

Birding Kazakhstan

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Front cover

Iconic Black Lark *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*, abundant on steppes at Korghalzyn, W Astana (MG).

Participants

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Highlights

- Black and White-winged Larks on Korghalzyn steppes
- Great numbers of Pallid Harriers
- Majestic Pallas's Gulls
- White-winged Woodpecker and Yellow-eyed Pigeon in Zhelturanga forest
- All those colours: Rollers, Bee-eaters, Rosy Starlings, Red-headed Buntings
- Loads of migrants in Kanshengel after heavy rains
- A surprise Grey-necked Bunting in Kanshengel
- After seeing lots of Red-tailed Shrikes in Taukum desert finding a migrant Isabelline Shrike at Sorbulak
- Astonishing scenery in Tien Shan mountains among Accentors and Mountain Finches
- Gldenstdt's Redstart escaping icy winds at the Cosmo station
- Purple White-browed Tit-Warbler
- Ibisbill hiding among Big Almaty Lake pebbles
- Final morning and a calling Himalayan Snowcock in the scope
- Bonus Booted Warbler in Astana

Logistics

Independent birding in Kazakhstan is a novelty. Following reports from Talbot and Jacobs we decided to organize our own trip. Finding rather cheap flights from Stockholm to Astana via Moscow it became a budget trip.

Domestic flights: We booked a return flight from Astana to Almaty for 44 Euro pp.

Car rental, Astana: We booked a small KIA from Europcar on-line via rentalcars.com. Everything worked impeccably. c.115 Euro for 2 days.

Car rental, Almaty: We used Navigator Cars (you shouldn't!, see below...) and paid around 200,000 tenge for a Landrover for 5 days. Europcar is available at Almaty airport, but it seems tough to get a 4WD from them. On the other hand, it's not essential to have a 4WD.

Hotel Aksunkar, Almaty Airport: Booked in advance on-line. Cheap, I think 9,000 tenge for a budget room, we upgraded to a somewhat larger room for another couple of thousand tenge. There was showers separately, no hot water available during our stay(!), clean.

Hotel Duman, Astana: Booked in advance on-line via agoda.com. Luxurious. 34,000 tenge for a double room.

Korghalzyn Guesthouse: We didn't book in advance, we had prepared for one night camping. But we tried to just show up. The map in Jacobs reports shows where it's located. One of the women spoke very good English so everything turned out unexpectedly good. At planning stage I tried to contact Korghalzyn Guesthouse via www.korg-tur.kz. There are several e-mail addresses that I tried without getting any response. Maybe it's worth trying to call the place in advance.

Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory: I managed to get into contact with Yelena, an English-speaking woman working with some sort of musical events at a company called Tessa Ltd. She was mentioned by Talbot. Her e-mail is: tessafestival@gmail.com. She was able to book accommodation at the Observatory. Usually it cost 45 Euro pp/night including meals. During our staying we had to bring our own food and paid only 15 Euro directly to Nelly, the Russian-speaking hostess of the Observatory, we paid a roughly equal amount in tenge instead (Nelly didn't want Euro). Nelly can be reached on mobile phone (if you speak Russian...): [+77756519555](tel:+77756519555) / [+77476651740](tel:+77476651740).

Camping: It's perfectly safe and allowed to camp in Kazakhstan. We stayed one night in the Zhelturanga forest, it

was easy to pick a good spot here. The next night was trickier since it had rained heavily. We found a decent side-track from the main Kanshengel-Topar road. Maybe 20-30 minutes drive from Kanshengel. It would have been easy to camp in the Tien Shan mountains. At least at lower altitudes. In the valley just beneath Big Almaty Lake there were several nice spots along the way next to a small creek.

Literature

- Helm Field Guides: Birds of Central Asia, R Ayé, M Schweizer, T Roth (2012)
- Trip-reports via Cloudbirders including: J van der Woude (2015), H Jacob (2013), G Talbot (2012), B Anderson (2007), H Hendriks (2007).

Itinerary

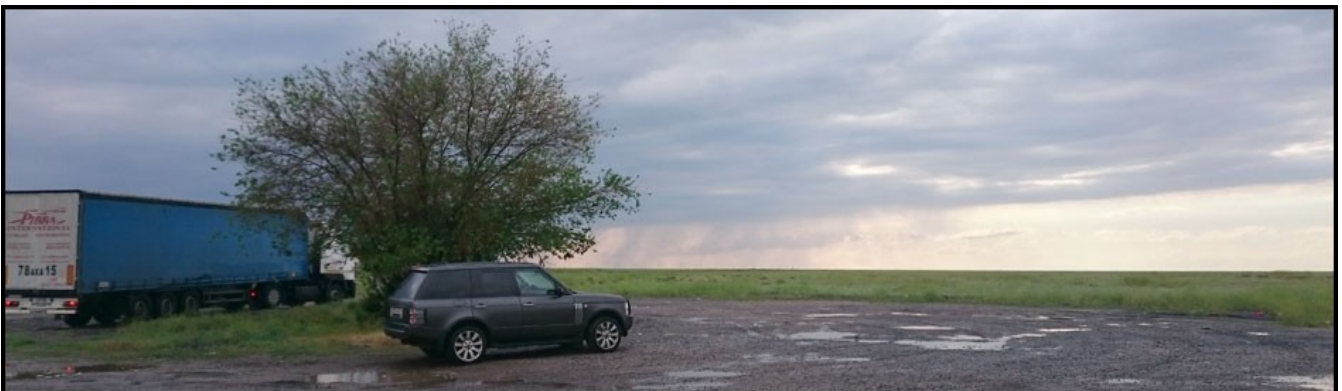
- 1.5 Arrival at **Astana** early morning. Drive to **Korghalzyn**. Night at Korghalzyn Guest House.
- 2.5 **Korghalzyn-Astana**. Evening flight to **Almaty**. Night at Akusunkar Hotel at Almaty Airport.
- 3.5 Pick up rental car. Drive NW to **Kanshengel** and then NW to **Zhelturanga**. Night in tent at Zhelturanga.
- 4.5 **Zhelturanga to Topar Lakes**. From mid-day around **Kanshengel**, going both west and south. Night in tent in Taukum desert, NW Kanshengel.
- 5.5 **Kanshengel to Wish tree**. Brief stop at **Lake Sorbulak**. Drive to Tien Shan and the **Astronomical Observatory**. Night at Astronomical Observatory.
- 6.5 Up to **Cosmo station**. Mid-day around **Big Almaty Lake**. Afternoon around **Observatory**. Night at Astronomical Observatory.
- 7.5 Morning around **Observatory**. Slow drive with many stops down to **Almaty**. Late afternoon flight to **Astana**. Night at Hotel Duman.
- 8.5 Morning flight from Astana to Moscow cancelled! Afternoon stroll to an Astana park. New flight at mid-night.
- 9.5 Mid-night arrival at Moscow. Transit hotel. Mid-day flight to Stockholm.



Adult Pallas's Gull at Korghalzyn Nature Reserve (MG).



Female Black Lark at Korghalzyn Nature Reserve (MG).



Lone tree, west of Kanshengel, packed with warblers, Shikra, and Ortolan Buntings after rains.

Map of Kazakhstan



A large country! 1h25min flight time between the capital Astana in the north to the largest city Almaty in the south-east. Mostly covered with endless steppes and semi-arid deserts.

Diary

May 1st Astana-Korghalzyn

After a long uneventful transit at Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport we boarded the Aeroflot night flight to Astana, capital of Kazakhstan. Arrived early morning a bit drowsy and smoothly passed immigration (visa-on-arrival possible since one year back for a few nationalities). We collected our pre-booked rental car at Europcar and soon were on our way. After leaving the airport parking lot there was a six-lane straight highway going to Astana encouraging speeding. That said, it was just a matter of minutes before a flash went off. A speeding camera in a box! Apparently the limit was just 60 km/h. Thankfully still haven't heard anything from the traffic police in Astana (The traffic police in Almaty, though, that's a different story...). Our GPS guided us to the nearest supermarket as we needed to bunker food for our Korghalzyn excursion. The first three attempts gave us closed stores before we found a small market open (Sunday morning...). We quickly filled up with bread, cheese, butter, sausage, beer and a couple of tins. And off west we went. By now we were ready to start birding and not long after leaving Astana a large wetland appeared on the right-hand side of the road, a Short-eared Owl was mobbed by some crows and we pulled over. Lots of ducks and a few waders here including Black-tailed Godwit while quite a few Pallid Harriers glided over the marshes. In nearby bushes a Cetti's Warbler sang together with a red-spotted *pallidirostris* Bluethroat before a pair of Azure Tits and a Eurasian Penduline Tit appeared! A good start.

