



15 – 28 May, 2025

Kazakhstan & Kyrgyzstan: Spring migration in Central Asia

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rubythroat
BIRDING TOURS

May 15 | Kaskelen National Reserve

Our 2025 spring migration tour through Central Asia began in earnest as we departed from our hotel in Almaty and set off for our first full-day excursion. We headed west to explore the beautiful Kaskelen Nature Reserve, part of the Ili Alatau Mountain range. Nestled at an elevation of around 1400 meters, this lush, forested site offered welcome relief from the recent heat in the city and proved to be an ideal setting to ease into the rhythm of the tour.

We embarked on a leisurely but rewarding circular walk, soaking in the mountain air and the serenity of our surroundings. At midday, we paused for a scenic picnic lunch under the shade of gnarled walnut trees and blooming wild apple—a picture-perfect spot that added to the magic of the day.

Birding highlights were plentiful. A pair of **Chukars** offered excellent scope views as they scrambled over the rocky outcrops, while the soft cooing of **Common Wood-Pigeons** and **Oriental Turtle-Doves** echoed through the valley. Overhead, the skies were alive with raptors: **Booted Eagles** circled gracefully, joined by a lone **Long-legged Buzzard**, and to our delight, a **Himalayan Griffon** appeared, gliding along the ridgeline with effortless majesty.

In the lower woodlands, we were treated to vibrant flashes of color from several **European Rollers**, and a cooperative **Azure Tit** foraging at eye level stole the show. In a patch of reeds, a singing **White-crowned Penduline-Tit** gave brief but satisfying views. Warblers were in full voice, and we had excellent looks at both **Hume's Warbler** and **Greenish Warbler** as they moved actively through the birch canopy.



A stunning Meadow Bunting put on a great show.

The rippling song of a **Blue Whistling-Thrush** was heard long before we finally spotted the bird perched on a mossy boulder beside the stream—a classic moment of mountain birding. Other species like **European Goldfinch** added their cheerful notes to the morning chorus.

One of the more memorable moments came during our search for **Meadow Bunting**, a subtly beautiful bird of dry slopes and scrubby hillsides. After scanning suitable habitat for nearly half an hour, we were finally rewarded with fantastic views of a striking male perched prominently on a bare branch, singing his soft but clear song. Not only did he sit still for several minutes, but he also allowed us exceptionally close views, giving everyone the chance to admire his rich chestnut plumage and finely marked face pattern—a real highlight of the day.

Alongside the birds, the reserve's rich biodiversity offered further delights. Several **Marsh Frogs** lounged at the stream's edge, while butterflies fluttered in sun-dappled clearings. We recorded a lovely variety, including **Small Copper, Hungarian Glider, Brown Argus**, and the delicate **Chapman's Blue**, each adding splashes of color to the already vibrant landscape. We finished the day with a lovely dinner in Almaty.

May 16 | Charyn Canyon

After a great start to the morning, we made our first stop at a known nesting site for **White-crowned Penduline-Tits**, where we enjoyed exceptional close views of these delicate birds working on their intricately woven hanging nests. Just nearby, a striking **Long-tailed Shrike** perched prominently, offering fantastic photographic opportunities and setting the tone for a productive day ahead.



A good start to our tour amid alpine forests and wildflowers

Continuing east, we entered the dramatic Kokpek Gorge, where towering red rock walls and steep cliffs formed a dramatic backdrop. Here we located a handsome **Blue Rock Thrush**, followed shortly by soaring **Golden Eagles** and, to our delight, several **White-capped Buntings**, one of the day's key targets, singing from exposed rocky perches.

Later in the afternoon, we made a long walk at the edge of the Sogety Valley, a sweeping semi-desert landscape stretching toward the Chinese border. The valley is wide and open, with rolling gravel plains, dry riverbeds, and scattered desert shrubs, all framed by distant hills and the snow-covered peaks of the Tian Shan far to the south. Despite its arid appearance, this landscape is full of life and surprises.

Bird activity was excellent, and we encountered several species typical of these dry steppes. **Red-tailed Shrike**, **Horned (Shore) Lark**, and **Greater Short-toed Lark** were all present, and the wheatears did not disappoint either – we recorded **Isabelline**, **Desert**, and **Pied Wheatear**, each offering good views. A few **Tawny Pipits** added to the mix, but the real star of the valley was a stunning group of **Mongolian Finches**, which we watched as they fed among the rocky outcrops – a massive highlight for the group!

On the way back from our walk, we stumbled upon a **Desert Sand Boa**, which we gently observed as it slid through the gravel – a rare and exciting find. Nearby, blooming **Orobanche amoena** added a splash of color to the otherwise dusty landscape, while a couple of **Great Gerbils** made brief but comical appearances near their burrows, dashing in and out of sight. Just before we left the area, Machiel spotted four **Siberian Ibex** high up on a rocky ridge – a fantastic



Close-up views of the elusive White-crowned Penduline-Tit

bonus to end an already outstanding day in the field. As we arrived at the Hunting Lodge for the night, we were greeted by a charming surprise — an active **Long-eared Owl** nest right beside the building, with several curious youngsters peering out from the foliage. As dusk fell, **Eurasian Scops Owls** began calling and, within minutes, we had excellent views of these tiny nocturnal hunters flitting between the poplars.

Throughout the day we continued to encounter an impressive variety of other species. A group of **Chukars** made a brief appearance early in the morning, while **Common Wood-Pigeons** of the 'casiotis' race were seen flying along the provincial road near Almaty. We had good views of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, and several **Himalayan Griffons** and **Steppe Eagles** soared overhead during the warmer hours. The vibrant calls of **Eurasian Hoopoe** echoed across the valley, and in the poplar groves, we were lucky to spot both **Eurasian Golden Oriole** and **Indian Golden Oriole**, offering a rare side-by-side comparison. Large flocks of **Rosy Starlings** moved across the valley floor, their pinkish plumage glowing in the late afternoon light.

May 17 | Sogety Valley and Kyrgyzstan

We began the day by heading back into the Sogety Valley, where the early morning light cast a soft golden hue across the semi-desert landscape. Within minutes of arriving, we had success with two key targets: a bold **Steppe Grey Shrike** perched conspicuously on a low shrub, and shortly after, an active **Asian Desert Warbler** flitting among the sparse vegetation.

This tiny, sandy-toned warbler is perfectly adapted to its arid surroundings. With its short tail, pale plumage, and piercing yellow eye,



The colorful Orobanche amoena, a parasitic plant

the Asian Desert Warbler is an understated gem of the steppe. It moved with quick, flicking motions, occasionally pausing to deliver its scratchy, dry song from atop a twig. Watching it so well in its natural habitat was a special moment.

Next, we set off for a one-hour walk through the breathtaking Charyn Canyon, one of Kazakhstan's most iconic natural landmarks. Often referred to as the "Grand Canyon of Central Asia," Charyn features towering red sandstone cliffs carved by wind and water over millions of years. The narrow trail wound between dramatic rock formations, some resembling towers and castles, while birdsong echoed from the sheer canyon walls. This surreal landscape offered not only spectacular views but a strong sense of place and geological wonder.

Further along our journey, we stopped at an old graveyard, a hauntingly beautiful and atmospheric site where dozens of **Lesser Kestrels** had made their nests in the crevices of the crumbling mausoleums. We watched the kestrels actively hunting and feeding their young, their high-pitched calls filling the air. While scanning the surroundings, a brief appearance by the **Relict Ground Squirrel** — a rare and localized species — added a jolt of mammal excitement, though it quickly darted into the safety of its burrow. To top it off, a Little Owl was spotted roosting quietly atop one of the grave markers, watching us with calm curiosity.

As we continued toward Kegen, the scenery gradually transformed. Gaining altitude, we entered a landscape of lush green pastures, alpine meadows, and scattered yurts surrounded by grazing flocks. The birdlife shifted accordingly — the skies rang with the song of **Eurasian Skylarks**, and in the wide, open spaces we enjoyed sightings



A very obliging Richard's Pipit, the first in many years!

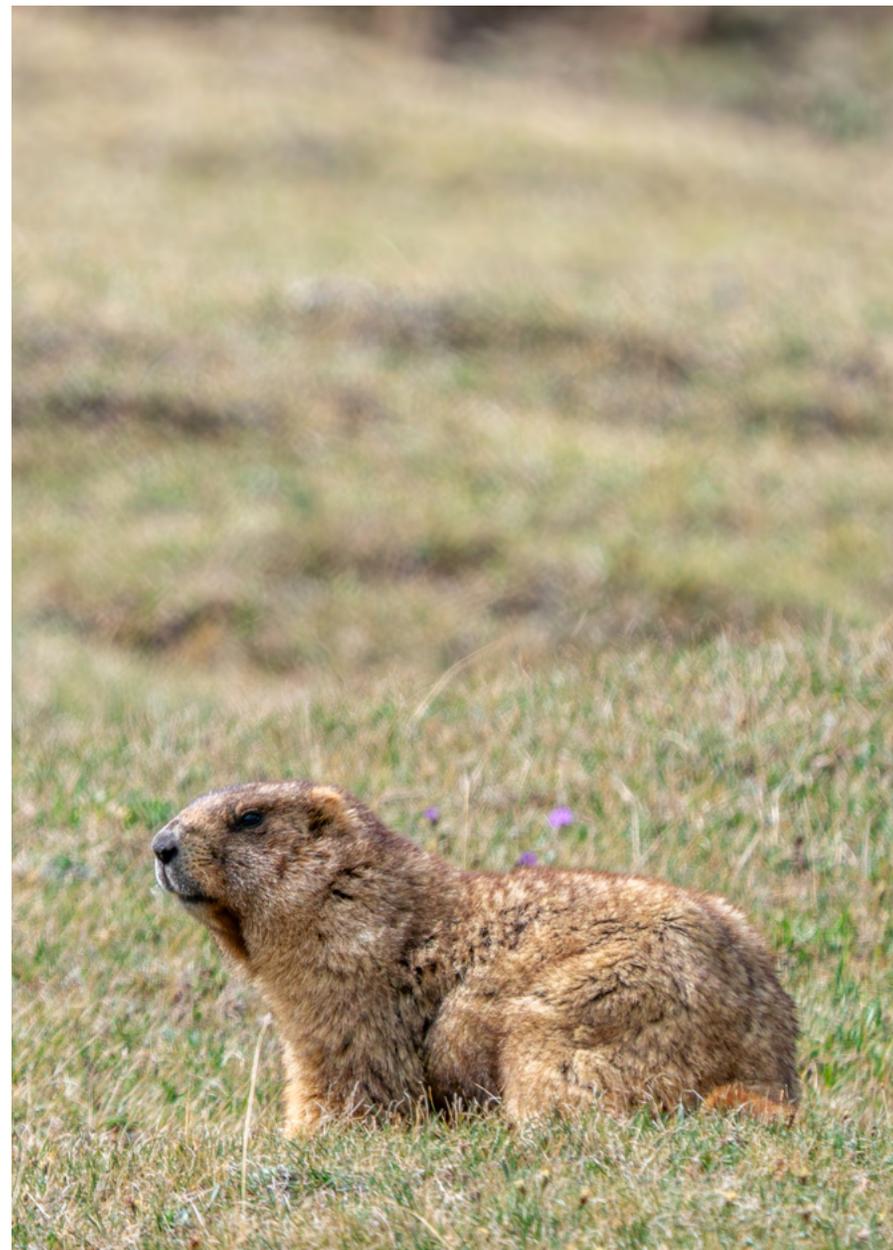
of **Common Cranes** striding through the grasslands. A **Black Stork** soared gracefully above us, while **Northern Wheatears** flitted along the roadside and flocks of **Common House-Martins** darted overhead. This area also gave us our first of many **Spotted Flycatchers**, actively hunting from perches along the streambeds.

