

Heart of the Tian-Shan

Birding Kyrgyzstan

1-15 July 2024

Arrival: Osh

Departure: Bishkek

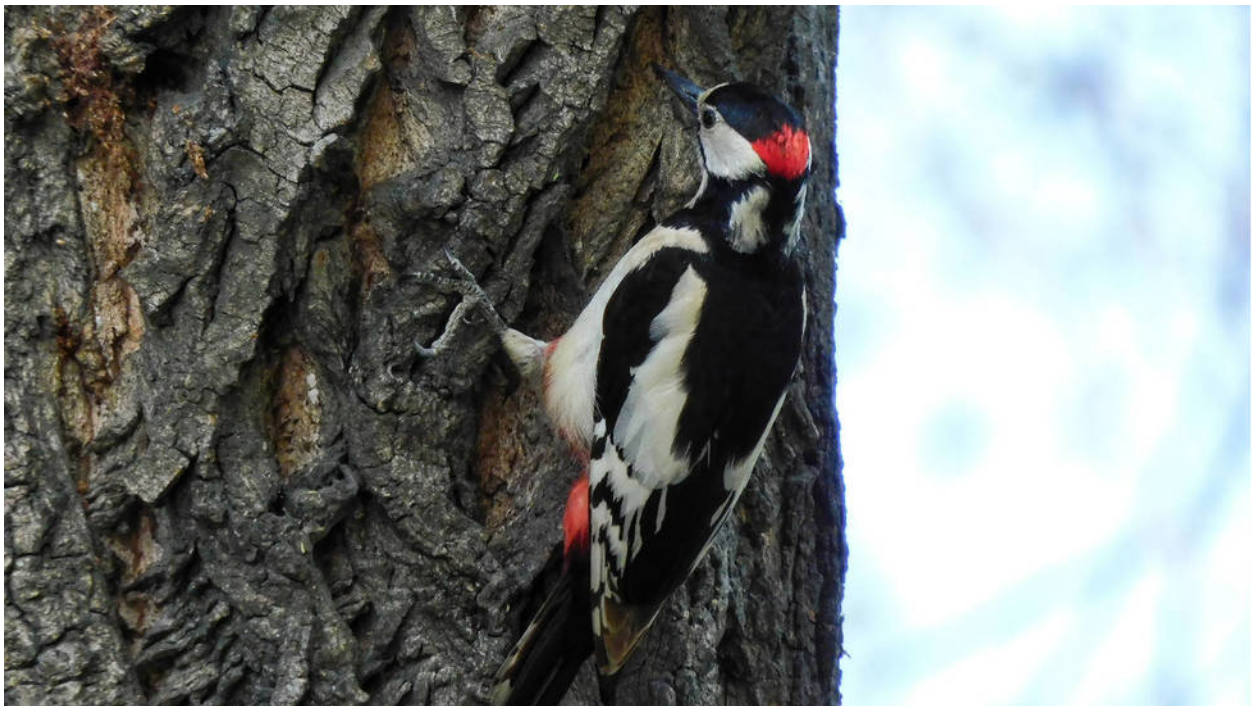
Duration: 15 days, 14 nights

Period: 1-15 July 2024

Day 1-2-3. Southern canyons and badlands. Our trip begins in Osh in the large Ferghana valley, from where we will explore the rarely-visited canyons, rivers and forests of the South of Kyrgyzstan. The area is as beautiful as its full of birdlife. Expect white-throated robin, Eastern Orphean warbler, variable wheatear, white-capped redstart, Blyth's rosefinch, white-capped bunting, Indian oriole, Hume's whitethroat, blue rock-thrush and many vultures (griffon, Egyptian and black). Long-tailed shrike possible. We should get our first rufous-naped tit too and we will have chances of desert finch.



Day 4-5. Arslanbob's walnut forest. We are then moving to the world's largest walnut forest around Arslanbob. This is a stunning area of relict forest, snow-capped peaks and traditional villages; indeed, we can expect the best food of the trip here. In term of birds, the forest should allow us to see white-winged woodpecker, Turkestan, azure (yellow-breasted) and rufous-naped tits, bar-tailed tree creeper, little fork-tail and, with luck, the *Tianshanicus* subspecies of the stock dove and the *Harmsi* subspecies of the tawny owl. As we move up, the landscape and wildlife will transit to juniper forests with blue-capped redstart, sulphur-bellied warbler and white-winged grosbeak.



