

# Kazakhstan

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Bjorn Anderson

A trip to find three target birds...



*White-winged Lark...*



*...Red-mantled Rosefinch...*



*...and Eversmann's Stock-Dove*

## General

This was the second leg of a combined trip to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the search of some key birds. For the Uzbek part of the trip, I have written a separate report. In 1983 I visited Kazakhstan, which was then part of the Soviet Union. At that time we could not go to the steppes and two target birds like White-winged Lark and Eversmann's Stock-Dove had still eluded me. In addition, I had still not managed to find Red-mantled Rosefinch and I was also interested in seeking out the rare Black-headed Penduline Tit. There were thus four good reasons to get back to this huge country!

The trip was thankfully organized by Andrey Kovalenko, one of the few local birders. He was sure that we would find all my targets within the space available, including also making an attempt to see the local subspecies of Pander's Ground-Jay. I was also interested in a number of interesting subspecies as well as some general good birding. Kazakhstan is certainly a very interesting place from a European and East Asian perspective. Many birds seem to meet here and various subspecies and hybrids occur and make it an excellent place to study taxonomic mysteries.

Most birding trips to Kazakhstan span over many more days than I had available, so I therefore concentrated on my target birds with everything else regarded as a bonus. We set off for one afternoon to the Tian Shan and from there we drove northwest towards Kanshengel and further on to Ili River and the Turanga forest eventually ending up at Karoy near Lake Balkash. From here we drove east and south back towards Almaty with a short stop east of Almaty. This took us almost five full days and we scored on all my possible targets except for the Penduline-Tit (see the reason later!). Most birding trips also include a detour to Astana (former Tselinograd) for Black Lark, but I cut that out of the itinerary solely for the reason of having seen one in Sweden.

## Highlights

Birding in Kazakhstan is a great pleasure and provides so many highlights. To me of course the success with the three target birds like Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Lark and Eversmann's Stock-Dove stand out. However, the myriads of migrants in the oasis on the steppe were especially memorable. Other good birds included singing Himalayan Accentor, a pair of Himalayan Snowcock, Guldenstadt's Redstarts, all the larks, a good flight show of Macqueen's Bustard, White-winged Woodpeckers, Turkestan Tits, Sykes's and Booted Warblers, "brown-headed" Penduline-Tit, flocks of Rosy Starlings, Saxaul Sparrows, the abundant Red-headed Bunting, etc, etc.

## Itinerary

3/5

The flight from Tashkent in Uzbekistan arrived on time and by 9.30 I was through the passport control. Andrey was supposed to meet me, but no birder-look-alike was to be found and I had no mobile number or any contacts with me. However, just as I was about to arrange for an information call, he showed up. We boarded the minivan and drove through town, only stopping for shopping food for the next five days. It was interesting to see how the shelves in the food shop had changed since my last visit 24 years ago. Now there were even groceries for sale, and all possible brands could be found. Having stocked up, we drove south out of town and up to Big Almaty Lake in the towering mountains of Tian Shan. After some hassle at some sort of gate, we were soon driving on a poor dirt road up through a valley that eventually took us to a dam and soon after an observatory. Here we started birding around noon and the first of the target birds, the Red-mantled Rosefinch was on the agenda. As soon as we got out of the car and started working the juniper scrub, a gale force wind with rain swept down from the surrounding crags. We took shelter under a spruce tree, but it did actually not take long for the weather to be birdable again. However, it took quite a while until we suddenly heard the distinctive call of the Rosefinch and shortly after we could admire a pair at close range as they fed in the junipers. Happy with the success, we cooked some lunch and while eating, the curlew-like calls of Himalayan Snowcock echoed through the valley. We found the pair in typical snowcock-fashion on one of the ridges and could watch them through the scope while they were feeding.



*The observatory at Big Almaty Lake*

After lunch we drove higher up the mountain to the pass at 3275 masl and here the wind was rather cold. We found some Guldenstadt's Redstarts and a super Lammergeier, but it took us a bit longer to find the hoped for Himalayan Accentor. When found, it however performed very nicely on the rocky slope. Having seen the target Rosefinch so easily, we decided to go for the next one already this evening, i.e. drive to the steppes northwest of Almaty. On the way down through the spruce forest we did a couple of stops and picked up an obliging Blue-capped Redstart. As dusk fell about 20.00 we drove on decent roads first west out of Almaty and then north towards Tamgaly and Kanshengel. By 00.15 we stopped at a small dry riverbed next to some cliff-faces and put camp for the night. Before going to bed we cooked some late dinner and enjoyed the full moon lighting up the surrounding steppe. It was a short night, but as always when camping, I was quickly fast asleep in my now more than 30 year old tent. The difference compared to the old camping days was that now I did the log on a portable computer instead.