After a smooth and scenic border crossing into Kyrgyzstan, we made one last stop before sunset. In a damp field dotted with wildflowers, we found several brilliant **Citrine Wagtails**, glowing lemon-yellow in the golden evening light. A showy **Richard's Pipit** stood tall in the grass, allowing for prolonged and close views – a perfect end to the day's fieldwork.

By evening, we arrived at our charming guesthouse, nestled in a quiet Kyrgyz mountain village. After settling in, we walked to the best available local restaurant – a lively spot buzzing with fellow travelers from around the world – and enjoyed a warm, hearty meal while sharing highlights from what had been a diverse and unforgettable day in the field.

May 18 | Chon-Ashuu Valley

We began the day well before dawn with a 4:00 a.m. breakfast, energized for what would become one of the most bird-filled and unforgettable days of the tour. Our destination was the stunning Chon-Ashuu Valley, a remote, high-altitude expanse near the Chinese border. With its wide glacial basin, rushing rivers, and sweeping meadows framed by jagged, snow-capped peaks, the valley feels wild and untouched – a true mountain wilderness brimming with life.



Gray Marmots out and about in the lush alpine meadows, offering fantastic views



Alpine wildflower galore in the Chon-Ashuu pass!

Our first stop provided outstanding photo opportunities, with tens of **Pine Buntings** perched on roadside shrubs, glowing in the soft morning light. Nearby, a local **Ring-necked Pheasant** gave itself away with a low call and brief but brilliant views, while a **Montagu's Harrier** cruised gracefully overhead, a fleeting but beautiful encounter.

As we entered the lower forested zones, bird activity was high. We found **Grey Wagtails** flitting along the streams, while the soft trills of **Goldcrests** and **Eurasian Wrens** echoed through the undergrowth. **Black-throated Accentors** sang from low branches, and both **Masked Wagtails** and **Water Pipits** were common in damp meadows. Flocks of **Fire-fronted Serins** fed noisily in the thickets, adding a splash of red to the greenery. **Songar Tit** was a good record too.

At the valley's fast-flowing central river, we struck gold with one of the region's most iconic birds: four **Ibisbills**, carefully camouflaged among the river pebbles. Their long, down-curved bills and muted grey plumage were mesmerizing, and we spent a long while admiring them as they delicately probed the gravel for food – a true highlight.

In the surrounding grasslands, **Grey Marmots** were everywhere. These large, ground-dwelling rodents are well adapted to life at altitude, with thick fur and sharp whistles that echoed across the valley as they kept a watchful eye on our movements. Their curious faces often peeked from burrows before vanishing underground with a flick of the tail.

Climbing higher, we scanned rocky slopes and alpine scrub. A distant **Merlin** of the *lymani* race sat perched on the peak of a pine tree.



Radiant Himalayan Rubythroat's!!!

Patient searching eventually produced a wonderful series of mountain gems: **Red-mantled Rosefinch**, **Himalayan Rubythroat**, **White-winged Grosbeak**, and, high above the treeline, a breeding pair of **Altai Accentors** – all seen well and often with song.

Overhead, we were never alone. **Common Ravens** and **Red-billed Choughs** passed by in chatty flocks, while a majestic **Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier)** soared silently overhead – the perfect raptor for such a dramatic landscape.

The richness of the day wasn't limited to birds and mammals. Wildflowers blanketed the alpine meadows in stunning variety and color. "Alpine flowers galore!" one guest exclaimed – and we couldn't agree more. Delicate ***Primula algida*** dotted the alpine meadows, bright yellow **Oeder's Lousewort** stood proud in clusters, and the unusual **Pea Shrub** added texture to the terrain. Perhaps the most eye-catching of all was ***Iris ruthenica***, its deep blue blossoms glowing in the sunlight. Among the flowers, butterflies fluttered lazily – **Queen of Spain Fritillary** was especially common, its bold orange-and-silver pattern dancing across the open fields.

As we made our way back through this grand alpine landscape, the group was buzzing with excitement. Birds, butterflies, marmots, and flowers – Chon-Ashuu Valley had offered it all in one incredible day.

May 19 | Barskoon Gorge

As we set off toward Lake Issyk-Kul, the towering peaks ahead of us were draped in dark clouds, and a cool wind swept through the valley. Despite the dramatic skies, spirits were high as we climbed into the Barskoon Gorge, a scenic and well-maintained mining



A close and unforgettable view of a glowing male Pine Bunting



White-winged Grosbeaks are a regular sight in the mountain forests surrounding Karakol

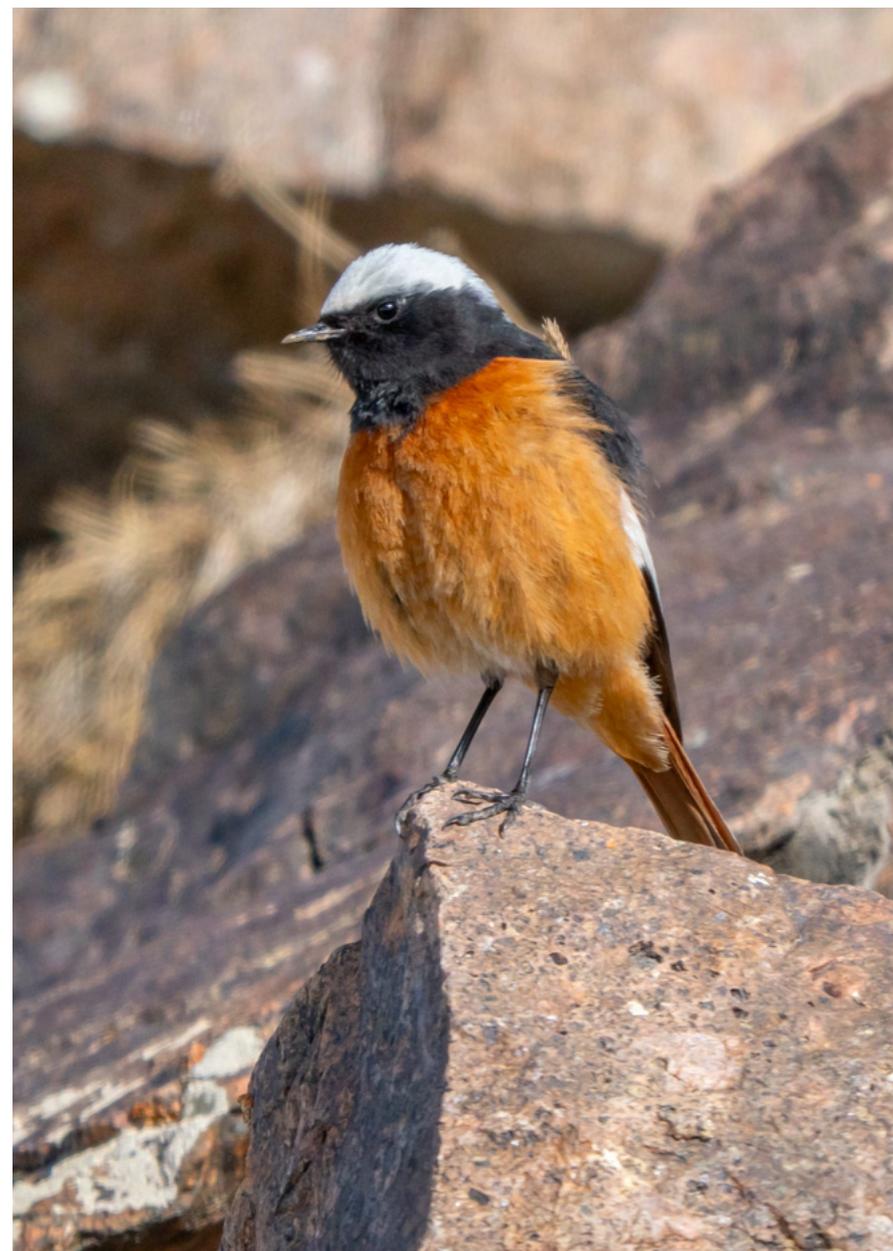
road that offers remarkable access to elevations exceeding 4,000 meters – a birder’s gateway to the alpine realm.

Our ascent began through forested slopes where activity was high. In the lower elevations, we **encountered Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Coal Tit, and Black-throated Accentor** flitting through the spruce trees. A highlight here was a beautifully feeding **White-winged Grosbeak**, giving prolonged views as it moved methodically through the subalpine shrubs.