Day 6. The Naryn river riparian forests and cliffs. We have to get to Kazarman today. On the way, we have our last chance for forest species we may have missed. If the new tunnel is finished (it has been promised since 2017, so we have our doubts), this would be an easy day. Otherwise, we will take the high-pass with our first chance of white-winged snowfinch. Our main target in the area are the riparian forests of the Naryn river, which could yield white-crowned penduline-tit, paddyfield warbler, bluethroat, common rosefinch and more. The towering cliffs in the area also host Eastern rock nuthatch, rock sparrow and up to five species of vultures (Egyptian and lammergeier being the hardest to spot).



Day 7-8. Lake Chatyr-Kul. We have two days to get to high-altitude lake Chatyr-Kul (3530m), which should be a highlight of this trip. It is almost never visited and requires an effort of time (and bureaucratie) to visit, but it is well-worth it. This is Kyrgyzstan's last breeding colony of barred geese and the short vegetations that surrounds the lake is used by Mongolian plovers and shore larks to breed. It is also a waterfowl and, in migration, a wader paradise. Expect large number of birds and, with luck, a barbary, or even saker, falcon may fly over. Because of the altitude, we won't stay at the lake, but by the historical caravanserai of Tash-Rabat in a neighbouring valley. Guldenstadt's redstart, plain mountain finch, Altai accentor and white-winged snowfinch breed in the area, as does the great rosefinch... but no promise!





Day 9-10. South-West Issyk-Kul badlands. After Chatyr-Kul, we descend to lake Issyk-Kul (the word sea feels more accurate), where we enjoy two days of birding looking for black-bellied and, maybe, Pallas sandgrouse, grey-necked bunting, chukar partridge, Mongolian finch, pale sand martin, Sykes' warbler, black redstart (the Eastern *phoenicuroides* subspecies) and more. This is also our first chance for the famous ibisbill, as well as both white-throated and brown dipper.



Day 11-12-13. Mountains and valleys of Eastern Kyrgyzstan. This last part of the trip is centered around the city of Karakol, a former Russian imperial frontier post, on the eastern edge of the lake Issyk Kul and nestled in the feet of the Tian Shan mountains. This is where we become serious about the mountains. We will visit various altitudes and valleys, with high mountains a priority. We should get Himalayan snowcock (this is a heavily hunted species and

close-up views are rare), Altai, brown and black-throated accentors, hill pigeon, plain mountain-finch (we will do our best to find the much more difficult black-headed mountain finch too), Guldenstadt's, Eversman's, blue-capped and black redstarts, Himalayan rubythroat, sulphur-bellied, Hume's and greenish warblers, white-browed tit-warbler and the stunning red-mantled rosetfinch. Golden eagles and Himalayan griffon will fly overhead, while pine bunting, nutcrackers and Songar tit (subspecies of the willow) will be searched for at a lower altitude. We will also explore the shores of the lake itself for Kentish plover, pied avocet, Northern lapwing, citrine wagtail, Pallas grasshopper warbler. Red-breasted merganser breeds here in very small numbers.

On the way back to Bishkek, we will take the time to visit a historic petroglyph site near Cholpon-Ata.



Day 14. Around Bishkek. Before flying home, we take in the best of Kyrgyzstan's cultivated steppes. They are home to totally different bird species such as Calandra lark, shikra, glossy ibis, common rock thrush, long-legged buzzard, common pheasants (*Mongolicus* subspecies), Spanish sparrow, lesser grey shrike and others. This landscape is inhabited by little bustards and we will be listening for their calls towards the evening. Different irrigation ponds can also host terns (common, black and little), black-winged stilt, collared pratincole (not every year), common snipe, etc.



Day 15. Flight home

* An additional day could be had from Bishkek before the flight, for a very nice walk in Ala-Archa national park. While it does not add species to our list, it adds another opportunity to see the mountain ones that may have evaded us, in a wonderful setting. On the way down, we can either try to see eagle-owls leaving their roost or aim for a city park where little bittern breeds.

- 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 will be hot in the South of Kyrgyzstan, but also very cold in the mountains of Kyrgyzstan. The two nights around Chatyr Kul are above 3000m and it could be cold

around, even in July. 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 3860m at the pass of Chong Ashuu. 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.