#### 4/5

It got light at 5.30 and I was soon up and birding the dry riverbed. Plenty of interesting birds around and the steppe feeling was apparent: larks everywhere, Red-headed Buntings and Pied Wheatears singing away and lots of migrant warblers in the bushes. After some birding in this terrain, I walked back to the main road in the hope of finding my second target bird of the trip: White-winged Lark. This was a real key bird for me, and the main reason for going to Kazakhstan. I sorely missed one in Sweden a few years ago with only one hour, so now the time had come for the repair. However, in spite of an endless multitude of larks being present virtually everywhere, I failed to connect. I searched different types of grassland, but I was still empty-handed after a few of hours at 10.30 when the others caught up with me. The White-winged Lark numbers could vary quite a lot between the years and we decided to try another area some kilometers further north. After what seemed like endless of grass-scanning, I suddenly saw one fly next to the road and the car quickly came to a stop. I could then enjoy scope views and even photograph if before it decided to take off behind a hill. Andrey was convinced that we would find more birds, so I did not pursue this one. As it turned out, this was not a wise move as it was the only one to be found! However, one seen lark on the list is better than ten unseen on the steppe...

By noon we arrived at Kanshengel. It is basically a tiny oasis in the middle of the vast grassy steppe. Besides a gas station and a few shacks where food is possible to buy, it contains some highly interesting gardens. These were gorgeously crowded with migrants and we spent a couple of hours working all the passerines.



*Long-legged Buzzards were frequently seen on the road*

The rest of the afternoon and evening was spent birding on the steppe northwest of Kanshengel. It was hot and above 40 degrees even in the shade. We enjoyed more Demoiselle Cranes, breeding Greater Sand-Plovers, Pallid Harriers and more larks and migrants. We had a late lunch near a patch of about ten bushes. These bushes were just crawling with migrants, probably in excess of 200 birds including a Sulphur-bellied Warbler.

From here we continued even further to the northwest. Just as I found a male Macqueen's Bustard and was going to photograph it, a sand and rain storm blew up within seconds, a somewhat unfortunate coincident. Needless to say the Bustard was gone when the visibility cleared half an hour later. Anyway we drove around and eventually rediscovered it and had some amazing flight views as it circled us a number of times. We also found a female and a nearby nest was expected. The other looked for species, the Caspian Plover, was however nowhere to be seen.

In the evening we pitched our tents near a small patch of bushes and cooked some dinner.



*The flowering steppe near Kanshengel*

## 5/5

I was up at first light and birded the bushes right at the camp. The area was filled with freshly arrived migrants and I particularly enjoyed the variety of Isabelline Shrikes that were everywhere and spiced up with a pallidirostris Southern Grey Shrike, a Red-backed Shrike and two Lesser Grey Shrikes. After a while we walked to a nearby area and continued looking for Caspian Plovers. Apparently they occur in the special type of vegetation, which seems to be shared with Great Sand-Plovers. Some ten years ago in that area Caspian Plovers outnumbered GSP with a ratio of 20:1, but last year only one pair of CP was found and this year the ratio was 0:13. Hopefully the Caspian is better off in some other areas...

After breaking camp at 10.00 we continued to some more suitable areas, but with the same results. One male Macqueen's Bustard was seen, but eventually we decided to give up and instead go looking for my third target of the trip: Eversmann's Stock-Dove.

This meant that we returned to Kanshengel for refueling some diesel, beer and Twix. We also took advantage of the fresh water that was pumped up and the source of the oasis.



*The oasis at Kanshengel provided some opportunities to refuel for travelers through the desert*

From Kanshengel we drove due north and made some interesting stops at Topar lakes. These are lakes in the middle of the dry steppe, apparently fed by the not too distant Ili River. The lakes provided a whole series of new trip-birds like Black and White-winged Terns, Great and Little Bittern, ducks, Paddyfield and Cetti's Warbler and most interestingly, a strange-looking local form of "brown-headed" Penduline Tit.