One of the more sought-after birds of the day, the **Sulphur-bellied Warbler**, appeared on several occasions and offered wonderful views as it crept along rock faces, occasionally pausing to sing. Throughout the day, **Greenish Warblers** and **Hume’s Warblers** proved to be the most ubiquitous companions, their restless foraging and high-pitched calls filling the birch and juniper thickets.

Back in the lower zones, we focused on finding a trio of striking redstarts – and we weren’t disappointed. The **Rufous-backed Redstart**, with its warm rust tones and bold tail pattern, was characteristically upright and alert. **Black Redstarts**, in varying plumages, flicked their tails as they darted across the rocks. But it was **the Blue-capped Redstart** that stole the show – a dapper bird with its crisp black-and-white contrasts and deep slate-blue crown. It gave us excellent views as it foraged near a flowering slope, joined by a loud and persistent **Brown Accentor**, singing its scratchy song from a nearby rock.

Flocks of **Plain Mountain Finches** swirled overhead in tight



White-winged Redstarts were spotted at high elevations, where they favor the rocky alpine slopes

formation, settling briefly before lifting off again. Among the alpine meadows and granite boulders, we spotted a **Large-eared Pika**, perched on a stone, nervously surveying its surroundings before darting into its burrow – a charming mammal of the highlands.

At the top of the pass, just as we broke through the final tree line, a swirling flock of **Alpine Choughs**, mixed with several **Red-billed Choughs**, greeted us, their aerial acrobatics dramatic against the looming clouds. One of our top targets, the elusive **White-winged Redstart**, appeared just long enough for the group to enjoy satisfying views before disappearing over a ridge.

We were fortunate to avoid rain for most of the day, but by late afternoon, heavy clouds began to roll in fast. As we reached a favored spot to scan for **Himalayan Snowcock**, visibility dropped dramatically and the first snowflakes began to fall. With the peaks now obscured by thick cloud and snowfall, we made the decision – built into our flexible mountain schedule – to return the following morning, allowing a second chance in better conditions.

Aside from the birds, this day in the high mountains also brought joy to the botanists in the group. The alpine flora was in fine form, and we admired several stunning species including deep purple ***Saxifraga oppositifolia***, charming ***Pulsatilla campanella***, and the delicate, snow-like blossoms of ***Callianthemum alatavicum*** – each a highlight in its own right.

As we descended back toward Karakol, the skies brightened, and roadside sightings continued. **European Rollers** were plentiful, perching elegantly on power lines, their turquoise plumage



We were treated to a ten-minute performance by this lively Sulphur-bellied Warbler

glowing in the evening light. **Eurasian Kestrels** hovered nearby, while **Barn Swallows** skimmed low over fields. A few **Black-eared Kites** patrolled the farmland, and a pair of **Laughing Doves** fed calmly by the roadside – the perfect end to a day that had touched almost every elevation and habitat, from valley floor to snow-dusted alpine pass.

May 20 | Barskoon Gorge, again!

We woke to clear skies – a welcome sight after the previous day’s snow and cloud cover. As Machiel pointed out to the group over early tea, this kind of morning – when unsettled weather gives way to sun – is the absolute best time to go birding in the mountains. During stormy conditions, many high-altitude species descend to lower elevations, and as the skies clear, they often remain accessible for a short window. It’s the perfect chance to find the region’s alpine gems.

Our target for the day was one of the most iconic birds of the Central Asian highlands: the Himalayan Snowcock. We drove straight up into Barskoon Gorge – its name meaning “Snow Leopard Gorge” – and headed directly to a favorite lookout point. The scenery was dramatic, with towering cliffs and rock-strewn slopes glowing under a fresh dusting of snow.

Not long after we arrived, we heard the unmistakable call of a **Himalayan Snowcock**, followed quickly by its sharp, whistled flight call. Moments later, we located the bird perched on a high ridge. Through the scope, we had prolonged and satisfying views of this majestic mountain “chicken,” its barred flanks and powerful build standing out boldly against the granite.



Saxifraga oppositifolia adorned the rocky ground with its gorgeous deep purple cup-shaped flowers, a true alpine gem in bloom



Breathtaking birding landscapes in the heart of Kyrgyzstan's wild mountains

We watched as it began to walk along the slope before vanishing into the rockscape.

While we were still scanning for more Snowcocks, Machiel suddenly alerted the group to another extraordinary sound – the flight call of a **Spotted Great Rosefinch!** Within seconds, he spotted a small group perched on nearby rocks. We quickly got everyone onto the birds, and soon we were all enjoying excellent scope views of these rarely seen high-mountain specialists. The bold red plumage and heavy bills of the males glowed in the morning light – a truly unexpected bonus and a massive highlight of the trip.

After this brilliant double, we descended slightly to one of our regular sites in search of another prized species. It wasn't long before we connected with both a male and female **White-browed Tit-Warbler**. These tiny birds are energetic and fast-moving, often flitting through low junipers and alpine shrubs, but most of the group had close and satisfying views of their dazzling violet-blue plumage and crisp white eyebrows.

Raptors were active in the warming air, with **Golden Eagles** soaring overhead and several **Common Swifts** of the *pekinensis* race zipping past with effortless speed – a reminder that even the sky was full of life.

Later in the morning, we descended to Issyk-Kul Lake, where we enjoyed a relaxed breakfast with a stunning view across the water. The stillness of the scene was accompanied by birdsong: **Cetti's Warblers** calling sharply from the reeds and the rich melodies of



We caught up with this fast-moving White-browed Tit-Warbler, its vibrant colors flashing as it flitted through the alpine shrubs

Eastern Nightingales drifting from the willows. It was a peaceful and fitting close to our time in the high mountains – a morning of rare species, breathtaking scenery, and the kind of sightings that birders dream about.

May 21 | Return to Almaty, Kazakhstan

Although today was primarily a travel day back to Almaty, we still managed to carve out some rewarding birding moments before crossing the border from Kyrgyzstan into Kazakhstan.

Our first notable stop came at a small marsh, where we were thrilled to find a breeding **Whooper Swan** – a majestic sight, especially with its elegant neck arched over still waters framed by reeds and early morning mist. Just outside of Karakol, the skies and wires were alive with **Black-eared Kites**, while **Oriental Turtle-Doves** perched serenely in roadside trees.

As we paused to admire a beautifully posed **Siberian Stonechat**, our attention was suddenly drawn to the unexpected call of a **Corn Crane** – one of the most elusive species of the Palearctic. With the grasses unusually short in this area, we sensed a rare opportunity and sat down to try our luck. A bit of playback was enough to initiate a tense game of cat and mouse, with the bird responding immediately. For several minutes, we traded short bursts of call and silence, until – finally – the bird crept into view. What began as a glimpse turned into fantastic open views of this notoriously secretive species. It was a magical moment and a lifer for many.



We had an unforgettable encounter with this famous skulker, never had I closer views of a Common Grasshopper-Warbler

Further along, a quiet riverside stop delivered even more surprises. A small flock of **Pale Martins** swirled overhead, while on the water, we recorded the first **Moorhen** and **Black-headed Gull** of the tour. As we scanned the sky, a dark-morph **Upland Buzzard** soared into view, providing excellent photographic opportunities against the clean spring sky. Just as we were about to move on, a large flock of **European Bee-eaters** swept northward in tight formation, their rich colors flashing in the sunlight – always a crowd-pleaser.

One of the day's top highlights came shortly after, when we encountered a **Common Grasshopper-Warbler** at remarkably close range. Normally a skulking bird known more for its insect-like song than its visibility, this individual performed beautifully – creeping through the grasses in full view and allowing the kind of observation birders usually only dream of.

Upon re-entering Kazakhstan, the birding continued with yet another gem: our only **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** of the tour, perched on a rocky outcrop and glowing in the warm light. At the same location, multiple **Gray-necked Buntings** were also present, rounding off the day with more fantastic views.

As we rolled into Almaty, there was a sense of anticipation for the next chapter of our journey: the Taukum Desert, promising new habitats, new birds, and more unforgettable experiences. But even on a day dedicated to travel, Central Asia continued to offer up its wonders..



Green-underside Blue offered excellent views as it delicately fed, showing off its subtle coloration



A typical scene while exploring the mountains of eastern Kyrgyzstan, vast landscapes, crisp air, and the promise of exciting wildlife around every corner

May 22 | Sorbulak Lake & Taukum Desert

After breakfast in Almaty, we set off towards the renowned Sorbulak Lake—a magnet for waterbirds and an essential stop on our route. As expected, we quickly began racking up an impressive list of wildfowl. **Ruddy Shelduck** and **Common Shelduck** were abundant, and we enjoyed excellent views of drake **Garganey** in full breeding regalia, displaying their elegant white facial stripe and beautifully patterned scapulars. **Northern Shoveler** and **Gadwall** added to the diversity, but the true standouts in both color and elegance were the dazzling **Red-crested Pochard** and the deep-chested **Common Pochard**.

It took a bit more searching to track down the rarer **Ferruginous Duck**, which eventually revealed itself among the reeds. The star of the day, however, was undoubtedly the **White-headed Duck**—a male in pristine breeding plumage, its powder-blue bill gleaming in the light and the contrasting white head sharply offset by its dark body. A true highlight and a much-wanted target for many.

Waders also put on a strong showing. **Black-winged Stilts** tiptoed through the shallows with grace, while **Pied Avocets** swept their upturned bills in perfect arcs. **Temminck's Stint** skittered along the muddy fringes, and we were lucky to see a stunning all-black Spotted Redshank in its breeding finery. Both **Great White and Dalmatian Pelicans** drifted across the lake in their usual majestic manner, and a surprise came in the form of around 20 Glossy Ibises, their metallic green plumage shimmering in the sun. Just before we left, an adult



Our group enjoying fantastic views of the striking White-headed Duck, a true highlight of Sorbulak

White-tailed Eagle soared overhead—a fitting sendoff from Sorbulak.

Our journey continued toward the Taukum Desert, and along the way we were greeted by an extraordinary spectacle: thousands upon thousands of **Rosy Starlings** filling the skies, fields, and roadside wires. Their pinkish bodies and black crests turned every stop into a celebration of color and movement. Also perched along the wires was a handsome **Lesser Gray Shrike**, and our first **European Bee-eater** brought a splash of tropical brilliance to the dry steppe.