We continued west and made brief stops at several places. At one spot a Short-eared Owl and a male Pallid Harrier looked disturbed and attacked something on the ground close to the road. A Greater Spotted Eagle!, which soon took off and was joined by a second bird as it started to gain height. Common Kestrels were very abundant in roadside bushes, maybe 60 throughout the day.

We made a longer stop at a small clump of trees which surrounded a square-shaped man-made swamp. It was packed with migrant passerines, mostly Common Redstarts, Willow Warblers and Siberian Chiffchaffs. Further on we stopped at the small village Zhanteke, where a female *pallidus* Merlin flew by. The first Demoiselle Cranes stood at a marsh and now the first Black Larks had appeared! Also many Syke's Wagtails (*beema*) here, but only CW glimpsed the White-winged Lark which dropped in tallish vegetation not to be found again.

Next stop was at the bridge north of Korghalzyn where a few charismatic Pallas's Gulls and many Steppe Gulls (*barabensis*) resided. In the village of Korghalzyn we soon found the Guest House marked out on hand-drawn map by H Jacob. It turned out one of the ladies there spoke very good English and we were able to book a room (or actually one double room each!) and set a time for dinner and breakfast the next day. There were three French non-birders staying at the Guest House as well. Happy about sorting out accommodation we headed out birding for the remainder of the afternoon and evening. We had prepared for camping and cooking by our own but this was clearly a better alternative. It was sunny, not too warm, and rather calm, and as the day proceeded the wind decreased even more making conditions next to perfect for birding. During our short staying it was obvious that you would need more than one night to cover this huge area more properly. It was fascinating to see the difference between lakes, maybe partly due to different water qualities. Our first mission went east of Korghalzyn, we scanned two different lakes here, couldn't find White-headed Duck which we looked for, but both Red-necked and Black-necked Grebes, a small flock of Red-necked Phalaropes, and Black Terns. A surprise meeting was a Raccoon Dog which swiftly ran into its den. Lots of mosquitos here. We drove back to Korghalzyn and then proceeded southward. First a shallow lake on the left hand-side with lots of Pallas's Gulls and surprisingly one male and three female Smews before we found a very good reedy lake at a settlement called Birtaban. The lake here was huge and rich with birds and we could barely scan the far side of the lake. There were hundreds of Black and White-winged Terns catching insects, in all more than 500, three distant Dalmatian Pelicans was another highlight and a pair of Slender-billed Gulls flew over. All too soon we had to head back to Korghalzyn for dinner.

At dinner we had a friendly chat with the three French guests, one of them worked at the French embassy in Almaty, she told us about the current bad weather situation in the south with extremely rainy conditions. Too early to start worrying about the second part of our trip... Food was in excess and after a hot shower I quickly fell asleep in the heated (not unnecessary) room.

May 2nd Korghalzyn-Astana

We set the alarm early and went on a short pre-breakfast tour. There is a small bridge across the stream in Korghalzyn which we crossed, we then turned south along the stream and followed tracks down to an area with lots of scrubs and bushes bordering the stream. We knew this was a good spot for Booted Warbler, although we were pretty sure this was too early for them to have arrived from their winter grounds. And despite one and half hours searching we couldn't find any. However, there were a few other birds around. A few Bluethroats, many Siberian Chiffchaffs and a few probable '*blythi*' Lesser Whitethroats (quite different song from ordinary western *curruca*). On the way back a Common Grasshopper Warbler started to sing a we got nice but brief views.

At 8 o'clock it was time for a steady breakfast back at the guesthouse before we cleared our rooms and bid farewell to the kind owners. A recommendable place to stay! The steppe immediately north of Korghalzyn before the bridge, which is covered with very short grass is supposed to be good for Sociable Lapwings, however we couldn't find any. Better still was White-winged Larks in relative abundance, at least 5 birds were present many sang high in the sky, and a female bird gave close prolonged views. Great, both target larks under the belt!

It was already 10 AM as we decided to try sites further west. First we drove pass a small village called Zhumai. Distance was longer than expected and it took at least half an hour before we reached promising large lakes. Lots of ducks and gulls, and in close reed-beds a male Citrine Wagtail. We turned back and another detour south gave a nice flock om Demoiselle Cranes as well as Whooper Swans, Common Cranes and Pied Avocets. If we would have had more time we should have continued further southwest which I guess is the true area of the Korghalzyn Nature Reserve. We missed out on Sociable Lapwing and Black-winged Pratincole, maybe going into that area would have produced those species. On Google Earth the large lakes further west and southwest of Korghalzyn look definitely the best. On the way back there were still many Black Larks and also a male Pied Wheatear. By 1 PM we started heading back to Astana. At the square-shaped marsh we had a quick lunch, nothing new though, and by now the wind had really picked up, making birding more difficult. Two Grey Partridges ran across the road.

We returned the car to Europcar and after a quick check-in soon were in the air on the way to Almaty. Immense clouds appeared as we flew south-east. At Almaty Airport we had booked a room at Aksunkar Hotel which is just outside the airport. The hotel was as I have imagined, a bit factory-like, with a sterile ground floor lobby, a closed restaurant, the reception located on 4th (!) floor, rooms clean but no hot water in the showers.

May 3rd Almaty-Zhelturanga

Ok, where to start? After some e-mail correspondance with an Almaty car rental company, Navigator Cars, we had agreed to meet and have our car delivered at Hotel Aksunkar at 8 AM. I had send a confirmation mail and got an response one week prior to our arrival. And although the English in the e-mails was hard to understand fully, it seemed we had an agreement. Which was a Toyota Landcruiser for 5 days for 180,000 tenge, pick up at the hotel and drop-off at the airport, I had also described the approximate route.

Time passed. More time passed. No car. No mail. No text. By 8.30 AM we realized nobody would show up. I went back to the hotel lobby and a kind girl in the reception called Navigator Car to ask them (in Russian) where they were. After some 10 minutes they called back and she handed me the phone. It was Alex, an English-speaking representative of Navigator Cars. He told us there had been such heavy rains the last days so it would not be possible to drive to Topar so they couldn't give us a car... I asked them why they hadn't noticed us, they had both our e-mail and mobile number... After a long argument he agreed to come and pick us up at the hotel and take us to their office to discuss the route further.

After another 45 minutes Alex and another guy showed up and took us to the office some half an hour away in downtown Almaty. We told them it was ridiculous, off course we could drive to Topar, it's tarmac all the way! They offered us a Landrover, which off course was a bit more expensive, partly because we intended to drive outside Almaty (which we already had agreed upon...). And also they wanted a deposit of 50,000 tenge. We didn't have time for any further argument, we badly needed a car, but revenge will follow, as we will warn other travellers of getting in touch with this totally unreliable and dodgy company (also see May 7th...) on tripadvisor. Anyway, we had our overprized fuel-consuming 4WD and could proceed with our mission. Alex told us the traffic rules: wear a belt, always headlights on, speeding limit is 60 km/h within towns and 90 km/h outside. We started with a roadside lunch and picked up food at a large supermarket for 33,000 tenge that we hoped should last the following 5 days. Then we were on our way. Fully tanked and lots of food and good birds to be found.



Common Nightingale (ssp golzii), Wish tree (MG).



Common Pheasant (ssp mongolicus) close to Topar (CW).

