

**KAZAKHSTAN**  
**Bird paradise of Central Asia**  
**Best Time: May - June**  
**Tour Price \$ 2.200,-**  
*With RBT Leader as leader*



*Kazakhstan is located on the border between the western and eastern subdivisions. For a long time Kazakhstan is known for its large variety of rare Western Palearctic species. Everything is on a vast scale which is not surprising it being the ninth largest country in the world! Great expanses of flat steppe grasslands merge into sandy and stony deserts. Dotted here and there are saline and freshwater lakes which act like magnets to nesting and migrant birds. In sharp contrast, the massive towering peaks of the Tien Shan Mountains - an extension of the Himalayas - edging onto China rise to over 20,000 feet. Here we find ecosystems varying from massive tracts of deciduous and coniferous forest cut by untamed rivers in deep gorges at lower elevations, to snow-capped peaks and flower-rich alpine meadows higher up. A visit to the southeast and centre of the country is a guaranteed success and an unforgettable experience.*

*The bird-life is stunning! Apart from a large list of more typically European species there is a stunning list of very special breeding birds largely confined to Central Asia; Dalmatian Pelican; Macqueen's Bustard; Ruddy Shelduck; White-headed Duck; Himalayan Griffon; Cinereous Vulture; Pallid Harrier; Shikra; Steppe Eagle; Saker, Barbary and Red-footed falcons; Great Black-headed and Steppe gulls; Ibisbill; Black-winged Pratincole; Caspian Plover and Greater Sand Plover; Sociable Lapwing; Pallas's, Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse; Himalayan Snowcock; Demoiselle Crane; Oriental Turtle-dove; Yellow-eyed Pigeon ; White-winged Woodpecker; Brown Dipper; Pale Sand Martin; Citrine Wagtail; Brown-necked Raven; Southern Gray and Rufous-tailed (Isabelline) Shrikes; Eurasian Nutcracker; Sulphur-bellied, Asian Desert, Sykes's, Booted, Hume's, Greenish, Paddyfield, Moustached and Blyth's Reed warblers; Himalayan, Black-throated and Brown Accentors; Blue Whistling-Thrush; White-tailed Rubythroat; Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin; White-winged, Blue-headed and Rufous-backed redstarts; Pied, Desert and Isabelline wheatears; Bimaculated, Calandra, White-winged and Black larks; Rosy Starling; Black-headed and White-crowned Penduline-tits; Turkestan, Azure and Songar Tits; White-browed Tit-warbler; Grey-necked, Pine, Meadow, Red-headed and White-capped Buntings; Saxaul Sparrow; Fire-fronted Serin; Plain Mountain-finch; Desert, Crimson-winged and Mongolian Finches; Red-mantled Rosefinch and White-winged Grosbeak. Not to mention some very interesting mammals and reptiles! Birders have been enjoying this stable country and their fantastic birds and history ever since they gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union.*

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website [www.rubythroatbirdingtours.com](http://www.rubythroatbirdingtours.com) ◦ contact [machiel@rubythroatbirdingtours.com](mailto:machiel@rubythroatbirdingtours.com)

ALL-INCLUSIVE BIRDWATCHING & NATURE HOLIDAYS IN CENTRAL ASIA & SIBERIA

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***RBT operated its first and highly successful tour in 2007 and since we established ourselves as the main ground operator of several of the largest tour companies in the world. . We are sure that participants will be delighted with this extraordinary Central Asian experience.***

**May 00, Days 1: To Almaty.** Clients depart from home towards the largest city of Kazakhstan, Almaty. There are several options but the bests are coming in by way of Istanbul (Turkish Airlines) or Kiev (Ukrainian Airlines) as both operators have also connections when departing of Kazakhstan from Astana. Clients need to be in Almaty before May 19 - 6am! If you like to come in earlier please contact the RBT office which will gladly help with extra hotel bookings?

NIGHT: Day 0, on aircraft.

