
Short-toed Eagle <i>Circaetus gallicus</i> Singles seen at Aksu, Turanga and Charyn.	(3:14)
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i> Several at Ters-aschibulak and the Topar lakes area.	(3:14)
Pallid Harrier <i>Circus macrourus</i> A female flew North over Kolshengel.	(1:14)
Eurasian Sparrowhawk <i>Accipiter nisus melaschistos</i> Widespread.	(9:14)
Northern Goshawk <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> Singles were noted in the Aksu Gorge, Kolshengel Village and the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.	(3:14)
Shikra <i>Accipiter badius cenchroides</i> Only seen in its strongholds near the Illi Delta. Large, pale Central Asian <i>cenchroides</i> is the only migratory population of this species, which is, in various races, a widespread resident in the Oriental and Afrotropical regions	(2:14)
Common ('Steppe') Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo vulpinus</i> A single over the Almaty Gorge was the only sighting.	(1:14)
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus rufinus</i> Generally quite common in the steppe with up to 18 per day were seen in suitable habitat but none were found in the high Tien Shan	(11:14)
Steppe Eagle <i>Aquila nipalensis nipalensis</i> and/or <i>orientalis</i> A large concentration of 24+ were at Ters-aschibulak.	(4:14)
Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos chrysaetos</i> and/or ' <i>daphanea</i> ' Widespread in upland areas.	(6:14)
Booted Eagle <i>Hieraetus pennatus</i> Widespread singles were seen mainly in upland areas.	(4:14)
Lesser Kestrel <i>Falco naumanni</i> 10+ was the highest count at the Charyn Gorge.	(4:14)
Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus</i> Present in low densities throughout, including at over 2000m at the Tien Shan Observatory.	(12:14)
Red-footed Falcon <i>Falco vespertinus</i> A single seen briefly from the Almaty to Turkobas train.	(1:14)
Eurasian Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo subbuteo</i> Singles encountered in a wide range of habitats.	(7:14)
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus chloropus</i> One or two were present at Sorbulak and the Topar Lakes.	(2:14)
Eurasian Coot <i>Fulica atra atra</i> 200+ near Stone Lake by far was the highest count.	(4:14)
Common Crane <i>Grus grus</i> Four were at Ters-aschibulak.	(1:14)
Demoiselle Crane <i>Anthropoides virgo</i> The highest count was a huge flock of c1400 coming in to roost at Ters-aschibulak.	(6:14)

Macqueen's Bustard <i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>	(4:14)
A single male was seen daily at Kolshengel Camp performing its bizarre display ritual.	
Little Bustard <i>Tetrax tetrax</i>	(1:14)
Six were encountered in the Aksu Dzabagly and Ters-aschibulak area.	
Ibisbill <i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>	(2:14)
Four were present at Bolshoi Almaty Lake giving decent scope views.	
Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	(2:14)
40+ at Sorbulak was the highest count.	
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus himantopus</i>	(5:14)
Widespread in most wetland areas.	
Collared Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	(1:14)
60+ were present at a breeding colony near Stone Lake.	
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius curonicus</i>	(7:14)
Noted as widespread in most wetland areas.	
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	(1:14)
Six were at Sorbulak Lake.	
Greater Sand Plover <i>Charadrius leschenaultii crassirostris</i>	(1:14)
Three were in breeding habitat near Kolshengel Camp.	
Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	(5:14)
Noted as plentiful in the Ters-paschibulak area.	
Sanderling <i>Calidris maritima</i>	(1:14)
A single was at Sorbulak Lake.	
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	(1:14)
Two at Sorbulak Lake was the only record.	
Common Redshank <i>Tringa tetanus tetanus</i> and/or <i>ussuriensis/ eurhinus</i>	(3:14)
Recorded at three localities.	
Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	(4:14)
Noted at four wetland localities.	
Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	(1:14)
A single near Ters-aschibulak was the only record.	
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	(8:14)
Widespread.	
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	(2:14)
Two were at Sorbulak Lake.	
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	(11:14)
Widespread.	
Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	(1:14)
Two at Ters-aschibulak was the only record.	
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	(1:14)
Two were at the artesian well at Kolshengel.	
Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus ridibundus</i>	(5:14)
Regularly noted in most wetland areas.	