Five minutes later a police waved at us to stop at a control station. Alright, what now? The headlights wasn't on! I had to step out of the car and follow him to a small shelter where they checked my passport, driving license and the cars paper. The officer who didn't knew a single English word looked at me angry and told me "STRAFF!" and showed me that he was going to put my driving license in his pocket. He then clearly hinted me to give him money. Having read previous reports about guards at the gate to Big Almaty Lake demanding bribes I didn't really know what to do. After checking the computer the sorry excuse for a cop communicated that something was wrong with the papers and that there had to be an "inspection" of the vehicle. We hadn't time for this, so after some negotiation we agreed upon 10,000 tenge, he still threatened to take my driving license. By now I had become quite angry, I called Alex on Navigator Car and put the cop on the phone. Alex then explained that the officer would give us a warning but that we could proceed. We hang up. The officer still refused to hand me back my documents and I slipped him 10,000, got my license and we headed off. Angry.

Ten minutes later a police car stopped us!!! It was an unreal feeling to once again step out of the car with all papers to another police officer, this man could speak some poor English and explained that I had been driving to fast, we were well outside the town, but apparantly it was still 60 km/h. He gave us a warning and we could proceed. Pheew...

A feeling of emptiness followed... Followed by a feeling of freedom as we left Almaty behind and drove into the vast steppes towards northwest. Red poppies coloured the fields. And as large flocks of Rosy Starlings appeared we soon had forgot the mornings debacle. Soon the first Rollers and Bee-eaters were found on wires. Finally some good birds. We had lost a lot of time and knew it was quite a drive to Zhelturanga so we decided to push on and not make any unnecessary stops, although it was hard to resist. As we approached Kanshengel after a couple of hours we had to take a break. Initially we stopped by a single tree, and immediately found a Common Nightingale, a Barred Warbler and some Ortolan Buntings. Realizing the trees were full with migrants we soon checked the bushes behind the gas station where we found a singing Syke's Warbler, this was just great. Around the larger settlement a Clamorous Reed Warbler and a possible Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin were added before we had to proceed.

After another hour we reached Topar turned right and soon approached Zhelturanga and the famous forest one kilometer further east. This was our destination for the day. We left the main road on a small track into the forest, and actually found the first White-winged Woodpecker from the car. Within another 30 minutes we had found a pair of Yellow-eyed Pigeons, Azure Tit and "Turkestan" (Great) Tit. After a long day, we cooked some pasta dinner on our multi-fuel kitchen and just before it was time to hit the sleeping bag a Pallid Scops Owl called a few times. Further search was fruitless though. Later a Eurasian Scops Owl called distantly and as did a few European Nightjars.

May 4th Zhelturanga-Kanshengel

At break of dawn a short walk in the forest produced a singing Syke's Warbler and a singing possible *halimodendri*-Lesser Whitethroat (again different song from both 'blythi'-type birds in Korghalzyn as well as ordinary *curruca*). We packed our stuff and headed to the cemetery outside Zhelturanga to have our breakfast there. As we stepped out of the car a Saxaul Sparrow was calling, and after a while we got great views of male at the gate to the cemetery. A few more Syke's Warblers were seen here. On the way back to Topar we stopped to get some shots of roadside Red-tailed Shrikes. Just south of Topar there is a network of small lakes. At larger reed beds around 2,2 km south of Topar we had a couple of Paddyfield Warblers close to the road and in another lake 40 Black Terns and a single White-winged Tern. Red-crested Pochards and Ferruginous Ducks were seen in a few different lakes. Further south, around 6,3-6,5 km south of Topar there is an area of multiple small lakes surrounded by larger trees and reeds. This area look good for Penduline Tits and we decided to make a longer stop. We walked along the ridges between the small lakes. There were a few Shikras and Crested Honey Buzzards in the area. We found no Penduline Tits at all, however one White-winged Woodpecker, a singing Common Grasshopper Warbler, a nice flock of migrant Hume's Leaf Warblers including a few Greenish Warblers, also Azure Tit, and Black-crowned Night Heron. Wouldn't be surprised to find Little Bittern here. Overhead a Short-toed Snake Eagle and a large migrating flock of Crested Honey Buzzards.

Back at Kanshengel just after lunch the clouds became increasingly darker, it was raining behind us and in front of us but we managed to escape the worst showers. The trees in Kanshengel were packed with birds again. Red-headed Buntings, a bright yellow male Eurasian Golden Oriole dropped down from the sky, while an Indian Golden Oriole showed off behind the Gas Station, Rollers flew by, among smaller birds there were a few Paddyfield Warbler, one single Eurasian Reed Warbler, Barred Warblers, Syke's Warbler, Greenish Warbler, two European Turtle Doves among a large flock of Oriental dittos. Quite out of range were three White-crowned Penduline Tits. We still had a few larks to connect with and decided to try the track south from Kanshengel. Before heading south we made a brief stop at the intersection. A bunting landed out of sight and after a few attempts I could locate the bird on the ground in the scope and it turned out to be a smashing male Grey-necked Bunting!, a good bird to get at Kanshengel.



Eurasian Golden Oriole, Kanshengel, male (MG).



Indian Golden Oriole, Kanshengel, male, note black behind the eye, yellow fringes to tertials and large yellow patch on primary coverts (MG).

The meticulously straight road south delivered the larks we hoped for. Crowds of Calandra Larks, a few Greater Short-toed Larks, many Bimaculated Larks and turning back finally a single Lesser Short-toed Lark. One Steppe Grey Shrike stood on the road and flight views of a White-winged Lark.

Back in Kanshengel it was turning late afternoon. We decided to try the main road further west, we still hadn't found any real suitable habitat for Macqueen's Bustard or Greater Sand Plover, most reports mentions "North-west of Kanshengel" which would be between the road to Topar and the main road. Looking for more desert-like flat areas we started driving west, it was all green steppes, and it was hard to find any tracks going

north (at least that were still drivable in the rain). We went as far as 20 km west of Kanshengel. Here there is a large parking lot by a solitary large tree (the only one visible for miles and miles). This tree held a male Shikra, a Barred Warbler, multiple Ortolan Buntings, and herds of Lesser Whitethroats.

Once again back in Kanshengel we had a nice shish kebab at one of the unglamorous food stands, served with tea. At the next table two truck drivers were enjoying their dinner while streaming some sort of live music event on a smart phone, in the middle of the steppes, in Kazakhstan, not what you might expect, as a kilometre away we met an old man without teeth on horseback herding goats... It was time to find a place to stay for the night. At the well in Kanshengel we met two Dutch birders doing an independent road-trip in Kazakhstan! We shared some brief information and then headed north again on the road to Topar. We tried a small track to the left not far from Kanshengel and luckily managed to turn around inches from getting stuck in the extremely muddy track, and we did have a 4WD! Heavy showers throughout the day had made the desert mostly arduous. We had to drive another 20 minutes before we found another decent spot, well away from the road. We put up the tent as the sun set. It was a magic evening. The weather had calmed down, and a Bluethroat, a Common Grasshopper Warbler, a Syke's Warbler were all found in the immediate vicinity. After dark a Little Owl called for a long time, but never within reach.

May 5th Kanshengel-Almaty-Tien Shan Observatory

Early morning still in the Taukum desert a short morning walk produced a few flocks of Red-headed Buntings, two Steppe Grey Shrikes, and best of all a very distant Goitered Gazelle. We were eager to get back to Kanshengel for some more migrants. Mostly the same species dominated, however a Long-eared Owl was new and as we came around a corner a Common Kingfisher darted away. There were more Syke's Warblers today. On the opposite side of the road there was an aggregation of Bee-eaters and suddenly there was an all green-backed bird among them: a Blue-cheeked Bee-eater! It flew behind a large building and the flock spread out, unfortunately we couldn't relocate the bird. The heavy rains from yesterday had moved on and clear skies turned migration on again. Throughout the morning we had a couple of flocks of Demoiselle Cranes, at least 100 Crested Honey Buzzards in six different flocks and two Steppe Eagles.

Before lunch we began the long drive back to Almaty. We made three longer stops. First at a small creek where a larger flock of Yellow Wagtails were found, a few *feldlegg*-types but unfortunately no *leucocephala*. Next stop was at the famous Wish tree (there is actually three trees at that spot (The Wish Tree being the most productive one). We had Barred Warbler, two Red-tailed Shrikes, Common Nightingale, Pied Wheatear and two Spanish Sparrows.

