

## Steppe and saxaul, sandgrouse and snowcock

### A kazakh birding adventure

June 2024

**Arrival:** Astana

**Departure:** Almaty

**Duration:** 15 days, 14 nights

**Period:** 3-17 June 2024

**Day 1-2-3. The steppes of Korgalzhyn.** The first part of the trip focuses on the Korgalzhyn area where grassy steppes are interspaced with numerous shallow lakes. It is a fascinating landscape that hosts many typical (and desirable!) steppe species such as Sociable Lapwing (the one and only), Greater Flamingo, Black Lark, White-winged Lark, Black-winged Pratincole, Pallas's Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, demoiselle crane, steppe eagle, Red-footed Falcon and pallid harrier. On the last day in the afternoon, we take a flight to Almaty.



**Day 4-5. The desert-steppes of Kanshengel.** Upon leaving Almaty, we take on a series of large lakes and canals, a great place for pelican colonies (Dalmatian and great white), vast numbers of waterfowl and waders (if during migration) as well as a small pond where white-headed ducks nest. The desert itself is then home to fascinating species like MacQueen's bustard and Caspian plover, many species of larks (calandra and bimaculated amongst them), black-bellied and Pallas sandgrouse. Migrating passerines are a possibility and we'll hope for desert finch and imperial eagle.

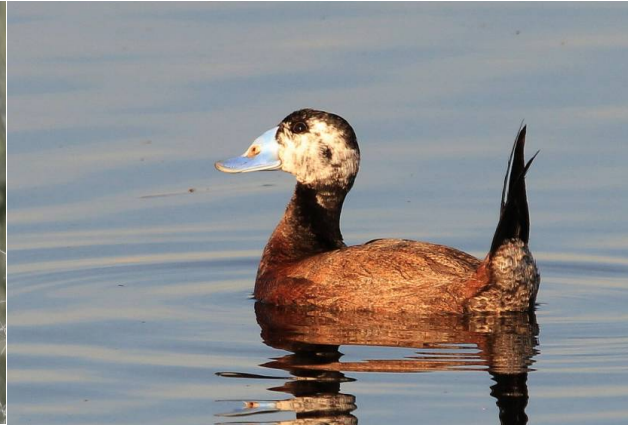


**Day 6. The Ili River delta and surrounding deserts.** As we cross the Taukum desert, we will be searching for the likes of Asian desert warbler, ‘steppe’ grey shrike, Syke’s warbler and rufous-tailed scrub-robin. The main reason to visit the delta is the unique species that inhabit it. We will aim for yellow-eyed pigeon, saxaul sparrow, white-winged woodpecker, Turkestan tit, shikra and more. Little bustards are a possibility and we should see the Pallid scops-owl at night.



**\*\*\* The Pander desert extension.**

We offer a 1-day/1 nights extension on the main tour where we drive much further into the delta. The main reason to do this is the famous Pander ground-jay; we will camp one night in the desert while we search for it. We also use this opportunity to get right into the delta, hoping for pygmy cormorant, purple heron, another chance for white-headed duck, savi’s warbler, paddyfield and great reed warbler, white-tailed eagle, etc.



**Day 7-8-9. Sogety plains and Charyn plateau.** The first day is a long transfer from the Ili delta to the South-Eastern corner of Kazakhstan. Depending on the weather, we will then prioritise between the lower, rocky deserts and canyons (the famous Charyn canyon is located here) and the higher, greener pastures. The former holds steppe eagle, lesser kestrel, Desert wheatear, grey-necked, meadow and especially white-capped buntings, with another chance at very close encounters with Pallas sandgrouse. The latter has Himalayan griffon, pine buntings, Richard's pipit and usually demoiselle cranes.





**Day 10-11-12. Big Almaty Lake.** We finally escape the heat to explore the mountains South of Almaty. Most of it has to be done on foot, with a variety of hikes to suit different physical capacities. We target high-altitude species such as Himalayan snowcock, altai and brown accenter, Guldenstadt's redstart and plain mountain-finch, with both red-billed and Alpine chouch present. Mid-altitude walks should then allow us to see red-mantled rosefinch, white-browed tit-warbler, Eversman's and blue-capped redstart, sulphur-bellied, Hume's and greenish warbler, Songar tit, red-fronted serin and the famous ibisbill. Lammergeier is a possibility.



**Day 13. Around Almaty. Around Almaty.** In this final day, we make sure that we get all the mountain species that we desired before moving to other birding areas around Almaty. As we leave the mountain, another short walk gives wonderful, up-close views of brown dipper, blue whistling-thrush and grey wagtail. Afterwards, we visit yet another national park looking for

meadow bunting and hopefully short-toed eagle. On our way back, a residential area should yield long-tailed shrike. We will finish the day at a local pond for clamorous reed warblers before our final meal.

#### **Day 14. Departure**

##### **Important information**

- People are responsible for their own health insurance. We will do our best to be within reasonable distance to a hospital should something happen, but visitors have to understand that some of the locations we will visit are very remote and will involve long journeys in cars.
- While this tour does not involve sustained physical activities, some walking may be done (we will have alternatives for anyone who can't/do not want to do this).
- Temperature can and will vary. It could get hot in Kazakhstan's deserts, but also very cold in the mountains. Visitors should bring both protection against the sun and warm clothing, including gloves, hats, warm socks, etc. We will provide what is required for the nights (bedding, sleeping bags if required).
- This trip reaches the altitude of 3350m at the Kosmostation. While we will adapt if this proves challenging, visitors should be well aware of it.
- While the itinerary is set, we retain the right to make changes, especially regarding the weather: we may bring forward or postpone our visits to high-mountain areas to coincide with good weather forecasts.