Great Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	(1:14)
At least four were present distantly at Ters-aschibulak.	
Caspian Gull <i>Larus cachinnans cachinnans</i> and/or <i>barabensis</i>	(5:14)
Recorded in small numbers at most wetland areas, and at a breeding colony at Sorbulak. A blackish mantled 3 rd calander year bird that briefly flew by with other gulls at Stone Lake, was thought likely to be of the form <i>heuglini</i> .	
Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	(3:14)
10+ were noted at Ters-aschibulak, the highest concentration.	
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo hirundo</i>	(3:14)
Most plentiful at Sorbulak Lake where 40+ were present.	
Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger niger</i>	(2:14)
Large numbers were present at Sorbulak and the Topar Lakes.	
White-winged Black Tern <i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	(2:14)
Present in small numbers amongst the Black Tern flocks.	
Pallas's Sandgrouse <i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>	(5:14)
One of the highlights of the tour, with small numbers on offer every morning at the artesian well at Kolshengel, a single male on the Sogaty Plain and low double figures at a flooded pit near Nurly.	
Black-bellied Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles orientalis arenarius</i>	(5:14)
Present in good numbers in the dry steppe areas.	
Rock Dove <i>Columba livia neglecta</i> / Feral Pigeon	(13:14)
Seen almost daily.	
Eversmann's Stock Dove <i>Columba eversmanni</i>	(1:14)
A total of about six were found in and around the Turanga grove near Zhealturanghy	
Common Woodpigeon <i>Columba palumbus casiotis</i>	(9:14)
Regularly noted around towns and wooded areas.	
Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto stoliczkae</i>	(5:14)
Most plentiful in the western Tien Shan.	
Oriental Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia (orientalis) meena</i>	(3:14)
Only three singles recorded, with main spring migration yet to get under way.	
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	(4:14)
Common at Aksu Dzabagly.	
Common Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus canorus</i> and/or <i>subtelephonus</i>	(8:14)
Seen and heard frequently, including in the vicinity of the Tien Shan Observatory in heavy snow.	
Scops Owl <i>Otus scops</i>	(7:14)
Commonly heard calling at night around villages, two migrants showed well at Kolsahengel.	
Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	(3:14)
Noted frequently in the Aksu Dzabagly area.	
Common Swift <i>Apus apus apus</i> and/or <i>pekinensis</i>	(4:14)
A few migrant groups encountered in widespread localities.	
Alpine Swift <i>Apus melba</i>	(1:14)
At least three were feeding distantly over the Charyn Gorge.	
European Roller <i>Coracias garrulous semenowi</i>	(2:14)
Only three singles recorded, clearly the main spring passage had yet to begin.	
Eurasian Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops epops (saturata</i> a possible migrant)	(12:14)
Seen abundantly on most days, only absent from the high mountains.	