Our target bird called for attention though, and we felt we had to leave the area and continue to Zhel'turanga. This target turned out to be the easiest, as I immediately found one and then a couple of birds perched on the power wires in the village. We studied this rare and threatened columbine for some time, before moving on to the nearby Turanga forest. The name comes from the species of tree that makes up this tiny park-like woodland. The trees are probably some 200 years old and there are probably only about 20 of these woods left. Additionally, these are the only places where Eversmann's Stock-Dove is known to breed, at least in Kazakhstan. I saw a couple of more Doves and also the other typical species of this site, namely Azure Tit, Turkestan Tit and White-winged Woodpecker. We stopped in this forest for a couple of hours and also had lunch in the shade of the trees.

By 17.40 we left and headed for a village called Karoy. This meant that we first had to cross Ili River and then drive for a long way west towards Lake Balkash. The road was ok and straight, albeit somewhat bumpy at places. The main reason for going to Karoy was to look for the local subspecies of Pander's Ground-Jay, a species I had seen a few days earlier on the Uzbek leg of the trip. The information on this very rare and localized subspecies is very limited and few people have actually seen it (Andrey has been birding 20+ years in Kazakhstan and never seen it). It occupies a range that spans some 20 by 50 km northeast of Karoy, not too far away from Lake Balkash. Whether it looks different from the Kyzul Kum Desert birds a long way to the west is still not clear to me. We targeted an area northeast of Karoy where it had been seen last year.

We only arrived at Karoy shortly after dark at 21.00 and eventually found our way to a small dirt track leading to the northeast out of the village. The sky was clear and filled with stars. At the PGJ site we put up our tents in the saxaul scrub about 5 km northeast of Karoy and quickly tried to escape all the mosquitos.

6/5

I woke up to a light rain smattering my tent. Birding is hard work and someone has to do it, so I went out and followed the dirt track through the saxaul forest. I especially concentrated on the sand dunes, which seemed to provide the right habitat for PGJ. Very few birds were active in the damp and cold conditions and by 9.00 I returned to camp and we cooked some breakfast. By the time we had packed up, the weather improved significantly and we drove along the track further northeast, at least 10 km northeast of Karoy. We passed some very likely areas, but in spite of putting in a lot of effort including playing recordings of the Kyzul Kum subspecies (which had attracted the attention of those birds at least), we failed to connect. By 16.00 we gave up, as we had a long drive towards Chilik ahead of us. Driving through Karoy proved to be a bit of a challenge. Karoy must surely be one of those places which the world forgot in the modern evolution. The “streets” were not even passable with a 2WD vehicle and criss-crossed the village that probably consisted of some 200+ “houses”. The count may contain a large degree of estimation, as it was rather difficult to classify what could be counted as a house. The average house looked more like an animal house in some form of deterioration. After some wrong turns in the muddy and filthy streets/garbage dumps, we finally reach the main road. Here we also found a shack that sold drinks and we increased their revenue. The shelves were to 10+ % occupied with a large range of different subspecies of vodka and the cashier used an abacus to count up our purchases. It then crossed my mind that new kids are still born and grown up in Karoy, to what future I have no clue. The only thing Karoy seems to have that is a unique competitive advantage is the Pander’s Ground-Jay. From Karoy we retraced our tracks to the east on the north side of Ili River, only making a short lunch stop in the desert. Well after dark we decided to break the journey and camp in some grassy rolling hills and continue early the morning after.



*This buddy was found to have spent the night under Andrey’s tent*

7/5

We did not break camp until 6.40 and drove for three hours to a place in the open country well to the east of Almaty, called Chilik. I was told the site would hold the seldom-seen pure Black-headed Penduline Tit. At the village of Teskensu, we sure found some Penduline Tits, but it was a matter of seconds until I realized that they were not real Black-headeds, but rather a mixture of White-crowned with some black blended in. As it turned out, Andrey had a list that quite wrongly (to put it mildly) stated that the English name of *Remiz coronotus* is Black-headed! We therefore obtained good looks at what was some black-headed form of White-crowned. Well, no one can win them all and we instead drove to a nearby reservoir and reed-beds called Kazatkom. Six Dalmatian Pelicans were the best bird seen.

At 14.00, after having lunch, we started the return drive to Almaty. We arrived at the airport at 16.00, which was well ahead of my 20.25 flight to Urumqi in China.