As we approached the desert proper, we began to spot small groups of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** lifting off in whirring bursts. But our main goal here was to find the elusive **Greater Sand-Plover** and, even more exciting, the enigmatic **Caspian Plover**. We arrived at a known hotspot and, almost unbelievably, within a minute spotted a small family group—including a magnificent male **Caspian Plover** with a glowing deep red chest, crisp white underparts, and sandy brown back. A true desert jewel—possibly the bird of the trip for many!

Driving back toward camp, we had a bonus mammal sighting: a solitary **Turkestan Gazelle**, standing elegantly on a ridge, briefly posing before trotting off into the golden landscape.

Our accommodation for the night was anything but rough: a fully equipped yurt camp set among the sand dunes. No



A close-up of the strikingly beautiful Caspian Plover, its vibrant tropical plumage is a dazzling surprise in these arid deserts

flimsy tents here, but spacious, traditional yurts with proper bedding, a professional cook, and a cozy central dining area. We were treated like old Kazakh Khans—Central Asian royalty surrounded by desert peace.

Around the camp, **Brown-necked Ravens** croaked from nearby perches, and the open desert revealed a suite of larks including **Calandra Lark**, **Turkestan Short-toed Lark**, **Eurasian Skylark**, and **Crested Lark**. But stealing the show around the camp was the stunning **Red-headed Bunting**. Males lit up the shrubs with their fiery orange heads and yellow underparts—a perfect splash of color to end a spectacular day.

After dinner, we set out on a night walk and were rewarded with a fascinating array of desert wildlife, including the adorable **Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa**, scurrying **Libyan Jirds**, the brilliantly camouflaged **Common Wonder Geckos**, and even a few formidable-looking **Camel Spiders**.

May 23 | Zheltorangly Desert Poplar Forest

In the early morning, we set out once more into the Taukum Desert in search of one of the region's most iconic birds—the elusive **Macqueen's Bustard**. For nearly two hours, we scanned the shimmering desert landscape, our eyes tracing every distant silhouette. Despite our persistence and hopeful anticipation, the bustard remained hidden, and we reluctantly decided to move on, saving this regal bird for another time.



A nocturnal wonder, the adorable Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa



Common Wonder Geckos are simply brilliant! Beautifully patterned and well-camouflaged as they patrol the desert floor after dark

Our next stop was a small artesian well, Seated comfortably in our camping chairs, we soaked in the serenity of the morning. Soon, the silence was broken by the unmistakable calls of sandgrouse overhead. Moments later, two **Pallas's Sandgrouse** swept past us, their narrow wings cutting through the air as they provided excellent flight views—a thrilling reward after the bustard disappointment.

Back at camp, a different kind of desert drama was unfolding. Among the yurts, two male **Steppe Agamas** were locked in a territorial fight, bobbing and posturing with fierce determination. Nearby, a visibly pregnant female watched from a rock, a silent witness to the reptilian ritual. These hardy desert dwellers were a joy to observe up close.

After breakfast, we packed up and headed towards the villages of Zheltorangly and Topar. The road through the open steppe yielded fantastic views of **Bimaculated Lark**, showing off its bold breast streaks and subtle plumage tones. Raptors were again plentiful, with **Booted Eagles** circling overhead and **Long-legged Buzzards** perched on poles. At one buzzard nest, we were surprised to discover a bustling colony of **Spanish Sparrows** tucked safely among the sticks.

In Topar, we made a targeted stop for one particularly special sparrow—and were soon rewarded with clear views of the elusive **Saxaul Sparrow**, perched low in a tamarisk. **Sykes's Warbler** also made an appearance, singing from a thicket and giving us prolonged views.



White-winged Woodpeckers are a striking member of the dendrocopus genus, uniquely adapted to thrive in arid desert habitats

Later in the day, we explored a patch of Desert Poplar forest on the edge of Lake Balkhash. This habitat holds some truly special birds, and our luck was in. Almost immediately, we located a small group of **Yellow-eyed Pigeons**, their pale plumage and striking yellow eyes glowing softly in the filtered light—a superb sighting of one of Central Asia’s most enigmatic species. **White-winged Woodpeckers** were surprisingly common, and we enjoyed several close encounters with these striking black-and-white birds.

During our relaxed lunch beneath the trees, we were treated to intimate views of a pair of **Turkestan Tits** nesting in a hollow limb—yet another highlight in this bird-rich woodland.

As evening approached, we drove into the local town for a change of scenery. Here we added more **Red-headed Buntings** and **Desert Finches** to the list, and, surprisingly, even spotted a lone **Chaffinch** flitting through the undergrowth of a local home—an unexpected guest in such an arid landscape. We ended the day as one should in the desert: with a cold beer in hand, watching the sun dip below the endless horizon, its golden light spilling across the dunes. Another full and unforgettable day in Central Asia.

May 24 | Return to Almaty

Before breakfast, we gave the desert one final attempt to track down our most-wanted target—the elusive Macqueen’s Bustard. Spirits remained high as we scanned the steppe with hope, but once again, the bird kept to its mysterious ways and



Yellow-eyed Pigeons are specialists of Central Asia’s Desert Poplar forests, rare and localized.



Saxaul Sparrow are typically found in around Saxaul bushes in the arid zones south of Lake Balkhash, blending perfectly into their dry, desert surroundings.

avoided detection. While the bustard continued to elude us, we did enjoy excellent views of singing **Calandra Larks**, their rich, bubbling songs rolling across the dry plains. **Brown-necked Ravens** were again a constant presence, their harsh calls echoing through the still morning air.

Back at camp, a bit of excitement came from the ground rather than the skies. Slithering between the yurts, a sleek **Steppe Ribbon Racer** was on the hunt, stealthily targeting a group of **Steppe Agamas** basking in the early sun. It was a remarkable interaction to witness—another reminder of the desert’s raw and surprising nature.

Later in the morning, we revisited a set of desert wells, always a reliable magnet for thirsty birds. Sure enough, another pair of **Pallas’s Sandgrouse** arrived to drink, their presence now familiar yet still thrilling. At a distance, a pair of **Demoiselle Cranes** moved gracefully across the shimmering heat haze—distant, but just enough to count.

A varied cast of birds accompanied us through our last hours in the desert: a ghostlike **Montagu’s Harrier** gliding low over the scrub, a striking male **Red-backed Shrike** perched in the open, and two skulking species giving brief but satisfying views—**Blyth’s Reed Warbler** and **Eastern Nightingale**. **Pied Wheatears** hopped across the rocks, the males in their classic black-and-white suits, rounding out a satisfying list for the morning. By early afternoon, we returned to Almaty, where cold drinks and a refreshing shower were very welcome after the days of



Steppe Agamas look like prehistoric miniature dragons when seen up close.

heat and dust. Tomorrow, we trade desert for steppe once more as we head north to Astana—new landscapes await, and with them, a whole new suite of birds.

May 25 | Astana & Korgalzhyn NP

We enjoyed a relaxed start to the day, savoring breakfast before transferring to the airport for our smooth and punctual Air Astana flight north to the capital, Astana. The flight offered fine views of Kazakhstan’s vast landscapes, and within a few hours, we had traded desert and yurts for endless steppe and wetlands.

Upon arrival, we didn’t linger in the city. Instead, we immediately headed west along the main road toward the village of Korgalzhyn—our gateway to one of Central Asia’s most celebrated birding areas. As we left the capital behind, the avian shift was immediate. One of the very first new additions was a charismatic **Booted Warbler**, perched up and calling loudly from a roadside thicket. Its song, a rapid and scratchy jumble of high-pitched notes, rang out boldly across the open steppe—a classic sound of the Kazakh summer.

Hooded Crows began to appear in good numbers, replacing the Carrion Crows from earlier in the trip, and a surprise came in the form of a **Eurasian Penduline Tit** of the ‘caspius’ subspecies. This eastern race differs from the nominate by its paler plumage and more warm brown crown—a subtle but pleasing ID challenge. Meanwhile, **Bluethroats** sang from



Booted Warblers were recently Split from Sykes’s Warblers, and when you study their features, it is easy to see why.

nearly every patch of reeds and bush, their fluty whistles and mimicry weaving through the air.

By late afternoon we arrived in the village of Korgalzhyn and wasted no time, heading straight for the first cluster of lakes in the national park. Korgalzhyn is a sprawling mosaic of shallow saline lakes, marshes, and steppe—an internationally important wetland complex and a magnet for breeding and migrating waterbirds.

Our first stop delivered a real spectacle: a large, noisy colony of **Pallas's Gulls**, with around 200 pairs in full breeding activity. Their powerful, deep chested bodies, black hoods, and menacing bills made them an unforgettable sight. Nearby, **Steppe Gulls**—an intriguing taxon within the Lesser Black-backed Gull complex—added another layer of interest with their paler mantles.

New waterfowl included flocks of **Eurasian Wigeon**, elegant **Greater Flamingos** shimmering pink on the water's surface, and lines of **Graylag Geese** flying overhead. A **Eurasian Oystercatcher** was a welcome addition, standing boldly on a mudflat, while **Common Ringed Plovers** scurried along the shoreline. Among them were smart **Ruddy Turnstones**, their harlequin-patterned plumage catching the evening light.

But it was the sheer variety and density of waders that truly amazed. Dozens of **Ruff** in elaborate breeding dress, **Curlew Sandpipers** with glowing rusty underparts, **Dunlin** and **Little Stints** feeding feverishly alongside the striking **Terek**



This 'caspius' Eurasian Penduline-Tit was a delightful surprise just outside of Astana – what a fantastic little bird!



We enjoyed exceptional photo opportunities with Black-winged Pratincoles, as they posed at close range when feeding in the steppe.

Sandpiper with its upturned bill. Thousands of **Red-necked Phalaropes** spun tirelessly on the lake surface—some of them so close we could see their red neck patches glowing against their silvery backs. It was central Kazakhstan’s wader migration at its most dazzling, a true avian feast.