Ten minutes later a police car stopped us... Amazingly it was the same officers who stopped us two days ago on our outbound drive. Actually the co-driver laughed hard when realizing it was some familiar faces, the driver pointed firmly on the speed meter telling us it was 70 km/h for another couple of kilometres before it was 90 km/h again. Apparently the road was a bit bumpy this stretch (off course, as opposed to ALL other roads). Well, well, my luck with the Almaty law enforcement had taken an unexpected turn.

The last stop before Almaty was at Lake Sorbulak. There is a large reed bed next to the road where Lake Sorbulak is at its closest to the main road. A quick stop produced a female Isabelline Shrike while the lake itself was full with birds. There was amazing numbers of pelicans, many Dalmatian and Great Whites on the water. On the far shore of the lake there was a huge flock of maybe 300 Great White Pelicans. Other good birds on the lake were lots of terns and Caspian Gulls. A longer stop would have turned up more stuff for sure. We only stopped for 20 minutes or so.

We picked up a few groceries at a Gas Station in the suburbs of Almaty before we had to pull over for another police check-point, this time a routine check-up. Driving license, passport, car papers, you know the drill. It was getting afternoon and traffic was piling up. We chose a wide loop around Almaty but still ended up in some jams in the southern parts before we found the turn-off to the mountains.

It was thrilling to leave the plains behind and start to climb the Tien Shan mountains. There was a gated entrance to the park where we paid a ticket (not much). Not until Big Almaty Lake we made a short break, and immediately found a superb male Eversmann's Redstart! It was now almost 5 PM and we thought it was best checking in at the Observatory before it got too late. Just before the Observatory there is another gate. The military guards first didn't want us to pass (too late in the afternoon perhaps), but somehow we made them realise we were staying in the Observatory. We handed over our passports and the guard wrote all data in a large log book before opening the gate. At the Observatory we met Nelly to whom Yelena had been in contact with to book our rooms. However we had no written invitation. Nelly only speak Russian, no English whatsoever. Sign language always works though. And we were shown to a room in the post-apocalypse run-down Observatory. There was a heater in the room, electric outlets, hot shower, a water boiler and thankfully clean beds. We got a towel each and also a key to the locked gate at the Observatory so that we could drive out and in as we pleased. Nelly also took us up to the military camp next to the Observatory apparently to sort out some details about clearance for us to visit the Cosmo Station later. The conversation was all in Russian, we understood that it

would have been better if we would have had some sort of formal papers showing that we were ornithologists and that the booking of the Observatory had been sanctioned, after a few minutes everything seemed settled and we were allowed to visit the Cosmo Station later. We guess both Nelly and in particular the military have grown used to foreign birders in May and June making everything less troublesome.

Eager to start birding we walk around the Observatory to get acquainted with the birds of Tien Shan. No hoped for Tit-Warblers, but a nice pair of Eversmann's Redstart, a singing Black-throated Accentor, and the only Common Rock Thrush of the trip at the shooting range, a male, and a brief White-winged Grosbeak.

Yelena had already told us that we couldn't have dining included in the accommodation, so we were prepared with food and our multi-fuel kitchen. There was a miserable kitchen in the main building which we weren't allowed to use. Unfortunately our multi-fuel kitchen broke down this evening. The water boiler was the saver so we could have some hot noodle soup at least. A nice hot shower (comically oversized water heater in the bathroom) later and it was time to go to bed.



Eversmann's Redstart, male, Tien Shan Observatory. Restricted to north-westernmost Himalayas, Tien Shan and Altai mountains (MG).



Altai Accentor, close to the Cosmo Station, Tien Shan (MG).

May 6th Tien Shan Observatory – Cosmo Station – Big Almaty Lake

Next morning we wanted those mountain birds. We left the Observatory and started to climb the hairpins up to the Cosmo Station at 3200 masl. As we passed some junipers up the first slope we made a stop and immediately connected with a singing White-tailed Rubythroat! A stonker! Flocks of Plain Mountain Finches were abundant and a swift-moving pair of handsome Red-mantled Rosefinches also appeared. A few hairpins higher we got Brown Accentor. A couple of hundred meters below the Cosmo Station there was yet another closed and locked gate and we had to park our car and walk the last couple of hundred meters up to the station. There were some people around, most of them skiers it seemed. We were hounded at, we waved and continued, a bit unclear if they wanted us to leave. We took no chances and focused on finding a Gldenstdt's Redstart as fast as possible if we had to turn back. And it was not difficult. A smashing pair had their nest under a broken roof and the male guarded with pride in the icy winds. It was darn cool and we backtracked while Alpine Choughs and Red-billed Choughs were added to the list.

Once again we met the nice Dutch couple from Kanshengel and had a chat before we slowly went downhill. A few Altai Accentors here and further down a fly-by Brandt's Mountain Finch which was a species not counted on. Scanning for both Snowcocks along ridges and the Tit-Warbler back at the junipers became fruitless. We now decided to go down to Big Almaty Lake for the Ibisbill. As we had lunch at the parking lot close to the dam low clouds came creeping up the mountain sides from the lower valleys, not good! Just before a Vulture flew across the valley, an adult Himalayan Griffon! Soon joined by an immature bird and directly followed by two other birds: one juvenile Himalayan Vulture and one Cinereous Vulture! A minute later thick fog surrounded us. We finished our lunch and then took the track (which is gated at the turn-off from the main tarmac) that runs along the eastern shore of the lake. Visibility was zero but we thought it was just temporarily so. As we passed the dam, two armed guards approached us and once again we had to show our passports, and explained: "O-R-N-I-T-H-O-L-O-G-Y", it worked. Hundred meters later rain started to pour and we took shelter beneath a huge spruce. 15 minutes later it stopped and soon skies cleared again! Thank you!

A strange call made us alert, it was the Ibisbill for sure, but we just couldn't find them. From our position high above the delta we had to see it, but we just couldn't. We had to scan the pebbles many times before finding the gem. Almost being anxious we found the precious Ibisbill - what a great camouflage! And it took several minutes of watching before realising another bird was standing beside with its back toward us.

On the way back there were several Red-fronted Serins and fly-over White-winged Grosbeaks. At some junipers there was another White-tailed Rubythroat singing when we heard a hard call - "tack...tack". It was a Sulphur-bellied Warbler, nice.

Close to the Observatory we made another lengthy effort to find the Tit-Warbler. A male Eversmann's Redstart made a great performance, but still no purple birds. But after another 30 minutes searching we had a bird responding to playback and beautifully perched on top of a bush before disappearing into the junipers again. A great relief to see this peculiar little bird.

Since our multi-fuel kitchen was broke we decided to cook some BBQ. There was an old grill outside the station. We had some troubles getting good ember due to rain showers. We found some spare planks and an old broken chair we used as fire wood. Beer, sausage, cheese and onion, what a day. Including a bucket full of desirable Tien Shan birds.

May 7th Tien Shan Observatory – Almaty – Astana

Our last morning birding and one bird still to see in the mountains. The Snowcock. There had been a serious storm during the night and from Big Almaty Lake and uphill everything was covered in a 5-10 cm thick snow layer! A small hill outside our room above the main building proved as an excellent vantage point. We had at least 3 or 4 Snowcocks calling from the adjacent slopes. And it was just a matter of time before we could find one, unfortunately very distant bird. The bird called repeatedly and the far-carrying sound echoed between the mountain sides. One bird seemed closer just across the valley from the Observatory, but after a while we reckoned the sound was coming from far higher grounds, probably out of sight. With our last bird to see up here ticked off and the snow rapidly melting away we started our descent. We stopped frequently along the way adding a few species new to the trip, most importantly Blue-capped Redstart, also a nice perched Eurasian Nutcracker, Goldcrest, a heard only Willow Tit, and three Brown Dippers. Before leaving the hills a few raptors appeared mostly single Black Kites but also a single adult Bearded Vulture at an unusually low altitude. One Golden Eagle, one Steppe Eagle and 13 Griffon Vultures were all nice additions! We repacked our stuff at a small creek in the middle of the day before driving the last hour back to Almaty and Navigator Car to return our Landrover.