## Weather

The weather was varying to say the least. In Tian Shan it was rather cold and windy and a fleece jacket would have been handy (if I had just dug it out of my bag!). On the steppe it was mostly very warm or even hot in the daytime, although the mornings could be just slightly chilly. It rained on several occasions and then the temperature dropped significantly. A sleeping bag was definitely a necessity when camping.

## Logistics

I owe a big hand for Andrey Kovalenko who organized the trip and also had the opportunity to come along. We had a Mitsubishi 4WD minivan and brought all our camping gear with us including food for the five days. Only occasionally we stocked up of more noodles, water and beer along the way.

## Site descriptions

### Big Almaty Lake and observatory

This dam is situated only some 40-50 km south of Almaty and can easily be reached. The dirt road meanders up a valley and eventually comes to the big dam and a bit higher up at 2670 masl there is an observatory. The road continues to a pass at 3275 masl, where there are some run down shacks and a few buildings where people are actually living, or more accurately; spending their time. We found the Red-mantled Rosefinches in dense low junipers across a small valley on the back side of the observatory.

### Kanshengel

Kanshengel is a small settlement at the crossroads of roads going in four different directions. It is possible to refuel gas, water and food. We approached from the south and explored the steppes well to the south of Kanshengel where we also camped the first night. The grassy steppes south of Kanshengel is where White-winged Lark is numerous in some years and like this year less numerous. We also spent more than one day on the steppe northwest of Kanshengel in an area where Macqueen's Bustard occur. Oriental Plover is also in this area, but is perhaps out-competed by Greater Sand-Plovers. The gardens in Kanshengel itself are also well worth a look during migration as are actually all patches of bushes and trees. During the time of our visit, the bushes were stunningly alive with all sorts of migrating passerines. From this perspective, the area has a similarity to places like High Island in Texas, although the warblers are fortunately more challenging in Asia.



*The first camp-site well south of Kanshengel*

### Topar Lakes

Between Kanshengel and Zhel'turanga there are a multitude of small lakes and marshes along the road. Some of these supported an interesting cast of breeding and migrating birds and are certainly worth a better investigation than we had the time to spend. One of the key birds is the distinctive brown-headed *caspius* form of Eurasian Penduline-Tit.

### Zhel'turanga

Zhel'turanga is a small village north of Kanshengel towards Lake Balkash. For birders it is well-known due to the small patch of woodland. This wood consists of many hundred years old Turanga trees and is home to the rare and decreasing Eversmann's (alias Yellow-eyed alias Pale-backed) Stock-Dove. Furthermore it holds specialties such as White-winged Woodpecker, Turkestan Tit and Azure Tit. I saw all these almost within minutes after our midday arrival and neither should present any real problem. The wood itself is very small and easy to cover. The Doves are seen both in the wood itself, but also frequently on the telephone wires around the village.



*The park-like landscape of the Turanga wood*

### Karoy

The one and only thing Karoy will ever be remembered from is probably that it is the “gateway” to the Kazakhstan population of Pander's Ground-Jay. The bird only occurs in an area of 20x50 km and is apparently much more difficult to find than the western population. The way to find the core area is to try to drive through Karoy without getting stuck on any of the “streets”. In the northern end of the village there is a small dirt track leading northeast through the saxaul scrubland. About 5-10 km along this track is where Pander's was seen in 2006. We birded probably between 5-15 km along this trail and found good habbo, i.e. similar to Kyzyl Kum in Uzbekistan. Unfortunately we failed with connecting with this enigmatic bird on this site.

### Kazatkom and Chilik

We spent a few hours in the late morning around some wetlands called Kazatkom around Chilik a couple of hours drive east of Almaty. We drove around and found some interesting reed-beds and bush-lined ditches that held the Penduline Tis we were looking for.





*View of Tian Shan from the Chilik area*

## **Birds**

The subspecies are in most cases assigned based on literature rather than by morphological characters noted in the field.

Dalmatian Pelican, *Pelecanus crispus*

Six at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*

One at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea cinerea*

Three at Topar lakes.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba alba*

Two near Karoy and three at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

One near Turanga forest.

Little Bittern, *Ixobrychus minutus minutus*

One male seen and one heard simultaneously at Topar River crossing.



*Little Bittern*

Great Bittern, *Botaurus stellaris stellaris*

One heard at Topar River crossing.

Ruddy Shelduck, *Tadorna ferruginea*

Two at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, one pair at Topar lakes.

Common Shelduck, *Tadorna tadorna*

One flying over Karoy saxaul forest.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos platyrhynchos*

One pair at Topar lakes.