And then came the highlight of Central Asia—or at least in the opinion of your truly. The spectacular **Black Lark**. These striking jet-black birds filled the steppe with their buzzing, mechanical display songs as they rose high into the sky, fluttering and hovering before diving back to the ground in bursts of aerial drama. Common throughout the Korgalzhyn region, their presence never fails to impress. **White-winged Larks** were also seen, their bold wing patterns flashing as they took flight—a rare and highly sought-after species for many.

Just before reaching our cozy lodge, we encountered a large and unusually confiding group of **Black-winged Pratincoles**. Normally a bit hit-and-miss, this year they were abundant and showed superbly well. We also came across a flock of the ‘beema’ race of **Western Yellow Wagtail**—each one bright and crisp, adding yet more color to our already impressive afternoon tally.

It was a magnificent welcome to Korgalzhyn, and with conditions looking ideal, we were eager to see what more these wetlands would reveal in the coming days.



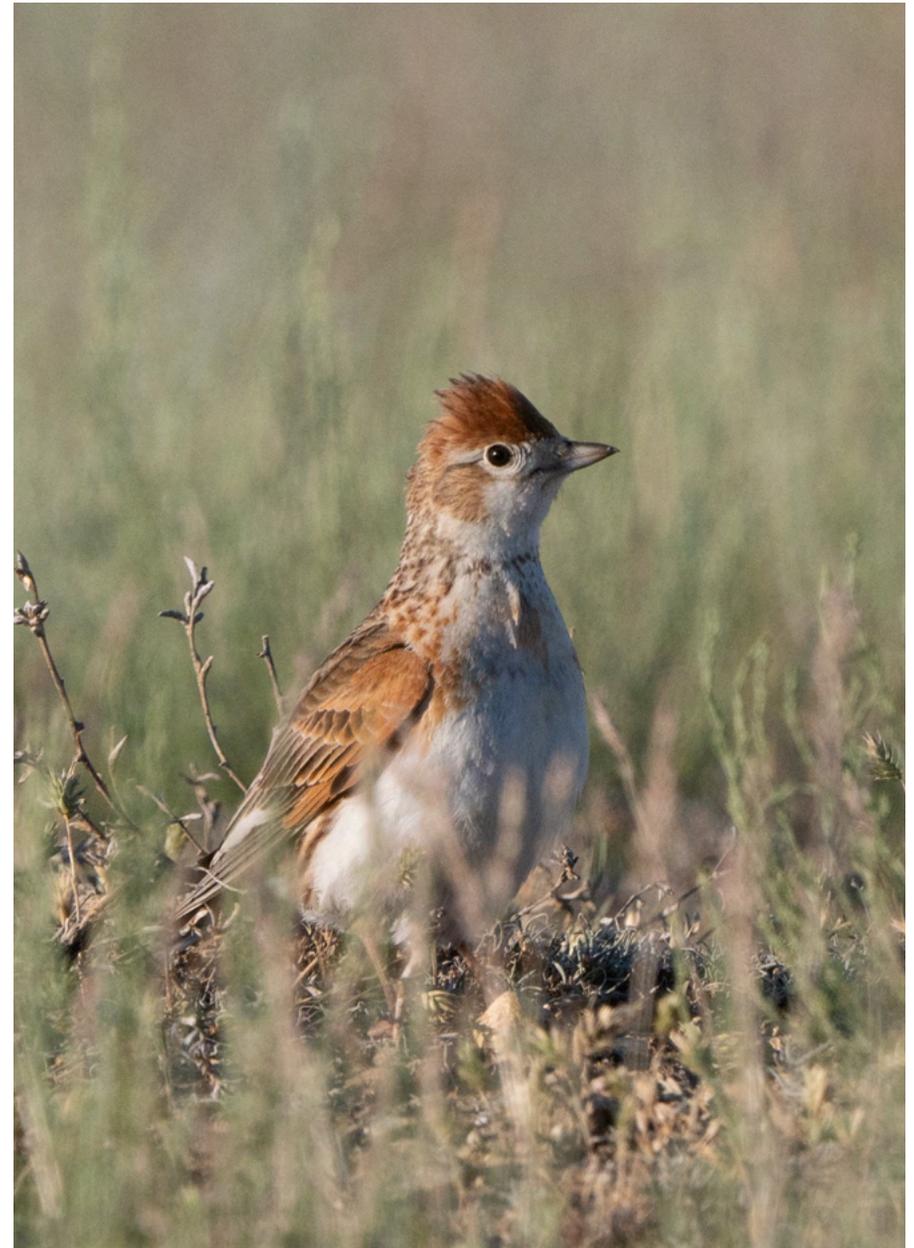
A Black Lark in full display flight above the steppe – a dramatic aerial performance as it hovered above the vast grasslands.

May 26 | Korgalzhyn NP

We began our full day in Korgalzhyn with a very early morning walk, taking advantage of the still air and golden light. The reeds were alive with birdsong, and before breakfast we had already tallied some excellent species. A booming **Great Bittern** echoed from the marsh, and nearby a **Great Reed Warbler** belted out its powerful, rhythmic song from the reed tops. **Bearded Reedlings** flitted through the lower reed layers, their tinkling calls betraying their presence. A majestic **Dalmatian Pelican** glided across the water, offering close views, and the local **Pallid Merlin**—one of Korgalzhyn's more unusual residents—put on a brief but welcome show as it darted low across the steppe.

After breakfast, we returned to the **Pallas's Gull** lake, which had already become a favorite for many in the group. The gull colony was just as active as the day before, and a new set of waders awaited us. Our first **Whimbrels** of the trip passed overhead, calling their distinctive, flute-like whistles. **Marsh Sandpipers** foraged close by, their delicate build and needle-fine bills making them one of the most elegant of all the waders. A surprise came in the form of our first **Wood Sandpiper** of the trip—unusual this late in the tour, as they are typically seen on multiple days.

Gull-billed Terns hunted with style, hawking insects above the shallows, while powerful **Caspian Terns** cut through the air with their deep wingbeats and hefty red bills. A highlight for many was the sheer number of **White-winged Terns** in full breeding plumage, their black underparts and snowy wings



The White-winged Lark is another Melanocorypha specialty of Kazakhstan – rare, striking and unmistakable.

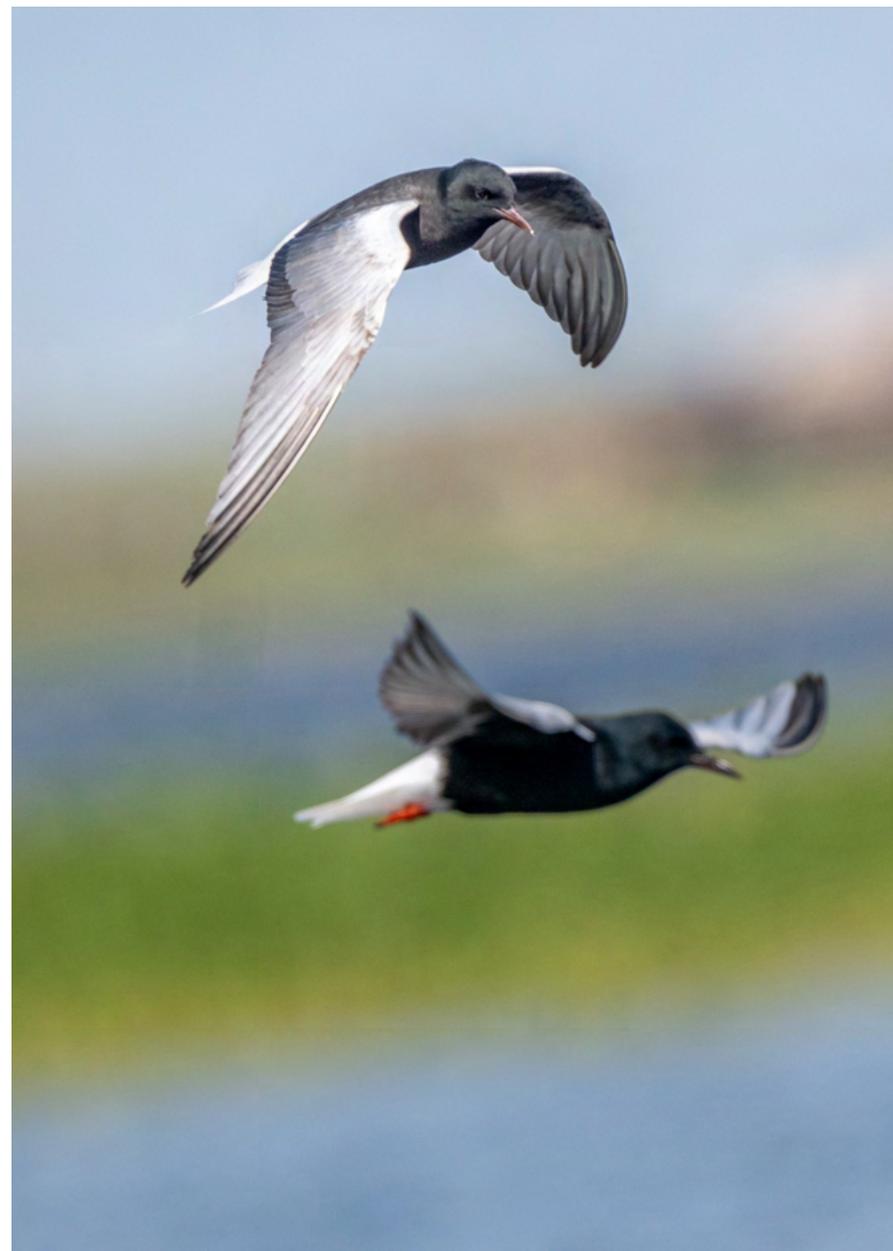
gleaming as they hovered and dipped—an irresistible subject for our photographers. Among them, a few **Whiskered Terns** offered a nice comparison, their softer greys and gentle flight style standing out amidst the chaos.

Out on the fringes of the lake, **Red-necked Grebes** dove repeatedly, working the reed edges with quiet determination. As we ventured further into the wide feather-grass steppes, a graceful pair of **Demoiselle Cranes** appeared in the distance, walking slowly across the open landscape—another quintessential species of the Kazakh plains.