A representative from Navigator Car then drove to the Airport to drop us off. When returning our deposit of 50,000 tenge he suddenly in a very angry manner demanded that we should give him 10,000 tenge to clean the car. This was outrageous, he called Alex (the English-speaking guy) and handed me the phone. I explained that we hadn't agreed upon a fee to clean the car and that it is always included (at least among serious car rental companies...) . I hang up, gave back the phone, didn't give any money and just walked into the airport building. Navigator Car! Just avoid them!

Back in Astana it was late evening and we took a cab to Hotel Duman for our last night in Kazakhstan. A rather luxurious hotel. There was a great view from our balcony, watching all the strange newly constructed towers popping up everywhere (oil-money well spent?).



White-browed Tit-Warbler, male, Tien Shan mountains (CW). Bearded Vulture, adult, lower Tien Shan mountains (MG).

May 8th Astana – Astana Airport – Astana – Astana Airport(!...)

Another early morning, we had a cab waiting for us and after some 30 minutes we were back at the airport. Just opposite the main entrance of the airport there are some small woods that holds a large Rook colony and also we knew Red-footed Falcons could be seen here. We asked the cab driver to pull over before the drop-off point, and luckily we saw at least one pair of Red-footed Falcons perched in nearby trees. Happily we thought this would be a great ending to the trip.

At the gate our flight got postponed an hour, then another, then another... then cancelled. Oh no! To make a long story short, all passengers of the plane were shipped back to Astana in a coach to a transit hotel down-town (Hotel Tourist). We were served lunch and during a long break in the afternoon we made a stroll to a nearby(not so) park. Among hordes of weekend-spenders we actually found some good birds: an Azure Tit, a Greenish Warbler, and a Great Spotted Woodpecker (new to the trip). At the last spot we tried, a jogging track, there were some promising scrubs and amazingly we found a Booted Warbler! A suitable bonus, since we were too early to see one at Korghalzyn a week earlier.

At late evening the bus took us back to the airport for a midnight flight to Moscow. Here several representatives from Aeroflot met us and provided us a room at the airport, a voucher for breakfast and new boarding cards to Stockholm. Actually they did their job in an efficient manner given the circumstances. We had some sleep in our room until the next day and finally were back at Arlanda, Stockholm at lunch-time, 24 hours later than expected.



Long-legged Buzzard and poppies at Kanshengel (CW).



Red-headed Bunting, male, Kanshengel (MG).

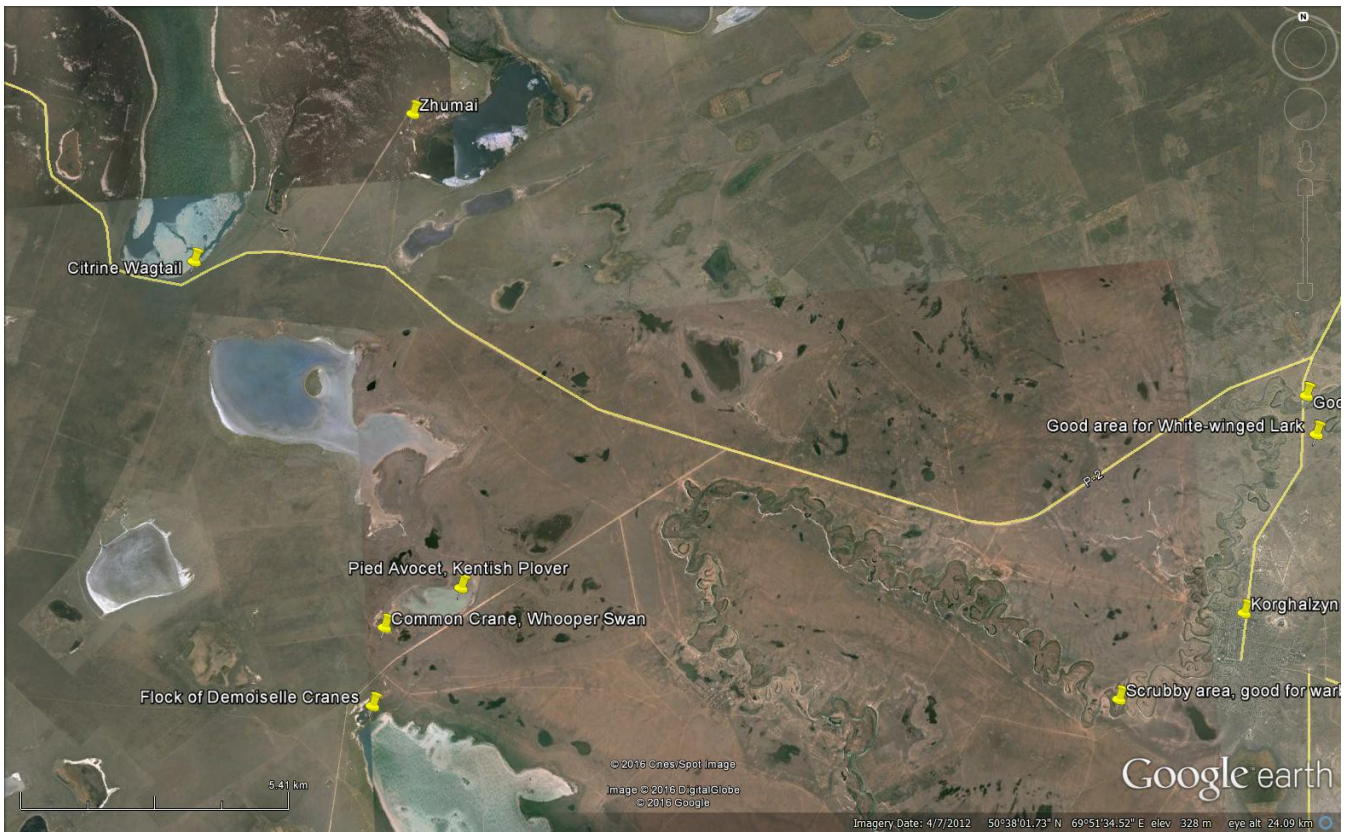
More maps



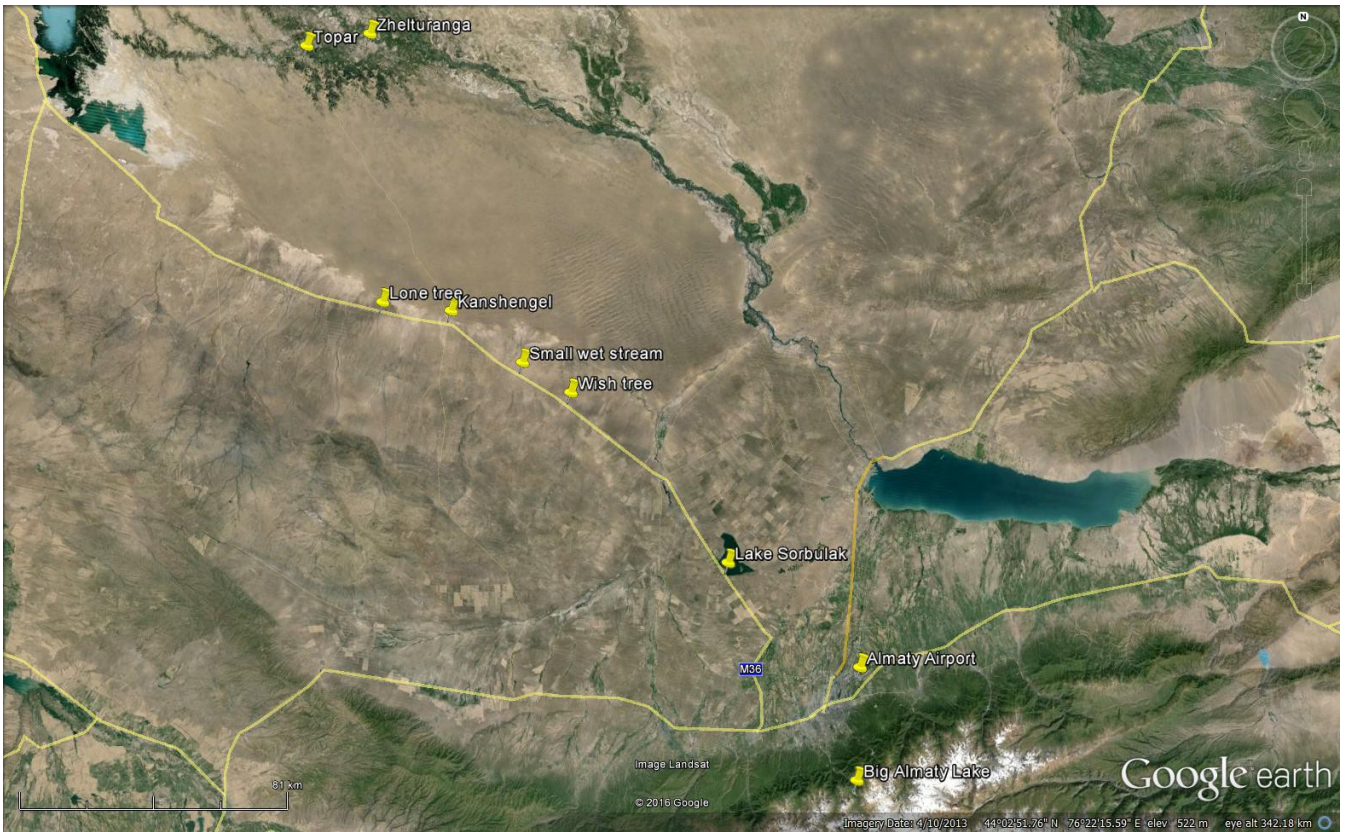
Road from Astana SW to Korghalzyn.