Garganey, *Anas querquedula*

Two males at Kanshengel, five at Topar lakes.

Northern Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*

One male at Kanshengel.

Red-crested Pochard, *Netta rufina*

Ten at Topar lakes, 80 near Karoy and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Common Pochard, *Aythya ferina*

One male at Topar lakes.

Ferruginous Pochard, *Aythya nyroca*

15-20 at Topar lakes.



*Ferruginous Pochard*

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*

One at Kanshengel, five between Kanshengel and Karoy, two between Karoy and Ili River crossing and one at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty). Only *lineatus* identified, which is the resident ssp, *migrans* only being a migrant.



*Black Kite of the form lineatus*

Lammergeier, *Gypaetus barbatus barbatus*

One adult showing off at the pass at the observatory above Almaty.



*Lammergeier*

Short-toed Eagle, *Circaetus gallicus*

One at Topar lakes.

Pallid Harrier, *Circus macrourus*

Two females at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel.

Montagu's Harrier, *Circus pygargus*

One pair at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Shikra, *Accipiter badius cenchroides*

Three around Kanshengel and five between Kanshengel at Karoy. Orange eye, as opposed to yellow on Eurasian Sparrowhawk.



*Shikra, note the orange eye compared to the yellow eye of A nisus*

Eurasian Sparrowhawk, *Accipiter nisus nisus/nisosimilis*

One at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel and one at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Eurasian Buzzard, *Buteo buteo vulpinus*

One at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Long-legged Buzzard, *Buteo rufinus rufinus*

About 15 around Kanshengel, two between Turanga forest and Karoy, five at Karoy saxaul forest and five between Karoy and Ili River crossing.



*Long-legged Buzzards were a common sight on the steppe*

Steppe Eagle, *Aquila nipalensis orientalis*  
One second year bird at Kanshengel.



*Steppe Eagle*

Golden Eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos daphanea*

One pair between Karoy and Ili River crossing.

Eurasian Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus*

Three at the observatory above Almaty, three around Kanshengel, ten between Kanshengel and Karoy, five between Karoy and Ili River crossing and several at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Merlin, *Falco columbarius pallidus*

One at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel, one at Karoy saxaul forest and five on the steppe on the way to Chilik.

Eurasian Hobby, *Falco subbuteo subbuteo*

One at Kanshengel, two between Turanga forest and Karoy and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Himalayan Snowcock, *Tetraogallus himalayensis sewerzowi*

Heard calling just above the observatory in mid afternoon and then we found the pair feeding on the ridge. Typical snowcock view, i.e. distant scope view.

Chukar, *Alectoris chukar ssp*

One heard at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel.

Common Quail, *Coturnix coturnix coturnix*

One heard at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel.

Ring-necked Pheasant, *Phasianus colchicus mongolicus*

One near Turanga forest and one heard between Turanga forest and Ili River crossing, three at Karoy saxaul forest.



*Ring-necked Pheasant*

Demoiselle Crane, *Anthropoides virgo*

About 90 migrating at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, about 60 feeding in a field northwest of Kanshengel, 50 migrating at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel, two at Kanshengel and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).



*Demoiselle Cranes*

Common Crane, *Grus grus*

One at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus chloropus*

Three at Topar lakes and five at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Eurasian Coot, *Fulica atra atra*

20+ at Topar lakes and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Maqueen's Bustard, *Chlamydotis macqueenii*

One pair at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel and another one male seen the day after in a nearby area.



*Maqueen's Bustard*

Black-winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*

Four northwest of Kanshengel, a few at Topar lakes, three near Karoy.

Northern Lapwing, *Vanellus vanellus*

One flushed from the road in the dark south of the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, two at Kanshengel.

Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius curonicus*

One at Kanshengel.

Greater Sandplover, *Charadrius leschenaultia crassirpstris*

13 and one pulli at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel and 11 and 1 pulli in anearby area the day after.

Common Redshank, *Tringa tetanus (ussuriensis?)*

Two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Green Sandpiper, *Tringa ochropus*

Two northwest of Kanshengel, two near Turanga forest.

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*

One at Kanshengel and three there the day after.

Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii*

Two at Kanshengel.

Large white-headed gull, *Larus* sp

One unidentified LWHG at Karoy and one at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*

Five at Topar lakes and ten at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Gull-billed Tern, *Sterna nilotica nilotica*

Two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo minussensis*

Four at Topar lakes and ten near Karoy.