Our day wasn't only about birds. Among the burrows scattered across the steppe, we spotted a large **Bobac Marmot**—a real heavyweight among rodents. These animals are typically wary and quick to vanish, but today we struck gold, enjoying superb prolonged views as one individual basked and preened on its mound.

Later in the afternoon, we ventured to a region known for its population of the iconic **Saiga Antelope**. These otherworldly mammals, with their oversized, trunk-like noses and ancient lineage, are always a thrill to find. Numbers were low, but we managed several good scope views of small groups grazing cautiously in the distance—a rare and unforgettable sight of this critically endangered species.

With the sun setting across the vast horizon and a warm breeze still rolling over the steppe, we reflected on a day rich in experiences. From elegant waders and steppe cranes to .



The region is dotted with lakes teeming with activity, where flocks of playful White-winged Terns dance over the water.



We had exceptionally good views of this Bobak Marmot – normally shy and elusive, but this individual gave us a rare, relaxed encounter right out in the open!

prehistoric antelopes and chubby marmots, this was Korgalzhyn at its finest—a true spectacle of Central Asian nature and one of the greatest wader migration hotspots on Earth.

May 27 | Return to Astana

On our final morning, we began the journey back to Astana, but not without one last stop at the lake that had brought us so many highlights over the past few days. The **Pallas's Gull** colony remained as lively as ever, but this time we picked out something new—a pair of elegant **Slender-billed Gulls**. With their long, narrow bills and pale heads, they stood out beautifully among the larger gulls, a subtle but satisfying addition to our list. On the drive toward the lake, we also had excellent views of **Steppe Twite**, perched and feeding close to the roadside—a typically tricky species showing very well.

As we made our way across the endless feather-steppe, we were once again treated to one of the signature spectacles of the Central Kazakh plains: **Pallid Harriers**. Over the course of the morning drive, we tallied an astonishing 60 individuals, including several immaculate adult males gliding low over the grasslands. Their numbers this year were a real testament to good small mammal availability, further confirmed by the presence of several Short-eared Owls also quartering the fields.

New additions continued to appear, with a singing **Sedge Warbler** skulking in the reeds and a striking **Black-tailed Godwit** feeding along the marshy fringes. One of the best



Near our hotel, this Pallid Merlin treated us to daily shows – darting low over the fields with incredible speed and precision.

raptors of the day came in the form of a beautifully perched **Red-footed Falcon**. This handsome male offered excellent scope views—its blue-grey plumage and reddish trousers glowing in the soft morning light. And then came the biggest surprise: an adult **Greater Spotted Eagle** calmly perched on a roadside post, offering prolonged and unobstructed views of this impressive and rather scarce bird. It was a fittingly grand finale to our days of birding on the open steppe.

Back in Astana, we gathered for one last celebratory meal in a cozy Uzbek restaurant, sharing laughter, memories, and highlights over plates of manty and delicious tea.

May 28 | Return to home

Airport transfers were arranged smoothly, and with warm farewells shared, we said our goodbyes before boarding our flights home—each of us carrying unforgettable memories of the vast steppes, dazzling birdlife, and the camaraderie that made this journey so special.



Whooper Swans are common breeding species on the lakes of Korgalzhyn, adding to the magic of this vast wetland landscape.

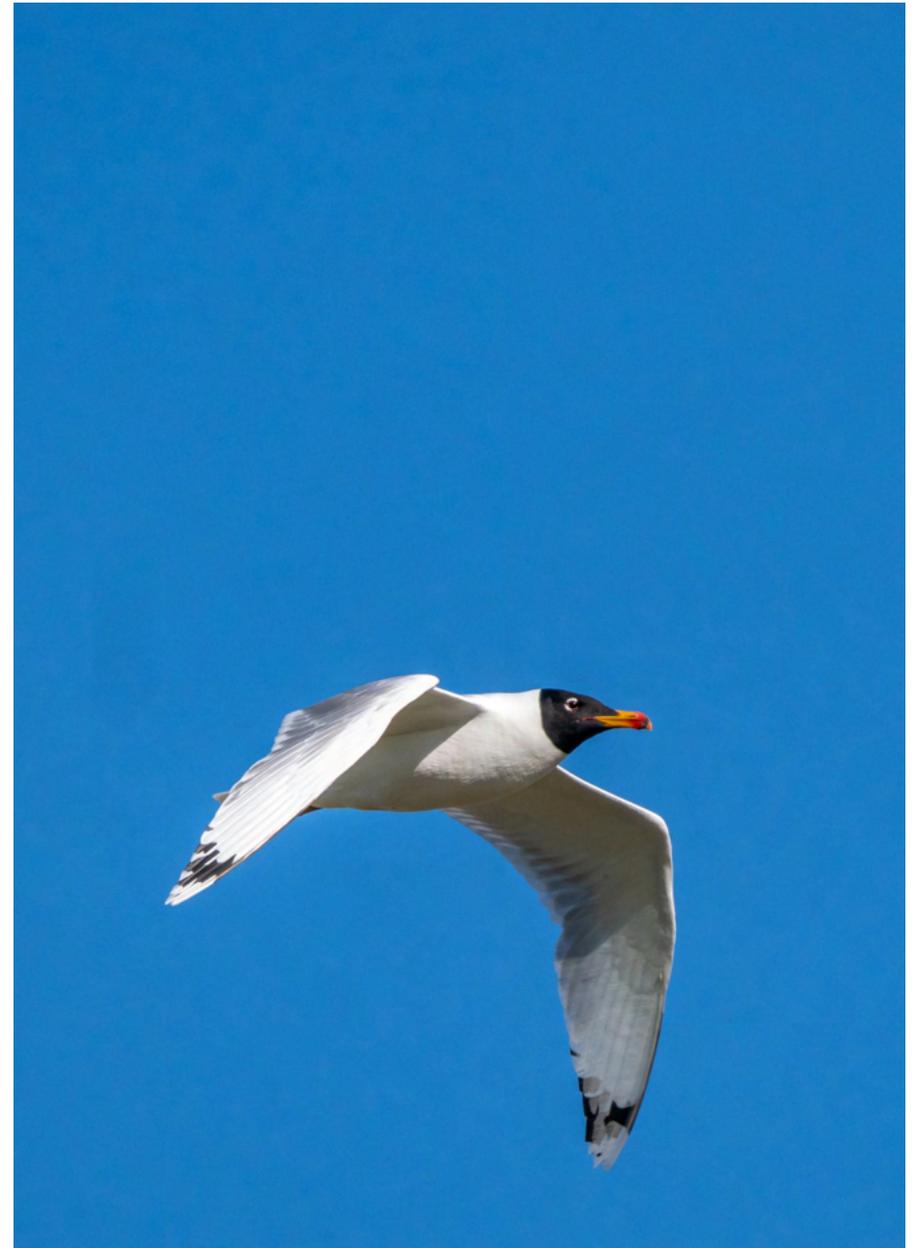
Ending note

I'd like to sincerely thank all participants for joining me on this fantastic journey across the wild heart of Central Asia. Your good spirits, curiosity, and humor made it an absolute pleasure to guide. We had a well-balanced group with diverse interests—from birds and photography to landscapes and culture—and it all blended together wonderfully.

Once again, thank you for being part of this adventure. I hope to see you again soon on another Rubythroat tour. This journey reaffirms what we've known for years: *Central Asia remains one of the most rewarding and best-value birding destinations on the planet.*

Our 2026 departure is confirmed, running from 24 May in Almaty to 6 June in Astana, Kazakhstan. For full details, please visit our website or reach out directly to Machiel Valkenburg at ceo@rubythroat.team. We look forward to welcoming you on this unforgettable journey through the heart of Central Asia.

<https://rubythroatbirdingtours.com/birding-kazakhstan/>



Pallas's Gull is arguably one of the most striking gulls of the world – the bold and beautiful never fails to impress!



Vast, scenic landscapes stretch in every direction – and ever-present backdrop that defines the wild beauty of this remarkable region.

Bird list

The list includes everything that was seen by at least one of the group, including the guides. Taxonomy follows: Clements, J. F., P. C. Rasmussen, T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, T. A. Fredericks, J. A. Gerbracht, D. Lepage, A. Spencer, S. M. Billerman, B. L. Sullivan, M. Smith, and C. L. Wood. 2024. The eBird/Clements checklist of Birds of the World: v2024. Downloaded from [Birds Cornell Education](https://birds.cornell.edu/)

COMMON NAME

Ducks, Geese & Waterfowl

Graylag Goose
Whooper Swan
Ruddy Shelduck
Common Shelduck
Garganey
Northern Shoveler
Gadwall
Eurasian Wigeon
Mallard
Northern Pintail
Red-crested Pochard
Common Pochard
Ferruginous Duck
White-headed Duck

SCIENTIFIC NAME

Anatidae

Anser anser
Cygnus cygnus
Tadorna ferruginea
Tadorna tadorna
Spatula querquedula
Spatula clypeata
Mareca strepera
Mareca penelope
Anas platyrhynchos
Anas acuta
Netta rufina
Aythya ferina
Aythya nyroca
Oxyura leucocephala

Pheasants, Grouse & Allies

Ring-necked Pheasant
Himalayan Snowcock
Common Quail
Chukar

Phasianidae

Phasianus colchicus
Tetraogallus himalayensis
Coturnix coturnix
Alectoris chukar

Heard only

Flamingos

Greater Flamingo

Phoenicopteridae

Phoenicopterus roseus

Grebes

Podicipedidae



Little Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Great Crested Grebe
Eared (Black-necked) Grebe

Pigeons & Doves

Rock Pigeon (I)
Yellow-eyed Pigeon
Common Wood-Pigeon
European Turtle-Dove
Oriental Turtle-Dove
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Laughing Dove

Sandgrouse

Pallas's Sandgrouse
Black-bellied Sandgrouse

Cuckoos

Common (Eurasian) Cuckoo

Swifts

Common Swift

Rails, Gallinules & Coots

Corn Crake
Eurasian Moorhen
Eurasian Coot

Cranes

Demoiselle Crane
Common Crane

Stilts & Avocets

Black-winged Stilt

Tachybaptus ruficollis
Podiceps grisegena
Podiceps cristatus
Podiceps nigricollis