Around Korghalzyn.



Sites West of Korghalzyn.



South-east Kazakhstan, road from Almaty to Topar-Zhelturanga.



Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory. Looking south-west.



Big Almaty Lake, Ibisbill stake-out. Looking south-east.



Jogging track close to Astana Park Hotel with scrubs.

List of birds: Kazakhstan, May 1st - 8th 2016

Following IOC World Bird List 6.2 (April 2016) (www.worldbirdnames.org). In total: 206 species, including 9 heard onlys (HO), 12 species on The IUCN Red List for Threatened Species (2014.3). Subspecies notations are foremost literature-based.

- 1 **Greylag Goose** *Anser anser rubrirostris*
Max 40 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 2 **Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*
Max 4 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 3 **Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*
Max 35 Korghalzyn 1-2.5
- 4 **Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*
Max 4 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 5 **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*
Max 7 Zhelturanga 3-4.5, 30 Lake Sorbulak 5.5, 2-3 Big Almaty Lake 6-7.5.
- 6 **Gadwall** *Anas strepera*
Max 10 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 Topar 4.5, 4 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 7 **Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*
2 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 8 **Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*
Max 10 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 5 Almaty 3.5.
- 9 **Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*
Max 80 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 10 **Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*
Max 12 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 11 **Garganey** *Anas querquedula*
Max 50 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 40 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 12 **Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*
20 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 13 **Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*
15 Korghalzyn 1.5, max 10 Topar 3-4.5, 30 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 14 **Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*
Max 80 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 5 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 15 **Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca* **NT**
Max 5 Topar 3-4.5.
- 16 **Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*
Max 30 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 17 **Smew** *Mergellus albellus*
1 male + 3 female Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 18 **Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis sewerzowi*
3 heard Tien Shan 5-7.5, 1 seen Tien Shan 7.5.
- 19 **Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix robusta*
2 e.r. Astana 2.5.
- 20 **Common Quail** *Coturnix coturnix* HO
1 heard Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 21 **Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus mongolicus*
1 male Topar 3.5, 4 males + 1 female Topar 4.5, 1 heard e.r. Tien Shan 5.5.
- 22 **Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
3 Topar Lakes 4.5.
- 23 **Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena*
4 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 24 **Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*
Max 100 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 Topar 4.5, 15 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 25 **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*
Max 8 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 26 **Eurasian Bittern** *Botarus stellaris* HO
3 heard Korghalzyn 1.5, 1 heard Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 27 **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

- 5 Topar Lakes 5.5.
- 28 **Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
Max 15 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, max 2 Topar 3-4.5.
- 29 **Great Egret** *Ardea alba*
3 e.r. Astana 2.5, max 4 Topar 3-4.5, 2 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 30 **Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*
200 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 31 **Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus* VU
3 Korghalzyn 1.5, 20 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 32 **Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*
Max 50, seen on 5 days.
- 33 **Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus* NT
1 adult seen at lower parts of road to Tien Shan 7.5.
- 34 **Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
20 migrating and 5 in trees at Topar 4.5, 100 migrating NE (in 6 flocks) Kanshengel 5.5.
- 35 **Himalayan Vulture** *Gyps himalayensis* NT
1 ad + 1 subad + 1 juv Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 36 **Griffon Vulture** *Gyps fulvus*
1+7+5 seen at lower parts of road to Tien Shan 7.5.
- 37 **Cinereous Vulture** *Aegypius monachus* NT
1 Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 38 **Short-toed Snake Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus*
1 Topar Lakes 3.5.
- 39 **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Clanga clanga* NT
2 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 40 **Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis* EN
1 Kanshengel 4.5, 2 Kanshengel 5.5, 1 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 41 **Golden Eagle** *Aquila chrysaetos daphanea*
1 ad lower parts of road to Tien Shan 7.5.
- 42 **Shikra** *Accipiter badius cenchroides*
3+2 Topar Lakes 4.5, 1 W Kanshengel 4.5, 1 male Kanshengel 5.5.
- 43 **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus*
2 Korghalzyn 2.5, 1 Zhelturanga 3.5, 5 e.r. 4.5, 10 migrating 5.5, 1 Tien Shan 6.5.
- 44 **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*
Max 15 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 45 **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* NT
Max 60 Korghalzyn-Astana 1-2.5, 1 male Astana 8.5.
- 46 **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus*
Max 3 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 female Kanshengel 5.5.
- 47 **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans lineatus*
Seen on 6 days. Max 50 around Kanshengel 5.5.
- 48 **Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*
Max 15 Kanshengel-Topar 3-5.5.
- 49 **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*
Max 3 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 3 Topar 4.5.
- 50 **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*
Max 40 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, max 10 Topar 3-4.5.
- 51 **Demoiselle Crane** *Grus virgo*
6 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5, 45 Korghalzyn 2.5, 40 migrating Kanshengel 4.5, 50 migrating (in 2 flocks) Kanshengel-Wish tree 5.5.
- 52 **Common Crane** *Grus grus*
5 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 53 **Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*
2 Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 54 **Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*
Max 15 Topar 3-4.5, 4 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 55 **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*
3 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 56 **Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*

- Max 40 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 4 Topar 4.5.
- 57 **Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius curonicus*
Seen on 5 days.
- 58 **Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*
1 female Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 59 **Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*
Max 3 e.r. Astana 1-2.5.
- 60 **Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa* NT
Max 6 e.r. Astana 1-2.5.
- 61 **Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus*
12 migrating Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 62 **Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata* NT
1 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 63 **Spotted Redshank** *Tringa erythropus*
3 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 64 **Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*
Max 10 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 e.r. Almaty 5.5.
- 65 **Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*
Max 10 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 66 **Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
2 Korghalzyn 1.5, 1 e.r. Almaty 5.5.
- 67 **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*
Singles seen on 5 days.
- 68 **Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*
2 Topar Lakes 4.5.
- 69 **Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*
1 Korghalzyn 2.5, 5 Lake Sorbulak 5.5, 2 Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 70 **Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*
2 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 71 **Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*
150 Korghalzyn 1.5, 400 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 72 **Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*
8 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 73 **Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*
2 Korghalzyn 1.5, 10 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 74 **Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Seen on 6 days. Max 200 Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 75 **Pallas's Gull** *Ichthyiaetus ichthyiaetus*
25 Korghalzyn 1.5, 15 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 76 **Mew Gull** *Larus canus heinei*
Max 10 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 77 **Caspian Gull** *Larus cachinnans*
10 Topar 4.5, 20 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 78 **Lesser Black-backed Gull** *Larus fuscus barabensis*
50 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 5 Astana 8.5.
- 79 **Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia*
8 Korghalzyn 1.5, 4 Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 80 **Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*
3 Korghalzyn 1.5, 5 Topar 3-4.5, 100 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 81 **White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*
200 Korghalzyn 1.5, 1 Korghalzyn 2.5, 6 Almaty 3.5, 1 Topar 4.5, 20 Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 82 **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*
300 Korghalzyn 1.5, 40 Topar 4.5.
- 83 **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis arenarius*
3+1+2+3 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 84 **Rock Dove** *Columba livia*
Senn on 8 days.
- 85 **Yellow-eyed Pigeon** *Columba eversmanni* VU
2 Zhelturanga 3-4.5.