**May 00, Day 2: Almaty Kaskelen.** Our journey starts in Almaty, the greenest city of Central Asia. We will spend our first day in the Kaskelen Ili-Ala-Tau National Park where we will get acquainted with the commoner species of Kazakhstan such as Grey-crowned Goldfinch, White-crowned Penduline Tit and Azure Tit. Next to the commoner species we also may find here such gems as Siberian Meadow Bunting, Blue Whistling Thrush and Blue-capped Redstart!

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Almaty.

**May 00, Day 3: Sogety Valley and Kokpek pass.** Heading out from our hotel in Almaty this morning we travel 125 miles (200 km) east to one of the more spectacular and well-known sites in Kazakhstan - the red, yellow and black canyons of the Charyn River Gorge. Amidst this lovely scenery we should encounter beautiful species such as Chukar; Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock Thrushes; Hume's Whitethroat; Chestnut-breasted-, Grey-necked-, Rock- and Red-headed Buntings. Raptor might include Egyptian, Himalayan Griffon and Cinereous Vultures; Long-legged Buzzard; Golden Eagle; Saker Falcon and Lesser Kestrel. We may come across roadside colonies of the bizarre, pink-and-black, nomadic Rosy Starlings. In the evening we visit a small artesian where leaking pipes created small puddles. We wait for incoming Desert Finches, many Mongolian Finches should be seen and hopefully also several much larger Asian Crimson-winged Finches should pass by for a drink. After this spectacle we drive to our basic guesthouse which is located in an oasis of the Charyn River.

NIGHT: Hunting Lodges.

**May 00, Day 4: Charyn Canyon.** We start the day with an early walk on the Sogety Valley where we are in search of one of the most sought-after species in Central Asia; the Pallas's Sandgrouse! Here we also might come across: Steppe Eagle; Sykes's Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler; Horned Lark and Central Asian Lesser Whitethroat. During the walk on the Sogety plains we might flush a Persian Gazelle! After a successful excursion we set sails for the superb and astounding landscapes of the Charyn Canyon where we can expect close views of Lesser Kestrel; Pied Wheatear and Desert Wheatear. Our journey continues in southern direction towards the Kyrgyz border where a lunch stop might render cute Rock Petronias. When we come close to the mountains the ground becomes more suitable for growing crops and in these agricultural lands we have chance to come across some really interesting birds such as Upland

Buzzard and Saker Falcon. Large groups of gentle Demoiselle Cranes are seen regularly. We return home to our great guesthouse where a fantastic dinner awaits us.

NIGHT: Hunting Lodges.

**May 00, Day 5: Return to Almaty.** The day starts with a walk on the Sogety plains to secure that everybody has seen the Pallas's Sandgrouse. This elegant bird is unfortunately always difficult to see because of its skulky behaviour and rare existence in this part of Central Asia. In the Kokpek pass we might come across ten thousand of Black-veined Whites. These gorgeous butterflies fly in large numbers during the month of May. Birding en-route we go back to Almaty. A stop in one of the small villages along the road might render Red-rumped Swallows; Indian Golden Oriole; Lesser Grey Shrike; Long-tailed Shrike; Greenish Warbler and lovely Laughing Doves. End of the afternoon we arrive back in our hotel in Almaty where a refreshing shower feels great!

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Almaty.

**May 00, Day 6: Almaty to Taukum Desert.** We depart this morning for our Taukum Desert adventure passing through fields of poppies and other wildflowers and all with the spectacular backdrop of the icy Tien Shan Mountains. Along the way we make a first stop at the fantastic Sorbulak Lake here a colony with European Rollers and European Bee-eaters might enjoy the photographers amongst us. On the lake itself gorgeous Dalmatian Pelicans, rare Ferruginous Ducks, Great Crested-, Black-necked- and the amazing Slavonian Grebe might be seen. On the mud flats waders in the form of Little- and Temminck's Stint are quite common; Terek Sandpipers are seen yearly as well in good numbers. We will take an *al fresco* lunch in the field before continuing on to our yurt camp in the Taukum Desert: a luxurious tented camp, a nomadic dwelling used by the local inhabitants of this beautiful country. All things being equal we should arrive in time for afternoon tea and an opportunity to view Black-bellied and possibly Pin-tailed Sandgrouse coming to drink at an artesian waterhole.