- White-winged Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucopterus* (3:14)
Noted at Aksu Dzabagly and the Turanga Forest.
- Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla* (2:14)
Single passage migrants were at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel Village.
- Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa* (7:14)
Abundant in steppe to the north and west of Almaty, especially on the flat plains near Tamgaly
- Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata* (4:14)
Common at Kolshengel with occasional birds seen in steppe elsewhere
- White-winged Lark** *Melanocorypha leucoptera* (2:14)
Seen well near Kolshengel and en-route to Tamgaly.
- Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis* (6:14)
Present in small numbers at Kolshengel and the Sogaty Plain., though the identification of some individuals is by no means straightforward and easily confused with 'heinei'.
- Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella rufescens heinei* (3:14)
Most numerous around Kolshengel Camp and the Tamgaly road.
- Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata magna* (5:14)
Present in most steppe areas at lower densities than the above.
- Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis dulcivox* (4:14)
Noted in small numbers on most well vegetated steppe areas.
- Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris brandti* (5:14)
Small numbers were noted on the Sogaty Plain, of this distinctive 'monochrome' form .
- Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia riparia* (3:14)
Migrant flocks were noted at Sorbulak and the Topar Lakes.
- Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* (2:14)
Noted in the Aksu and Charyn Gorges.
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica rustica* (12:14)
Very widespread except in the high mountains.
- Red-rumped Swallow** *Hirundo daurica rufula* (3:14)
Scarce, seen briefly at Aksu Dzabagly, Sorbulak and Tamgaly.
- Common House Martin** *Delichon urbica urbica* (3:14)
Small numbers were encountered, mainly in urban contexts
- Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris campestris* (so-called 'griseus') (8:14)
Commonly recorded in steppe areas.
- Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis* (6:14)
Commonly recorded in the Aksu Dzabagly area.
- Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni* (4:14)
A small migratory group were at Stone Lake, and common in the high mountains.
- Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava* (5:14)
Encountered in low numbers at most wetland areas, it was apparent that the main migration had yet to begin. The eastern form of Black-headed *melanogrisea* being the most prevalent, with a few *beema* and *thunbergi* also being recorded.
- Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola* (5:14)
The stunning breeding black-backed form known as *calcaracta* was noted along with several migrant *citreola* and various *Flava* wagtails at Stone Lake one evening.

- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea melanope* (10:14)
A plentiful passage migrant especially in the Aksu Dzabagly area.
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* (11:14)
The very distinctive form *personata* known as Masked Wagtail and considered as a full species by Kazakh ornithologists is to be found in a wide range of habitats and was noted on an almost daily basis. Presumed northbound migrants of the forms *alba* or *dukhenensis* were also noted at Sorbulak and Kolshengel.
- White-bellied Dipper** *Cinclus cinclus leucogaster* (1:14)
Two were downstream from the Bolshoi Almaty Dam and another in the Almaty Gorge.
- Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii* (1:14)
A single showed well in the Almaty Gorge.
- Winter Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* (3:14)
Singles were noted in the Tien Shan area.
- Alpine Accentor** *Prunella collaris rufilata* (1:14)
A single was seen well at the Kosmostation, in the high Tien Shan.
- Brown Accentor** *Prunella fulvescens* (perhaps *dresseri*) (1:14)
At least five were around the Tien Shan Obs and the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.
- Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis huttoni* (2:14)
Up to 10 per day were found at and around the Tien Shan Obs and in the spruce forest below.
- Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos* (1:14)
A single was heard singing in the guest house garden at Aksu Dzabagly.
- Robin** *Erithacus rubecula* (1:14)
A single migrant was seen at Kolshengel Village.
- Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* (3:14)
Passage migrants were noted in several areas, including the guest house garden at Aksu Dzabagly.
- Himalayan Rubythroat** *Luscinia pectoralis pectoralis* (2:14)
Proved elusive in the snow around the Tien Shan Observatory, eventually two singing males being seen very well indeed.
- Eversmann's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythronotus* (1:14)
Three were seen around the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.
- Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus* (2:14)
A singing male offered great views near the entrance of the Ile-Alatau National Park.
- Güldenstadt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis* (1:14)
Two pairs were noted around the Kosmostation in the Tien Shan.
- Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* (3:14)
Singles were noted at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel Village.
- Siberian (Common) Stonechat** *Saxicola (torquatus) maurus* (11:14)
A common passage migrant in more open areas.
- Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra* (2:14)
Two were seen en-route to Kolshengel.
- Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina* (8:14)
Common to abundant in most lowland areas.
- Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe libanotica* (4:14)
Migrants were noted at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel.

Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i> Common in suitable habitat.	(8:14)
Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti deserti</i> A male was in the desert near Kolshengel Camp.	(1:14)
Rock Thrush <i>Monticola saxatilis</i> Recorded in the Aksu Gorge and on passage at Nurly.	(4:14)
BlueWhistling Thrush <i>Myophonus caeruleus</i> Common in upland areas, close to water.	(5:14)
Eurasian Blackbird <i>Turdus merula intermedius</i> Common around populated areas.	(8:14)
Black-throated Thrush <i>Turdus atrogularis</i> Late migrants were noted at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel.	(3:14)
Mistle Thrush <i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i> Small numbers in the spruce forests in the mountains.	(5:14)
White's Thrush <i>Zoothra dauma</i> A single was heard singing from high spruce slopes below the Tien Shan Observatory.	(1:14)
Cetti's Warbler <i>Cettia cetti albiventris</i> 2 showed very well out in the open at Ters-aschibulak.	(1:14)
Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella naevia straminea</i> A couple of passage migrants encountered at Aksu Dzabagly.	(2:14)
Paddyfield Warbler <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i> 15+ were at Stone Lake and four migrants were at Kolshengel Village.	(2:14)
Clamorous Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i> One showed well at Stone Lake.	(1:14)
Syke's Warbler <i>Hippolais rama</i> Showing well on territory at Topar and Nurly.	(2:14)
Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria merzbacheri</i> At least four at Kolshengel Village proved a real highlight for some members of the group.	(2:14)
Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca</i> Territorial <i>halimodendri</i> types were well represented at Kolshengel and Nurly, while presumably migrant <i>blythi</i> types were widespread at most lowland localities but absent in the higher mountain areas.	(5:14)
Hume's Whitethroat <i>Sylvia althaea</i> Reasonably common in the foothills of the Tien Shan above Aksu Dzabagly, easily located by their distinctive song but not so easy to see well.	(1:14)
'Siberian' Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita tristis</i> The commonest migrant warbler present at a wide range of localities.	(8:14)
Greenish Warbler <i>Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus</i> Another species yet to begin its main spring migration and only 2 migrants noted at Kolshengel.	(1:14)
Hume's Warbler <i>Phylloscopus humei humei</i> Encountered at most localities in small numbers.	(13:14)
Sulphur-bellied Warbler <i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i> Migrants were encountered near Almaty and Aldarly.	(2:14)

Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus tristis</i> Noted in the Tien Shan spruce forests.	(2:14)
Songar Tit <i>Parus songarus songarus</i> Singles were located near the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.	(2:14)
Coal Tit <i>Parus ater rufipectus</i> (a member of the crested <i>aemodius</i> group) Several in the Tien Shan spruce zone.	(2:14)
Azure Tit <i>Parus cyanus tianshanicus</i> Great views of two breeding pairs attending nest holes.	(3:14)
Yellow-breasted Tit <i>Parus flavipectus</i> A pair showed well attending a nest box near Aksu Dzabagly.	(2:14)
Great Tit <i>Parus major</i> Common around habitations.	(5:14)
Turkestan Tit <i>Parus bokharensis turkestanicus</i> Several were recorded in the Turanga forest.	(1:14)
Rufous-naped Tit <i>Parus rufonuchalis</i> Noted at two localities in spruce forest near Aksu Dzabagly.	(2:14)
White-crowned Penduline Tit <i>Remiz coronatus coronatus or stoliczkae</i> Recorded at two localities, but proving generally elusive to the group as a whole.	(2:14)
Eastern Rock Nuthatch <i>Sitta tephronata</i> Breeding pairs showed well at the Aksu Gorge and Tamgaly.	(2:14)
'Turkestan' Isabelline Shrike <i>Lanius (isabellinus) phoenicuroides</i> Noted regularly at a wide range of localities.	(6:14)
Long-tailed Shrike <i>Lanius schach erythronotus</i> Present in the guest house garden at Aksu Dzabagly.	(2:14)
Lesser Grey Shrike <i>Lanius minor</i> Only a single seen near Nurly, normally a common migrant.	(1:14)
Steppe Grey Shrike <i>Lanius pallidostris</i> A pair showed well by the roadside while crossing the Taukum Sands.	(1:14)
Magpie <i>Pica pica bactriana</i> Present in small numbers in most wooded areas	(13:14)
Red-billed Chough <i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis</i> Small numbers seen in the high mountains.	(2:14)
Jackdaw <i>Corvus monedula soemmerringii</i> Regularly noted while travelling through the lowlands.	(12:14)
Rook <i>Corvus frugilegus</i> A common roadside species in agricultural areas.	(10:14)
(Eastern) Carrion Crow <i>Corvus (corone) orientalis</i> Common only seemingly absent in the high mountains.	(14:14)
Hooded Crow <i>Corvus cornix</i> A single seen on two occasions at Kolshengel Village.	(2:14)
Common Raven <i>Corvus corax</i> probably <i>tibetanus</i> rather than <i>laurencei</i> (syn. <i>Subcorax</i>) Seen regularly in the high mountain areas.	(7:14)