- 86 **Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*
Ssp. *palumbus*: 1 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5. Ssp. *casiotis*: 1 Almaty 3.5, 1 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 87 **European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*
2 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 88 **Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis meena*
6 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5, 1 Korghalzyn 2.5, max 20 Kanshengel 3-5.5.
- 89 **Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*
1 Almaty Airport 3.5.
- 90 **Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus optatus*
Seen on 6 days.
- 91 **Pallid Scops Owl** *Otus brucei brucei* HO
1 heard Zhelturanga 3.5.
- 92 **Eurasian Scops Owl** *Otus scops pulchellus* HO
1 heard Zhelturanga 3.5.
- 93 **Little Owl** *Athene noctua* HO
1 heard NNW Kanshengel 4.5.
- 94 **Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*
1 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 95 **Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*
5 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 96 **European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus sarudnyi* HO
3 heard Zhelturanga 3.5.
- 97 **European Roller** *Coracias garrulus*
6 e.r. 3.5, 5 Kanshengel 4.5, 2 Kanshengel 5.5, 3 e.r. 5.5.
- 98 **Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*
1 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 99 **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus persicus*
1 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 100 **European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*
12 e.r. 3.5, 40 Kanshengel 4.5, 10 Kanshengel-Almaty 5.5.
- 101 **Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*
Seen on 5 days. Max 10 Kanshengel 4-5.5.
- 102 **White-winged Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos leucopterus*
2 Zhelturanga 3.5, 1 Topar Lakes 4.5.
- 103 **Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*
1 Astana Park 8.6.
- 104 **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus tianschanicus* HO
1 heard drumming Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 105 **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*
Seen on 7 days. Max 60 Astana-Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 106 **Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus* **NT**
1 male 7.5 and 1 male + 1 female 8.5 Astana Airport.
- 107 **Merlin** *Falco columbarius*
1 (ssp *pallidus*) female Korghalzyn 1.5, 1 (ssp *lymani*) male Big Almaty Lake 7.5.
- 108 **Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*
1 Zhelturanga 3.5, 3 Topar Lakes 4.5, 1 Kanshengel 5.5, 3 lower parts of road to Tien Shan 7.5.
- 109 **Isabelline Shrike** *Larus isabellinus*
1 female Lake Sorbulak 5.5.
- 110 **Red-tailed Shrike** *Larus phoenicuroides*
Max 8 Kanshengel area 3-5.5, 1 Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 111 **Steppe Grey Shrike** *Larus pallidirostris*
Max 2 Kanshengel area 3-5.5.
- 112 **Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*
1 male Kanshengel 4.5, 2 males Kanshengel 5.5.
- 113 **Indian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus kundoo*
1 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 114 **Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica*
Seen on 8 days.
- 115 **Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

- 1 Below Big Almaty Lake 7.5.
- 116 Red-billed Chough** *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis*
2 Cosmo Station, Tien Shan 6.5, 15 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 117 Alpine Chough** *Pyrrhocorax graculus digitatus*
3 Cosmo Station, Tien Shan 6.5, 2 Observatory 7.5.
- 118 Western Jackdaw** *Coloeus monedula soemmerringii*
Seen on 6 days.
- 119 Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*
Seen on 7 days.
- 120 Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone orientalis*
10 daily at Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 121 Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*
Seen daily around Astana.
- 122 Brown-necked Raven** *Corvus ruficollis*
2 Kanshengel 4-5.5.
- 123 Northern Raven** *Corvus corax*
1 Topar Lakes 3.5.
- 124 Coal Tit** *Pariparus ater rufipectus*
Max 25 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 125 Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus songarus* HO
1 heard Tien Shan 7.5.
- 126 Azure Tit** *Cyanistes cyanus*
2 W Astana 1.5, 1 Zhelturanga 3.5, 2 Topar Lakes 4.5, 1 Astana Park 8.5.
- 127 Great Tit** *Parus major*
(ssp *turkestanicus*) 3 Zhelturanga 3.5, 4 Topar Lakes 4.5 (ssp ?) 5 Almaty 7.5, 1 Astana Park 8.5.
- 128 Eurasian Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*
1 male W Astana 1.5.
- 129 White-crowned Penduline Tit** *Remiz coronatus*
3 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 130 Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus russicus* HO
1 heard Topar Lakes 4.5.
- 131 White-winged Lark** *Alauda leucoptera*
Max 8 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 1 S Kanshengel 4.5, 1 S Kanshengel 5.5.
- 132 Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*
C. 300 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 133 Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*
Max 15 daily Kanshengel area (mostly NW) 3-5.5.
- 134 Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis*
10 Kanshengel area 4.5, 1 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 135 Bimaculated Lark** *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata*
15 Kanshengel area 4.5, 1 E Kanshengel 5.5.
- 136 Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*
10 e.r. 3.5, 300 Kanshengel area 4.5, 10 e.r. 5.5.
- 137 Black Lark** *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*
100 daily Korghalzyn area 1-2.5.
- 138 Lesser Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala rufescens heinei*
1 S Kanshengel 4.5.
- 139 Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*
Seen on 5 days.
- 140 Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*
Seen on 5 days.
- 141 Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*
5 Kanshengel 4-5.5, 5 Big Almaty Lake 6.5.
- 142 Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti albiventris*
Max 3 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 10 Topar Lakes 4.5, 1 Almaty 5.5.
- 143 White-browed Tit-Warbler** *Leptopoecile sophiae sophiae*
1 male Tien Shan 6.5.
- 144 Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*
15 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5, 2 e.r. Astana 2.5, 1 Kanshengel 4.5.

- 145 Common Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*
Max 40 Astana-Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 6 Kanshengel 3.5, 30 Kanshengel area 4-5.5, max 4 Tien Shan 5-7.5, 4 Astana Park 8.5.
- 146 Sulphur-bellied Warbler** *Phylloscopus griseolus*
1 Tien Shan 6.5.
- 147 Hume's Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei*
Common in the south, max 80 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 148 Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*
4 Topar-Kanshengel 4.5, 3 Kanshengel area 5.5, 1 Astana Park 8.5.
- 149 Clamorous Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*
1 Kanshengel 3.5.
- 150 Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*
4 Topar Lakes 4.5, 3 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 151 Eurasian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus*
1 Kanshengel 4.5.
- 152 Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata*
1 Astana Park 8.5.
- 153 Syke's Warbler** *Iduna rama*
1 Kanshengel 3.5, 6 Zhelturanga-Kanshengel 4.5, 6 Kanshengel area 5.5.
- 154 Common Grasshopper Warbler** *Locustella naevia straminea*
1 Korghalzyn 2.5, 1 heard Topar Lakes 4.5, 1 heard Taukum 5.5.
- 155 Barred Warbler** *Sylvia nisoria merzbarcheri*
1 Kanshengel 3.5, 3 Kanshengel 4.5, 2 Kanshengel 5.5, 2 Wish tree 5.5.
- 156 Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*
(Ssp *curruca*) max 6 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, IOC doesn't acknowledge '*blythi*'. Many Lesser Whitethroats in Kanshengel and Taukum area. A few being rattling sandy-coloured ssp *halimodendri*. Max 60 4.5.
- 157 Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*
10 below Big Almaty Lake 7.5.
- 158 Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes tianschanicus*
Max 5 below Big Almaty Lake 6-7.5.
- 159 Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis*
Seen on 4 days in the south, max 10 Almaty and e.r. 3.5.
- 160 Rosy Starling** *Pastor roseus*
Seen on 3 days. Max 4000(!) Kanshengel area/Taukum 5.5.
- 161 Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris poltaratskyi*
Max 25 Korghalzyn 1-2.5, 20 Topar Lakes 4.5.
- 162 Common Blackbird** *Turdus merula*
1 Almaty 3.5.
- 163 Fieldfare** *Turdus pilaris*
10 Astana Park 8.5.
- 164 Mistle Thrush** *Turdus viscivorus bonapartei*
Max 20 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 165 Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*
2 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5, 20-40 daily Kanshengel 3-5.5.
- 166 Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica pallidogularis*
Max 20 Korghalzyn area 1-2.5, 1 female Taukum 4.5.
- 167 Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos golzii*
3 Kanshengel 3-5.5, 1 Wish tree 5.5.
- 168 White-tailed Rubythroat** *Calliope pectoralis ballioni*
2 males Tien Shan 6.5.
- 169 Eversmann's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythronotus*
Max 8 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 170 Blue-capped Redstart** *Phoenicurus coeruleocephala*
2 males + 1 female below Big Almaty Lake 7.5.
- 171 Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus phoenicurus*
Seen on 6 days, migrating birds. Max 20 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 172 Gldenstdt's Redstart** *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus grandis*
2 pairs Cosmo station, Tien Shan 6.5.
- 173 Common Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis*