White-winged Tern, *Chlidonias leucopterus*

20 at Topar lakes.

Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger niger*

30 at Topar lakes.



*Black Tern*

Black-bellied Sandgrouse, *Pterocles orientalis arenarius*

Four at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, and several small flocks, probably totaling 50+ birds northwest of Kanshengel, two at Karoy saxaul forest.



*Black-bellied Sandgrouses*

Rock Pigeon, *Columba livia gaddi/neglecta*

Four south of Kanshengel, four at Turanga forest, a few near Ili River crossing and several between Ili River and Chilik.

Eversmann's Stock-Dove, *Columba eversmanni*

One plus a pair of wires at Turanga forest and then a pair in the forest.



*Eversmann's Stock-Dove*

Eurasian Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia turtur turtur*

Four between Karoy and Ili River crossing.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis meena*

Four at Kanshengel, one northwest of Kanshengel, one at Turanga forest and two between Turanga forest and Karoy.



*Oriental Turtle Dove, note the distinctive eye-ring and similarity to Eurasian Turtle-Dove*

Common Cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus* ssp

One heard at Kanshengel, one heard at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, several heard between Kanshengel and Karoy, five around Karoy and one at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Horsfield's Cuckoo, *Cuculus horsfieldi*

One heard at Topar River crossing. Called consistently with a series of double-hoots.

Little Owl, *Athene noctua bactriana*

One at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, two between Turanga forest and Karoy, one heard from the camp at Karoy saxaul forest.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis (ispida?)*

Three at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty)

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, *Merops persicus persicus*

20 along the main road near Karoy.

European Bee-eater, *Merops apiaster*

Two between Turanga forest and Karoy and 15 at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

European Roller, *Coracias garrulous semenovi*

10-15 between Kanshengel and Karoy and 50 at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Eurasian Hoopoe, *Upupa epops epops*

Five around Kanshengel, several between Topar lakes and Turanga forest, one between Karoy and Ili River crossing.

White-winged Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos leucopterus*  
Three at Turanga forest, one at Karoy saxaul forest.



*White-winged Woodpecker in a Turanga tree*

Calandra Lark, *Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa*  
Abundant on the steppes around Kanshengel.



*Calandra Lark, extremely common in some places, especially in the grassy steppes*

Bimaculated Lark, *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata*  
Common at the steppes around Kanshengel.



*Bimaculated Lark, also one of the common larks, but more on drier ground*



White-winged Lark, *Melanocorypha leucoptera*  
One south of Kanshengel.



*Only one W-w Lark was found, although some years they are numerous in the area*

Greater Short-toed Lark, *Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis*

Abundant on the steppes around Kanshengel and north to Ili River.

Lesser Short-toed Lark, *Calandrella rufescens heinei*

Common at Karoy saxaul forest.

Crested Lark, *Galerida cristata magna*

A few at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel.

Oriental Skylark, *Alauda gulgula inconspicua*

Locally common on the steppes around Kanshengel.

Horned Lark, *Eremophila alpestris brandti*

One at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel.

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia riparia*

Five at the steppe northwest of Kanshengel and 200+ at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica ssp*

Common and widespread.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba ssp*

Subspecies *alba* seen in most areas and *personata* seen with two at Kanshengel.



*White Wagtails, personata to the left and alba to the right*

Yellow Wagtail, *Motacilla flava ssp*

One *thunbergi* and one *beema* at Kanshengel and many *ssp* unidentified in the same area and a few at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea melanope*

One at the observatory above Almaty and five around Kanshengel.

Tawny Pipit, *Anthus campestris*

Two at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel.

Tree Pipit, *Anthus trivialis ssp*

Three migrating at Kanshengel.

Water Pipit, *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni*

Ten at the observatory above Almaty.

Goldcrest, *Regulus regulus tristis*

Three heard at the observatory above Almaty.

Brown Dipper, *Cinclus pallasii tenuirostris*

One at the observatory above Almaty.

Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes tianschanicus*

Three heard at the observatory above Almaty.

Himalayan Accentor, *Prunella himalayana*

One seen, photographed and recorded at the pass at the observatory above Almaty. A welcome observation after a poor view 24 years ago.



*Himalayan Accentor*

Black-throated Accentor, *Prunella atrogularis huttoni*

6-8 at the observatory above Almaty, mostly around the observatory.