Common Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris porphyronotus</i> Another regular roadside species.	(10:14)
Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis tristis</i> Regularly encountered usually around habitations.	(12:14)
Saxaul Sparrow <i>Passer ammodendri ammodendri</i> A flock of over 20 gave great views in roadside scrub near Topar.	(1:14)
House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus domesticus</i> Apparently confined to urban contexts, fairly common in Almaty and surrounding areas. The distinctive migratory form <i>bactrianus</i> which is regarded as a full species by Kazakh ornithologists, was noted near Nurly, where a flock of 50+ fed by the roadside.	(5:14)
Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus</i> Migrants were seen at Kolshengel and Nurly.	(3:14)
Eurasian Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus dilutus</i> A few scattered records in lowland areas mainly around habitations.	(6:14)
Rock Sparrow <i>Petronia petronia exigua</i> Two were seen at a breeding site near the Charyn Gorge.	(1:14)
Red-fronted Serin <i>Serinus pusillus</i> Showed well around the dam at the Bolshoi Almaty Lake.	(3:14)
Siskin <i>Carduelis spinus</i> Two flew over Aksu Dzabagly.	(1:14)
European Greenfinch <i>Carduelis chloris turkestanicus</i> A couple of sightings in populated areas.	(2:14)
'Grey-headed' (European) Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis/caniceps paropanis</i> Seen regularly in mainly upland areas, a very different and distinctive form.	(5:14)
Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i> Regularly noted in wooded areas.	(5:14)
Brambling <i>Fringilla montifringilla</i> Late migrants were seen at Aksu Dzabagly and Kolshengel.	(2:14)
Common Linnet <i>Carduelis cannabina bella</i> Common around the Sogaty Plain.	(3:14)
Hodgson's Mountain Finch <i>Leucosticte nemoricola altaica</i> Flocks totalling over 100 birds were at and around the Tien Shan Observatory and Bolshoi Almaty Lake.	(2:14)
Desert Finch <i>Rhodopechys obsoleta</i> A flock of 20+ at Kolshengel Village and 2+ near Nurly.	(2:14)
Common Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus erythrinus ferghanensis</i> Only noted at Kolshengel Village where up to four were present.	(2:14)
Red-mantled Rosefinch <i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys rhodochlamys</i> and/or <i>kotschubeii</i> Proved fairly elusive at Tien Shan Obs, with most sightings being of unsatisfactory flyovers.	(3:14)
White-winged Grosbeak <i>Mycerobas carnipes carnipes</i> Recorded at higher elevations at Aksu Dzabagly and around the Tien Shan Observatory.	(2:7)
White-capped Bunting <i>Emberiza stewarti</i> Two males gave good views in Aksu Gorge.	(2:14)
Rock Bunting <i>Emberiza cia par</i> Common in the foothills of the Tien Shan above Aksu Dzabagly.	(3:14)

- Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana* (1:14)
A single passage migrant was seen at Tamgaly.
- Grey-necked Bunting** *Emberiza buchanani neobscura* (1:14)
Surprisingly, only a single encounter on the Sogaty Plain.
- Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhuloides* (1:14)
A single of this distinctive form was seen in the reeds at Stone Lake.
- Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* (1:14)
Conspicuous by its absence, only one sighting of a male at Tamgaly.
- Corn Bunting** *Miliaria calandra buturlini* (6:14)
Very common around Aksu Dzabagly.

Trip total: 209 species