- 1 male Observatory, Tien Shan 5.5.
- 174 Whinchat** *Saxicola rubetra*
1 male e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5.
- 175 Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus maurus*
20 e.r. Korghalzyn 1.5, 6 e.r. Astana 2.5, 5 Kanshengel area 4.5, 2 Kanshengel 5.5.
- 176 Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*
50 daily Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 177 Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*
Max 50 Kanshengel area 3-5.5.
- 178 Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*
1 male W Korghalzyn 2.5, 4 Topar-Kanshengel 4.5, 5 Kanshengel area-Wish tree 5.5.
- 179 Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii tenuirostris*
1 Tien Shan 5.5, 1+2 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 180 Saxaul Sparrow** *Passer ammodendri nigricans*
2 Zhelturanga cemetery 4.5.
- 181 House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*
Seen on 5 days. (Ssp *bactrianus*) Max 8 Kanshengel 4-5.5.
- 182 Spanish Sparrow** *Passer hispaniolensis transcaspicus*
1 male Kanshengel 4.5, 2 Wish tree 5.5.
- 183 Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*
Seen on 4 days.
- 184 Altai Accentor** *Prunella himalayana*
8 below Cosmo station, Tien Shan 6.5.
- 185 Brown Accentor** *Prunella fulvescens fulvescens*
4 below Cosmo station, Tien Shan 6.5.
- 186 Black-throated Accentor** *Prunella atrogularis huttoni*
Max 10 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 187 Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*
(Ssp *beema*) Max 200 Korghalzyn area 1-2.5. (Ssp *feldegg*) 5 E Kanshengel 5.5. (Ssp *thunbergi*) 10 E Kanshengel 5.5. Max 100 ssp Kanshengel 3.5.
- 188 Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola citreola*
1 2cy male W Korghalzyn 2.5.
- 189 Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea cinerea*
Max 20 Kanshengel 3-5.5, 10 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 190 White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*
(Ssp *alba*) Seen on 4 days, mainly in the north. (Ssp *personata*) Seen on 4 days in the south. Max 10 Kanshengel 4-5.5.
- 191 Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*
Max 25 Korghalzyn 1-2.5.
- 192 Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis haringtoni*
Max 4 Kanshengel 4-5.5, 10 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 193 Water Pipit** *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni*
Max 25 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 194 Common Chaffinch** *Fringilla coelebs coelebs*
1 Almaty 3.5, 1 female Kanshengel 3-4.5.
- 195 White-winged Grosbeak** *Mycerobas camipes merzbacheri*
Max 6 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 196 Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola altaica*
Max 20 Tien Shan 6-7.5.
- 197 Brandt's Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte brandti brandti*
1+1 Tien Shan 6.5.
- 198 Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*
1 Topar 4.5, 3 Kanshengel 4.5, 7 Kanshengel 5.5, 1 Tien Shan 7.5.
- 199 Red-mantled Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rhodochlamys*
1 pair above Observatory 6.5.
- 200 Red Crossbill** *Loxia curvirostra tianshanica*
1 heard Big Almaty Lake 5.5, 4 below Big Almaty Lake 7.5.
- 201 European Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis caniceps*
10 Big Almaty Lake 6.5, 15 below Big Almaty Lake 7.5.

- 202 Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus*
Max 15 Tien Shan 5-7.5.
- 203 Grey-necked Bunting** *Emberiza buchanani neoobscura*
1 male Kanshengel 4.5.
- 204 Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*
Max 12 Kanshengel area 3-5.5.
- 205 Red-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps*
Max 15 Kanshengel area 3-5.5.
- 206 Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus pallidior*
2 W Astana 1.5.

Comments on some other birds NOT seen

<i>Macqueen's Bustard</i>	Kanshengel area, NW, probably where to Taukum desert border the steppes.
<i>Little Bustard</i>	Korghalzyn area.
<i>Sociable Lapwing</i>	Korghalzyn area.
<i>Caspian Plover</i>	Kanshengel area, increasingly difficult.
<i>Black-winged Pratincole</i>	Breeds in large numbers in Korghalzyn. We never reached the right lakes.
<i>Pallas's Sandgrouse</i>	Sometimes around Kanshengel, seems more reliable in Charyn area, E Almaty.
<i>Pander's Ground Jay</i>	Korai area, NNE Topar, needs time, too far driving on our short itinerary.
<i>Black-headed Penduline Tit</i>	Rarely around Topar.
<i>Pale Martin</i>	E Almaty.
<i>Western Yellow Wagtail</i> (ssp <i>leucocephala</i>)	Migrates through Kanshengel area.
<i>Pine Bunting</i>	Astana area.

Additional record & trip shots



White-winged Lark, female, Korghalzyn (MG).



White-winged Lark, male, Korghalzyn (CW).



Try to find the Ibisbill... Big Almaty Lake (MG).



Bimaculated Lark, South of Kanshengel (CW).



Scanning for Sociable Lapwings, Korghalzyn (MG).



Paddyfield Warbler, Topar reed-beds (MG).



Azure Tit, close to Astana, e.r. Korghalzyn (CW).



Adult Himalayan Vulture, Big Almaty Lake (CW).



Range-restricted and distinct ssp caniceps of European Goldfinch, Tien Shan (MG).



Red-tailed Shrike, male, Taukum Desert, N Kanshengel (MG).



Isabelline Shrike, female, Lake Sorbulak (MG).



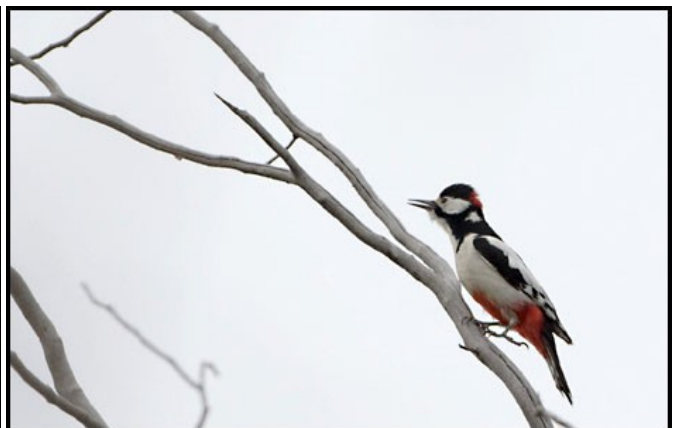
Singing Syke's Warbler, showing classic acro-look with pale long bill, and slightly hanging wings, Kanshengel (CW).



Amazing migrant trap – Kanshengel, heavy rainfalls didn't make situation worse... (MG).



Yellow-eyed Pigeon, Zhelturanga forest (MG).



Range-restricted White-winged Woodpecker, Topar Lakes (CW).



The run-down Tien Shan Astronomical Observatory, spectacular surroundings (MG).



Rapidly declining and therefore red-listed as Endangered, Steppe Eagle, Kanshengel (MG).



Güldenstädt's Redstart, male, one of the best redstarts, acclimated to high altitudes. Cosmo Station (MG).



Saxaul Sparrow, male, at stake-out, at Zhelturanga cemetery (CW).



Red-mantled Rosefinch, male, above the Tien Shan Observatory (CW).



Steppe Grey Shrike, South of Kanshengel (MG).