Blue Whistling-Thrush, *Myophonus caeruleus temminckii*

One at the observatory above Almaty.

Black-throated Thrush, *Turdus [ruficollis] atrogularis*

Three at Kanshengel.



*Black-throated Thrush*

Mistle Thrush, *Turdus viscivorus bonapartei*

Three at the observatory above Almaty.

Cetti's Warbler, *Cettia cetti albiventris*

Two heard singing at Topar River crossing and five at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Grasshopper Warbler, *Locustella naevia mongolica*

One singing at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel.

Paddyfield Warbler, *Acrocephalus agricola capistrata*

Two heard at Topar lakes.

Great Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus arundinaceus zarudnyi*

Ten at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Booted Warbler, *Hippolais caligata*

One at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel was probably a migrant.

Sykes' Warbler, *Hippolais rama*

Three at Kanshengel, three at Turanga forest, two at Karoy saxaul forest and one at Teskensu at Chilik.

Common Chiffchaff, *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Common in most bushes around Kanshengel and Turanga forest, one at Karoy saxaul forest. Although most seemed to be *tristis*, some were slightly more greenish and could have been *fulvescens*.



*Chiffchaffs, to the left a tristis, to the right perhaps a more western bird like fulvescens*

Sulphur-bellied Warbler, *Phylloscopus griseolus*

One at a few small bushes northwest of Kanshengel.



*Sulphur-bellied Warbler*

Hume's Warbler, *Phylloscopus humei humei*

About five at the observatory above Almaty, abundant in every patch of bushes around Kanshengel and a few at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).



*Hume's Warbler, one of many on their way to the Altai mountains*

Greenish Warbler, *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*

One at Kanshengel and one at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel.

Greater Whitethroat, *Sylvia communis rubicola*

One at Karoy saxaul forest

Lesser Whitethroat, *Sylvia curruca* (halimodendri?)

Common at every patch of bushes around Kanshengel and north to Karoy.



*Lesser Whitethroat, probably of the taxon curruca*

Barred Warbler, *Sylvia nisoria merzbacheri*

One male at Kanshengel.



*Barred Warbler*

Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa striata* ssp

Common at most of the patches of bushes around Kanshengel.



*Spotted Flycatcher*

Common Nightingale, *Luscinia megarhynchos hafizi*

Three at Kanshengel, one in a patch of bushes northwest of Kanshengel, two at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel, a few heard between Topar lakes and Karoy.



*Common Nightingale of the distinctive taxon hafizi*

Bluethroat, *Luscinia svecica pallidogularis*

Two at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel, blue or red on the throat.

Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, *Cercotrichas galactotes familiaris*

Three at Karoy saxaul forest

Blue-capped Redstart, *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*

One seen nicely in the tall spruce forest at the observatory above Almaty.

Common Redstart, *Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Two at Kanshengel, one at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel.

Guldenstadt's (White-winged) Redstart, *Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis*

One pair amongst the buildings at the pass at the observatory above Almaty.



*Mr and Mrs Guldenstadt*

Common Stonechat, *Saxicola torquatus maurus*.

30+ at the steppes around Kanshengel, three at Karoy saxaul forest and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).

Pied Wheatear, *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Five at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel and a few around Kanshengel, one between Karoy and Ili River crossing.

Isabelline Wheatear, *Oenanthe isabellina*

Locally common on the steppes around Kanshengel and north to Karoy saxaul forest.

Coal Tit, *Periparus ater rufipectus*

Three heard in the tall spruce forest at the observatory above Almaty.

Great Tit, *Parus major* ssp

One showing green back, yellow underparts and short tail with limited white on the underside.



*Great Tit, here the yellow form living almost sympatric with Turkestan Tit*

Turkestan Tit, *Parus bokharensis turkestanicus*

One at a nest at Topar River crossing and ten at Turanga forest, three at Karoy saxaul forest.



*Turkestan Tit with a much longer tail with white underside than the eastern grey Great Tits*

Azure Tit, *Cyanistes cyanus kotkalensis*

Five at Turanga forest.



*Azure Tit in a Turanga tree*

Eurasian Penduline-Tit, *Remiz pendulinus caspius*  
One brown-headed at Topas River crossing.



*'Brown-headed' Penduline-Tit, certainly a taxonomically interesting form*

White-crowned Penduline-Tit, *Remiz coronatus*  
Four birds incl one active nest at Teskentü at Chilik and two at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty).