NIGHT: Comfortable luxurious yurt camp.

**May 00, Day 7: Taukum Desert & Turanga Woodland.** Today is a wonderful day in which we will encounter a wide variety of habitats and some fine birds and other wildlife. Awakening in the midst of this remote desert, we will likely be watching the amazing display of McQueen's Bustards close to our camp, Caspian Plovers are breeding nearby and Wolves are spotted together with Persian Gazelles all before breakfast! Then we will set forth along narrow back-roads through a variety of steppe/desert habitats to an area of unique Turanga woodland where with a bit of luck we should encounter such specialties as Turkestan Tit, Saxaul Sparrow, White-winged Woodpecker, Pale-backed Pigeon (Eversmann's or Yellow-eyed Dove) and if we are especially lucky Pallid Scops-Owl. Along the way we will undoubtedly encounter a myriad of Greater Short-toed, Lesser Short-toed and Calandra larks and Isabelline Wheatears and Isabelline (Rufous-tailed) Shrikes but amongst which we must diligently search for Steppe Grey Shrike. Other possible species along our way include Pied and Desert wheatears, Rock Petronia, Spanish Sparrow, gorgeous little Azure Tits and Black-headed Penduline-Tit.

NIGHT: Comfortable luxurious yurt camp.

**May 00, Day 8: Return to Almaty.** Early this morning we will drive for about 15-20 miles into the desert looking for beautifully marked Caspian Plover and Greater Sand Plover that should look exceptionally smart in breeding plumage. After breakfast we will break camp and head back towards Almaty. We will make several stops along the way including a fascinating area of ancient petroglyphs; a scrubby, rocky area for the perky Eastern Rock Nuthatch and a breeding colony of exotic Red-headed Buntings. With a bit of luck we may find something exceptional such as Little Bustard which we encountered on our 2011 tour! Nearby fringing scrub acts as a magnet for migrant and nesting birds such as Eurasian Hoopoe, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Shikra, Lesser Gray Shrike, Blyth's Reed-warbler, Sykes's Warbler, Oriental Turtle-Dove and Desert finch.

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Almaty.

**May 00, Day 9: Tien Shan Mountains.** It will take us about two hours to transfer from Almaty to the Astronomical Observatory, situated at the Big Almaty Gorge of the northern Tien Shan Mountains at an altitude of over 8,500 feet. During our ascent we'll pause to seek out the Brown and White-throated Dippers and Blue Whistling-thrush along the fast-flowing mountain streams. In the open patches of mature, mixed deciduous/coniferous forest Greenish and Hume's warblers are quite common. The observatory is an old Soviet construction in a lovely open area of flower-covered alpine meadows and juniper-covered slopes, with a 360 degree backdrop of steep alpine peaks. Arriving in time for lunch, we can spend the afternoon ambling close to the Observatory where the stunning little White-tailed Rubythroat and Fire-fronted Serins are to be found.

NIGHT: Hotel Alpine Rose, Big Almaty Lake.

**May 00, Day 10: Tien Shan Mountains.** We have a full day in this glorious high-altitude landscape to find a wonderful array of alpine specialists. Black-throated, Altai and Brown accentors, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak and the incomparable White-browed (Severtzov's) Tit-warbler await us! We will descend a short distance by coach to the Big Almaty Lake where wide, braided, stony river beds are home to the utterly unique Ibisbill. Higher up in the mountains above the Observatory at an altitude of 10,500 feet, we will look for Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon, Red-billed & Yellow-billed choughs, Plain Mountain-finches, White-winged (Güldenstädt's) Redstart and the star-attraction: Himalayan Snowcock which we have a good chance to see.