Columbidae

Columba livia
Columba eversmanni
Columba palumbus
Streptopelia turtur
Streptopelia orientalis
Streptopelia decaocto
Streptopelia senegalensis

Pteroclididae

Syrrhaptes paradoxus
Pterocles orientalis

Cuculidae

Cuculus canorus

Apodidae

Apus apus

Rallidae

Crex crex
Gallinula chloropus
Fulica atra

Gruidae

Anthropoides virgo
Grus grus

Recurvirostridae

Himantopus himantopus



Pied Avocet

Ibisbill

Ibisbill

Oystercatchers

Eurasian Oystercatcher

Plovers & Lapwings

Black-bellied (Gray) Plover

Northern Lapwing

Greater Sand-Plover

Caspian Plover

Common Ringed Plover

Little Ringed Plover

Sandpipers & Allies

Whimbrel

Black-tailed Godwit

Ruddy Turnstone

Ruff

Curlew Sandpiper

Temminck's Stint

Dunlin

Little Stint

Terek Sandpiper

Red-necked Phalarope

Green Sandpiper

Spotted Redshank

Marsh Sandpiper

Wood Sandpiper

Common Redshank

Pratincoles & Coursers

Black-winged Pratincole

Recurvirostra avosetta

Ibidorhynchidae

Ibidorhyncha struthersii

Haematopodidae

Haematopus ostralegus

Charadriidae

Pluvialis squatarola

Vanellus vanellus

Charadrius leschenaultii

Charadrius asiaticus

Charadrius hiaticula

Charadrius dubius

Scolopacidae

Numenius phaeopus

Limosa limosa

Arenaria interpres

Calidris pugnax

Calidris ferruginea

Calidris temminckii

Calidris alpina

Calidris minuta

Xenus cinereus

Phalaropus lobatus

Tringa ochropus

Tringa erythropus

Tringa stagnatilis

Tringa glareola

Tringa totanus

Glareolidae

Glareola nordmanni



Gulls, Terns & Skimmers

Slender-billed Gull
 Black-headed Gull
 Pallas's (Great Black-headed) Gull
 Caspian Gull
 Common Gull

Lesser Black-backed Gull
 (Steppe Gull)

Gull-billed Tern
 Caspian Tern
 Black Tern
 White-winged Tern
 Whiskered Tern
 Common Tern

Storks

Black Stork

Cormorants & Shags

Great Cormorant

Pelicans

Great White Pelican
 Dalmatian Pelican

Herons, Egrets & Bitterns

Great Bittern
 Gray Heron
 Great Egret
 Little Egret

Ibises & Spoonbills

Glossy Ibis

Laridae

Chroicocephalus genei
Chroicocephalus ridibundus
Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus
Larus cachinnans
Larus canus

Larus fuscus
L. fuscus barabensis

Gelochelidon nilotica
Hydroprogne caspia
Chlidonias niger
Chlidonias leucopterus
Chlidonias hybrida
Sterna hirundo

Ciconiidae

Ciconia nigra

Phalacrocoracidae

Phalacrocorax carbo

Pelecanidae

Pelecanus onocrotalus
Pelecanus crispus

Ardeidae

Botaurus stellaris
Ardea cinerea
Ardea alba
Egretta garzetta

Threskiornithidae

Plegadis falcinellus



Hawks, Eagles & Kites

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier)
Himalayan Griffon
Booted Eagle
Steppe Eagle
Golden Eagle
Greater Spotted Eagle
Eurasian Marsh-Harrier
Pallid Harrier
Montagu's Harrier
Eurasian Sparrowhawk
Black Kite
White-tailed Eagle
Long-legged Buzzard
Upland Buzzard

Owls

Eurasian Scops-Owl
Little Owl
Long-eared Owl
Short-eared Owl

Hoopoes

Eurasian Hoopoe

Bee-eaters

European Bee-eater

Rollers

European Roller

Woodpeckers

White-winged Woodpecker

Accipitridae

Gypaetus barbatus
Gyps himalayensis
Hieraaetus pennatus
Aquila nipalensis
Aquila chrysaetos
Clanga clanga
Circus aeruginosus
Circus macrourus
Circus pygargus
Accipiter nisus
Milvus migrans
Haliaeetus albicilla
Buteo rufinus
Buteo hemilasius

Strigidae

Otus scops
Athene noctua
Asio otus
Asio flammeus

Upupidae

Upupa epops

Meropidae

Merops apiaster

Coraciidae

Coracias garrulus

Picidae

Dendrocopos leucopterus

Falconidae

Leader only



Falcons & Caracaras

Lesser Kestrel
Eurasian Kestrel
Red-footed Falcon
Merlin
Eurasian Hobby

Falco naumanni
Falco tinnunculus
Falco vespertinus
Falco columbarius
Falco subbuteo

Old World Orioles

Eurasian Golden Oriole
Indian Golden Oriole

Oriolidae

Oriolus oriolus
Oriolus kundoo

Shrikes

Red-backed Shrike
Red-tailed Shrike
Long-tailed Shrike
Great Gray Shrike
Lesser Gray Shrike

Laniidae

Lanius collurio
Lanius phoenicuroides
Lanius schach
Lanius excubitor
Lanius minor

Crows, Jays & Magpies

Eurasian Magpie
Red-billed Chough
Yellow-billed (Alpine) Chough
Eurasian Jackdaw
Rook
Carrion Crow
Hooded Crow
Brown-necked Raven
Common Raven

Corvidae

Pica pica
Pyrrhonorax pyrrhonorax
Pyrrhonorax graculus
Corvus monedula
Corvus frugilegus
Corvus corone
Corvus cornix
Corvus ruficollis
Corvus corax

Tits, Chickadees & Titmice

Coal Tit
Willow Tit
Azure Tit
Great Tit
(Turkestan Tit)

Paridae

Periparus ater
Poecile montanus
Cyanistes cyanus
Parus major
P. major bokharensis



Penduline-Tits

White-crowned Penduline-Tit
Eurasian Penduline Tit

Larks

Horned (Shore) Lark
Greater Short-toed Lark
Bimaculated Lark
Calandra Lark
Black Lark
Turkestan Short-toed Lark
White-winged Lark
Eurasian Skylark
Crested Lark

Bearded Reedling

Bearded Reedling (Tit)

Reed Warblers & Allies

Booted Warbler
Sykes's Warbler
Sedge Warbler
Blyth's Reed Warbler
Eurasian Reed Warbler
Great Reed Warbler

Grassbirds & Allies

Savi's Warbler
Common Grasshopper Warbler

Martins & Swallows

Bank Swallow (Sand Martin)
Pale Sand Martin
Eurasian Crag-Martin

Remizidae

Remiz coronatus
Remiz pendulinus

Alaudidae

Eremophila alpestris
Calandrella brachydactyla
Melanocorypha bimaculata
Melanocorypha calandra
Melanocorypha yeltoniensis
Alaudala heinei
Alauda leucoptera
Alauda arvensis
Galerida cristata

Panuridae

Panurus biarmicus

Acrocephalidae

Iduna caligata
Iduna rama
Acrocephalus schoenobaenus
Acrocephalus dumetorum
Acrocephalus scirpaceus
Acrocephalus arundinaceus

Locustellidae

Locustella luscinioides
Locustella naevia

Hirundinidae

Riparia riparia
Riparia diluta
Ptyonoprogne rupestris

Leader only



Barn Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
Common House-Martin

Leaf Warblers

Hume's Warbler
Sulphur-bellied Warbler
Common Chiffchaff
Greenish Warbler

Bush Warblers & Allies

Cetti's Warbler

Long-tailed Tits

White-browed Tit-Warbler

Sylviid Warblers, Parrotbills & Allies **Sylviidae**

Lesser Whitethroat
Asian Desert Warbler
Greater Whitethroat

Kinglets

Goldcrest

Wrens

Eurasian Wren

Dippers

White-throated Dipper

Starlings

European Starling
Rosy Starling
Common Myna

Hirundo rustica
Cecropis daurica
Delichon urbicum

Phylloscopidae

Phylloscopus humei
Phylloscopus griseolus
Phylloscopus collybita
Phylloscopus trochiloides