*White-crowned Penduline-Tit, with much more black on the head than in Mongolia*

Red-backed Shrike, *Lanius collurio pallidifrons*  
One at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel and one near Karoy.

Isabelline Shrike, *Lanius isabellinus* ssp

15-20 around Kanshengel and many more the day after. Common between Kanshengel and Karoy and a few at the wetlands around Kazatkom (east of Almaty). Mostly birds looking like *isabellinus*, but many were like *phoenicuroides 'karelini'*.



*Isabelline Shrike, or rather Turkestan shrike of the form karelini*

Southern Grey Shrike, *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*

Two at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel and one north of Kanshengel, one between Karoy and Ili River crossing.



*Southern Grey Shrike of the pallidirostris desert form*

Lesser Grey Shrike, *Lanius minor turanicus*

Two at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel and three at Teskentu at Chilik

Eurasian Magpie, *Pica pica bactriana*

Common around Almaty and frequently seen between Topar lakes and Karoy and around Chilik.

Red-billed Chough, *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis*

Ten near the pass at the observatory above Almaty.

Eurasian Jackdaw, *Corvus monedula soemmerringii*

Common around Topar lakes and Turanga forest and locally between Karoy and Ili River crossing and around Chilik.

Rook, *Corvus frugilegus frugilegus*

Common around Topar lakes and locally between Karoy and Ili River crossing and around Chilik.

Oriental Crow, *Corvus orientalis*

30+ at the observatory above Almaty, one at Topar lakes, a few around Karoy and common around Chilik.

Common Myna, *Acridotheres tristis tristis*

Common around Almaty and locally at Kanshengel and Karoy and common around Chilik.

Rosy Starling, *Pastor roseus*

500+ around Kanshengel, many small flocks northwest of Kanshengel, two near Karoy and 30 north of Chilik.

European Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris poltaratskyi*

Two north of Turanga forest.

Saxaul Sparrow, *Passer ammodendri ammodendri*

20-30 at Karoy saxaul forest.



Saxaul Sparrow in the sandy Saxaul forest



House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus bactrianus*

Locally common in bushes and around houses around Kanshengel, small numbers seen north to Ili River crossing and locally common around Chilik. This taxon breeds in trees and according to Andrey, it does so sympatrically with the house-nesting domesticus. Furthermore bactrianus is a migratory form that spends the winter mainly in India.



House Sparrow of the form *bactrianus*.

Spanish Sparrow, *Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus*

A few at an oasis northwest of Kanshengel, ten at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel and several around Chilik.



*Spanish Sparrow, along way from Spain*

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus dilutus*

Three near Kanshengel and several around Chilik.

Plain Mountain-Finch, *Leucosticte nemoricola altaica*

One at the pass at the observatory above Almaty.

Common Rosefinch, *Carpodacus erythrinus erythrinus*

10+ at Kanshengel and ten at the campsite northwest of Kanshengel.

Red-mantled Rosefinch, *Carpodacus rhodochlamys rhodochlamys*

One pair seen well near the observatory at the observatory above Almaty and the single reason for going there at all.  
One of the target birds of the trip.



*Mrs and Mr Red-mantled Rosefinch*

Fire-fronted Serin, *Serinus pusillus*

A flock of 20 at the observatory at the observatory above Almaty.

White-winged Grosbeak, *Mycerobas carnipes speculigerus*

One pair together with the Red-mantled Rosefinches at the observatory above Almaty.



*White-winged Grosbeak*

Mongolian Finch, *Rhodopechys mongolica*

Three at the campsite between Tamgaly and Kanshengel and on at an oasis northwest of Kanshengel.

Desert Finch, *Rhodospiza obsoleta*

One at Kanshengel and 10-15 at Karoy saxaul forest.

Grey-hooded Bunting, *Emberiza buchanani neobscura*

A few along the road south of Kanshengel.

Ortolan Bunting, *Emberiza hortulana*

A few migrating around Kanshengel.



*Ortolan Bunting*

Red-headed Bunting, *Emberiza bruniceps*

Common on the steppes around Kanshengel and north to Karoy saxaul forest and south to Chilik.



*Red-headed Bunting*

### **Mammals**

Marmot

Common at the observatory above Almaty.

Weasel

Two at the observatory above Almaty.

Hare

Six near Karoy.

Kangaroo Rat sp

One at Karoy.

Red Fox

Two near Karoy.