NIGHT: Hotel Alpine Rose, Big Almaty Lake.

**May 00, Day 11: Tien Shan Mountains to Almaty.** We will spend much of the day in the Tien Shan region and slowly make our way back to Almaty, arriving by late afternoon. This will allow for further searches at high altitude for anything so far missed, and also to descend slowly through the forests for Rufous-backed (Eversmann's) and Blue-capped redstarts, Songar Tit and the scarce Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker at mid-elevations.

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Almaty.

**May 23, Day 12: Almaty – Astana** In the morning we will board our domestic flight that will take us from Almaty 1000km north towards Astana. After arrival, we enjoy a little snack while driving out of the city. Here we are in search of the many waterfowl that are migrating north and

use the lakes around the city as stopover. Our top targets here will be the Pine Bunting, which shall be accompanied by several Red-footed Falcons and many Pallid Harrier. In the evening, we check-in to our new \*\*\*\*Astana hotel!

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Astana.

**May 24, Day 13: Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve** An early morning rise will see us depart at 5am for the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve. After a 2.5 hours drive from Astana brings us to Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve, its possesses a collection of birdlife that has recently attracted a nomination for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, the Korgalzhyn area remains surprisingly unknown, even within Kazakhstan. The vast wetland area, a combination of virgin steppe and lakes, is home to Wolves, Marmots and Saiga. However, it is the birds that are the real attraction. Located at the crossroads of two migration routes, the wetlands act as a giant motorway junction service station for birds (Lake Tengiz alone has the capacity to feed 15 million birds).

The area, most of which is protected as a 'Zapovednik' (national nature reserve), is home to the world's most northerly population of Greater Flamingo, one of over 300 species of birds, which includes one of the largest wildfowl population in Asia. Other notable residents include pelicans, cranes and a variety of birds of prey.

Our main targets here are nesting groups of the globally endangered Sociable Lapwing, which we have “staked-out” for you”. There are many other fine attractions in this vast landscape. Roadside colonies of Black-winged Pratincoles and White-winged Black Terns in glorious breeding plumage should be dotted with migrant shorebirds such as Red-necked Phalaropes, Spotted Redshank, Terek Sandpiper, Ruffs displaying in all their finery, Little- and Temminck’s Stints. These enumerable wetlands and lakes should also produce breeding Dalmatian Pelican, Great Bittern, White-headed Duck, Red-necked and Eared grebes, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Red-crested Pochard and Caspian Terns. More special still are often close colonies of splendid Great Black-headed Gulls, with a supporting cast of Steppe and Slender-billed gulls!

The damp grassy steppe contain elegant Demoiselle Cranes while scattered scrub, bush should hold Booted Warbler, Pallid Harrier and gorgeous little Red-footed Falcons. Two other very special birds we should find today are Black and White-winged Larks, often numerous along the roadside, both species confined to the Central Asian steppes. In the evening, we return to Astana where we will enjoy a lovely dinner.

NIGHT: Comfortable tourist hotel Astana.

**May 25, Day 14: Astana birding & city tour.** After a final morning’s birding around Astana for missed species or if time permits we will enjoy a city tour to this futuristic completely newly build city in the middle of the steppe! We will enjoy a large final dinner in an authentic Central Asian restaurant serving the best of local cuisine.

NIGHT: Airport hotel or on Aircraft. (not included in the venture)  
(Please note that we could make extra hotel arrangements for those flying early morning back to Europe)

**May 00, Day 15: Astana to home.**

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website [www.rubythroatbirdingtours.com](http://www.rubythroatbirdingtours.com) ◦ contact [machiel@rubythroatbirdingtours.com](mailto:machiel@rubythroatbirdingtours.com)

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After a splendid holiday in Central Asia it is time to depart home. We say goodbye on the Astana Airport from where everybody flies back home.