Scotocercidae

Cettia cetti

Aegithalidae

Leptopoeile sophiae

Carruca curruca
Carruca nana
Carruca communis

Regulidae

Regulus regulus

Troglodytidae

Troglodytes troglodytes

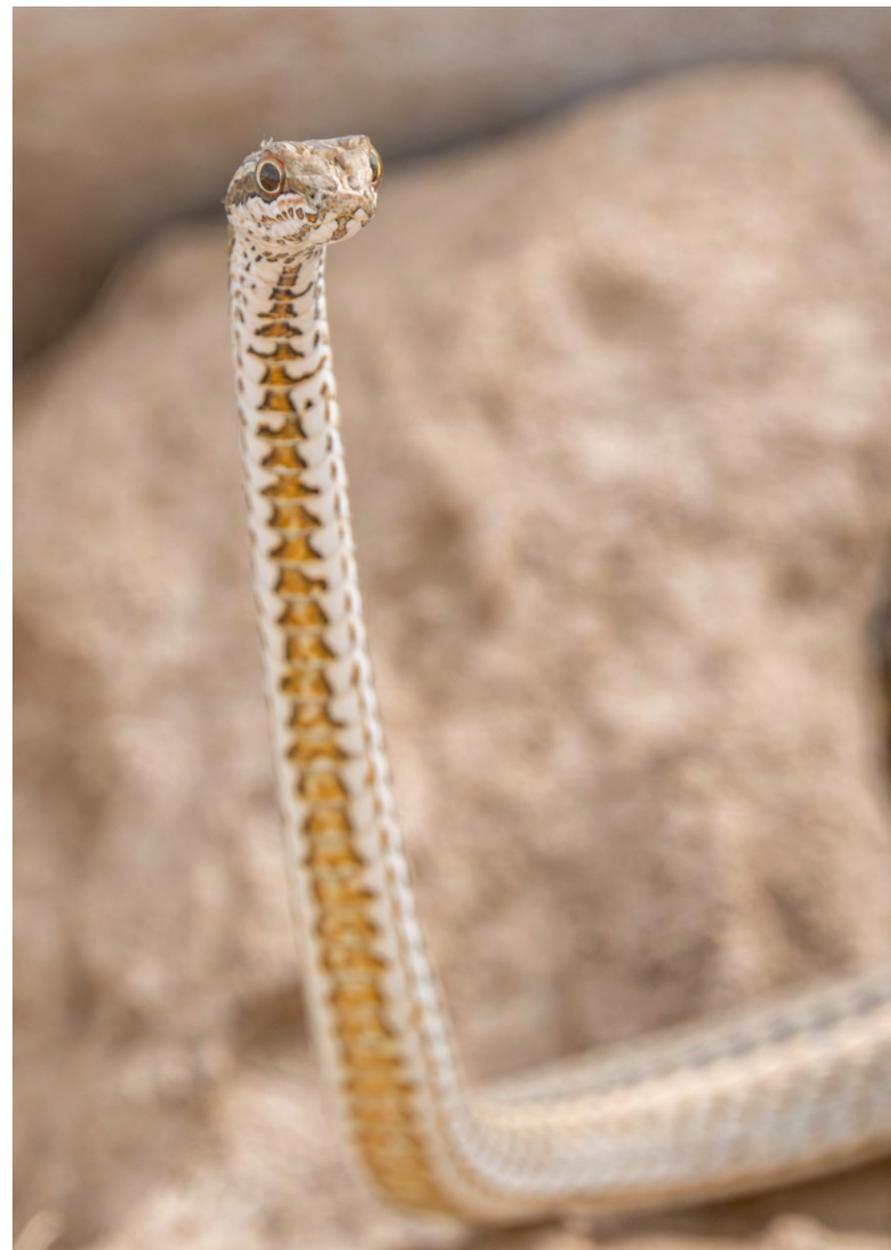
Heard only

Cinclidae

Cinclus cinclus

Sturnidae

Sturnus vulgaris
Pastor roseus
Acridotheres tristis



Thrushes & Allies

Mistle Thrush
Eurasian Blackbird

Old World Flycatchers

Spotted Flycatcher
Common Nightingale
Bluethroat
Blue Whistling-Thrush
Himalayan Rubythroat
Rufous-backed Redstart
Blue-capped Redstart
White-winged Redstart
Black Redstart
Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush
Blue Rock-Thrush
Siberian Stonechat
Northern Wheatear
Isabelline Wheatear
Desert Wheatear
Pied Wheatear

Accentors

Altai Accentor
Brown Accentor
Black-throated Accentor

Old World Sparrows

Saxaul Sparrow
House Sparrow
Spanish Sparrow
Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Wagtails & Pipits

Gray Wagtail

Turdidae

Turdus viscivorus
Turdus merula

Muscicapidae

Muscicapa striata
Luscinia megarhynchos
Luscinia svecica
Myophonus caeruleus
Calliope pectoralis
Phoenicurus erythronotus
Phoenicurus coeruleocephala
Phoenicurus erythrogastrus
Phoenicurus ochruros
Monticola saxatilis
Monticola solitarius
Saxicola maura
Oenanthe oenanthe
Oenanthe isabellina
Oenanthe deserti
Oenanthe pleschanka

Prunellidae

Prunella himalayana
Prunella fulvescens
Prunella atrogularis

Passeridae

Passer ammodendri
Passer domesticus
Passer hispaniolensis
Passer montanus

Motacillidae

Motacilla cinerea



Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
White Wagtail (Masked)	<i>Motacilla alba personata</i>
White Wagtail (White-faced)	<i>Motacilla alba dukhunensis</i>
Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>

Finches, Euphonias & Allies

White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>
Great Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilla</i>
Spotted Great Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi</i>
Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>
Plain Mountain Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>
Desert Finch	<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Twite	<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>
Eurasian Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
Fire-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>

Old World Buntings

Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>
Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
White-capped Bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>
Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>
Gray-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>

Fringillidae

<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>
<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>
<i>Carpodacus rubicilla</i>
<i>Carpodacus rubicilla severtzovi</i>
<i>Bucanetes mongolicus</i>
<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>
<i>Rhodospiza obsoleta</i>
<i>Chloris chloris</i>
<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
<i>Linaria flavirostris</i>
<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>
<i>Serinus pusillus</i>

Emberizidae

<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>
<i>Emberiza calandra</i>
<i>Emberiza cia</i>
<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>
<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>
<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>



Other Wildlife

Dogs

Corsac Fox
Golden Jackal

Cattle, Sheep & Antelopes

Siberian Ibex
Saiga Antelope
Turkestan Gazelle

Squirrels

Gray Marmot
Bobak Marmot
Eurasian Red Squirrel
Yellow Ground Squirrel
Relict ground squirrel
Muskrat (I)

Hedgehogs

Long-eared Hedgehog

Gerbils

Syrian Jird (Red-tailed Gerbil)
Great gerbil

Jerboas

Five-toed Pygmy Jerboa

Pikas

Turkestan Red Pika

Rabbits & Hares

European Hare

Canidae

Vulpes corsac
Canis aureus

Bovidae

Capra sibirica
Saiga tatarica
Gazella subgutturosa

Sciuridae

Marmota baibacina
Marmota bobak
Sciurus vulgaris
Spermophilus fulvus
Spermophilus relictus
Ondatra zibethicus

Erinaceidae

Hemiechinus auritus

Gerbillidae

Meriones libycus
Rhombomys opimus

Dipodidae

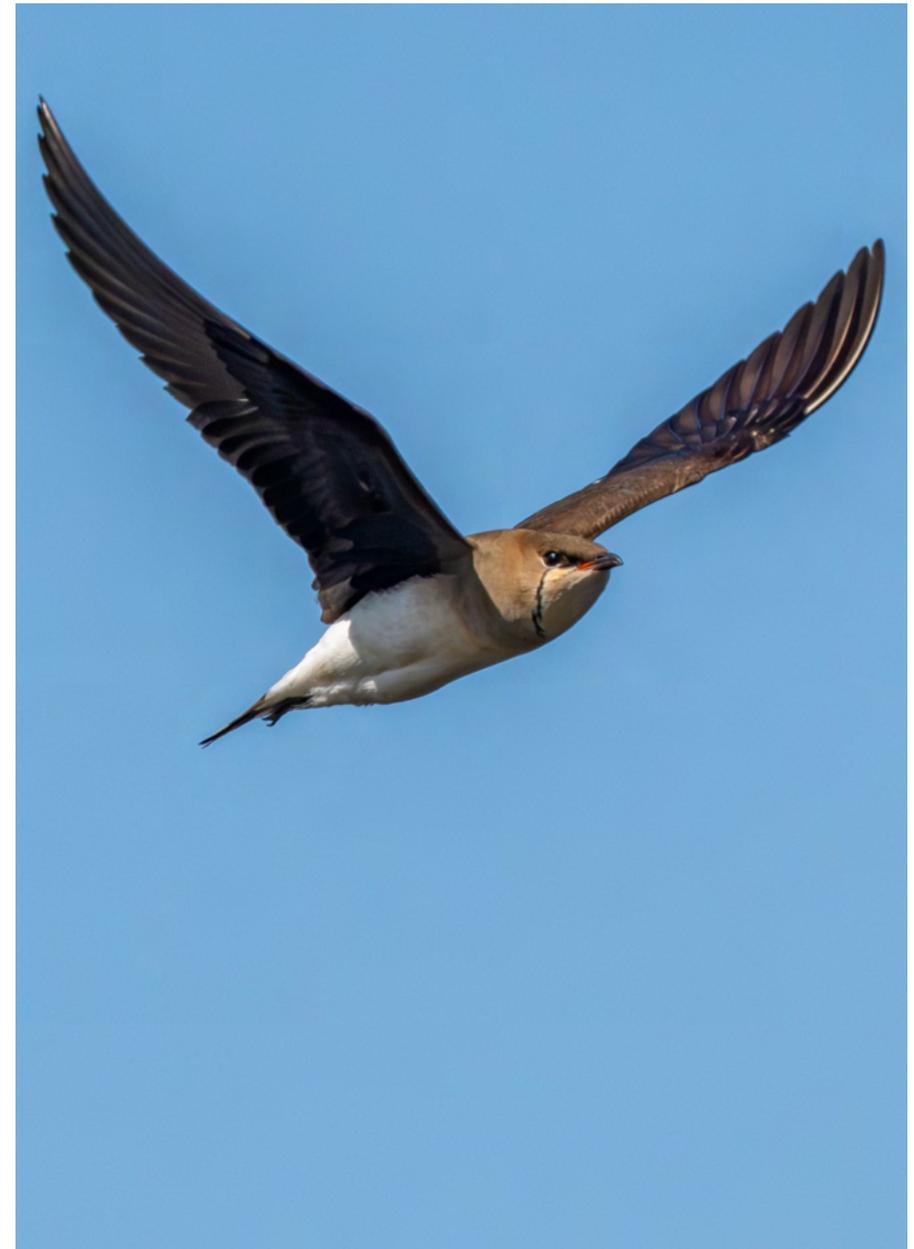
Cardiocranius paradoxus

Ochotonidae

Ochotona rutila

Leporidae

Lepus europeus



Tortoises

Horsfield's Tortoise

Typical Snakes

Dwarf Sand Boa

Amphibians

Marsh Frog

Geckos

Common Wonder Gecko

Agamas

Steppe Agama

Central Asian Toed-headed Agama

Sunwatcher Toad-headed Lizard

Wall & Sand Lizards

Sand Lizard p.

Steppe Ribbon Racer

Captive/Re-introduced

Goitred Gazelle

Dromedary Camel

Testudinidae

Testudo horsfieldi

Colubridae

Eryx miliaris

Amphibia

Pelophylax ridibundus

Gekkota

Teratoscincus scincus

Agamidae

Agama sanguinolenta

Phrynocephalus guttatus

Phrynocephalus helioscopus

Lacertidae

Lacerta strigata

Psamophis lineolatus

Gazella subgutturosa

Camelus dromedarius

