

# Western Palearctic birding in Western Kazakhstan

23.-31. May 2017

by Helmut Schaffer & Michael Dvorak

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Although Kazakhstan has been a popular travel destination for birdwatchers for the past three decades, almost all trips to date have focused on the east of the country. The west of the country with the two provinces (regions) Atyrau and West Kazakhstan, on the other hand, was largely unknown and undeveloped from an ornithological point of view, at least as far as we western/central European birdwatchers are concerned.

Nevertheless, this part of the country has a particular relevance for us Europeans, as the Ural River forms the (admittedly arbitrary) border between Europe and Asia in this area.

The western half of the two regions is therefore part of Europe and is dealt with in the second Atlas of European Breeding Birds (EBBA2) published in December 2020. T. Brandt and B. Scheel carried out a first “pioneer trip” in June 2005 and reported about it in the German magazine “Der Falke” (53, 2006: 144-149). Since many birders developed an interest in western Palearctic listing during the last two decades with an increased popularity when these lists finally found a “home” on [www.netfugl.dk](http://www.netfugl.dk), West Kazakhstan appeared firmly on the radar of the more serious WP-birders/listers.

The first birders visiting Western Kazakhstan were Pierre-André Crochet and Eric Didner in June 2014, followed by Finnish and Swedish/French teams in 2015 and 2016, at least five trips in 2017 and one each in 2018 and 2019. Target species were primarily Red-headed Bunting, White-winged Lark, Black Lark and Steppe Grey Shrike, which, as it

turned out, were relatively easy to find in the area. In June 2016, a breeding pair of Long-tailed Shrike was discovered, demonstrating the area's potential.

After two trips to the Ural Mountains in Russia, Western Kazakhstan was finally on the travel agenda of a small group of Austrian and German WP-Birders in spring 2017. As it soon became apparent that there was great interest in such a tour, a larger group quickly came together and set off for Atyrau, the largest city in the region on the Caspian Sea, at the end of May 2017.

### **Logistics**

The trip was organized by Yekaterina (Katya) Dotsenko (yekaterina.dotsenko@gmail.com), who is from Kazakhstan and was living in Almaty at the time of the trip. The practical implementation of the tour was in the hands of ACBK-Tours, an agency that is part of the ACBHK (= Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan) and organizes ornithological and general natural history trips (<http://www.acbk.kz/#tours-wgt>). Our trip to Western Kazakhstan was the first ornithological tour that ACBK-Tours conducted in this part of the country.

### **Guides**

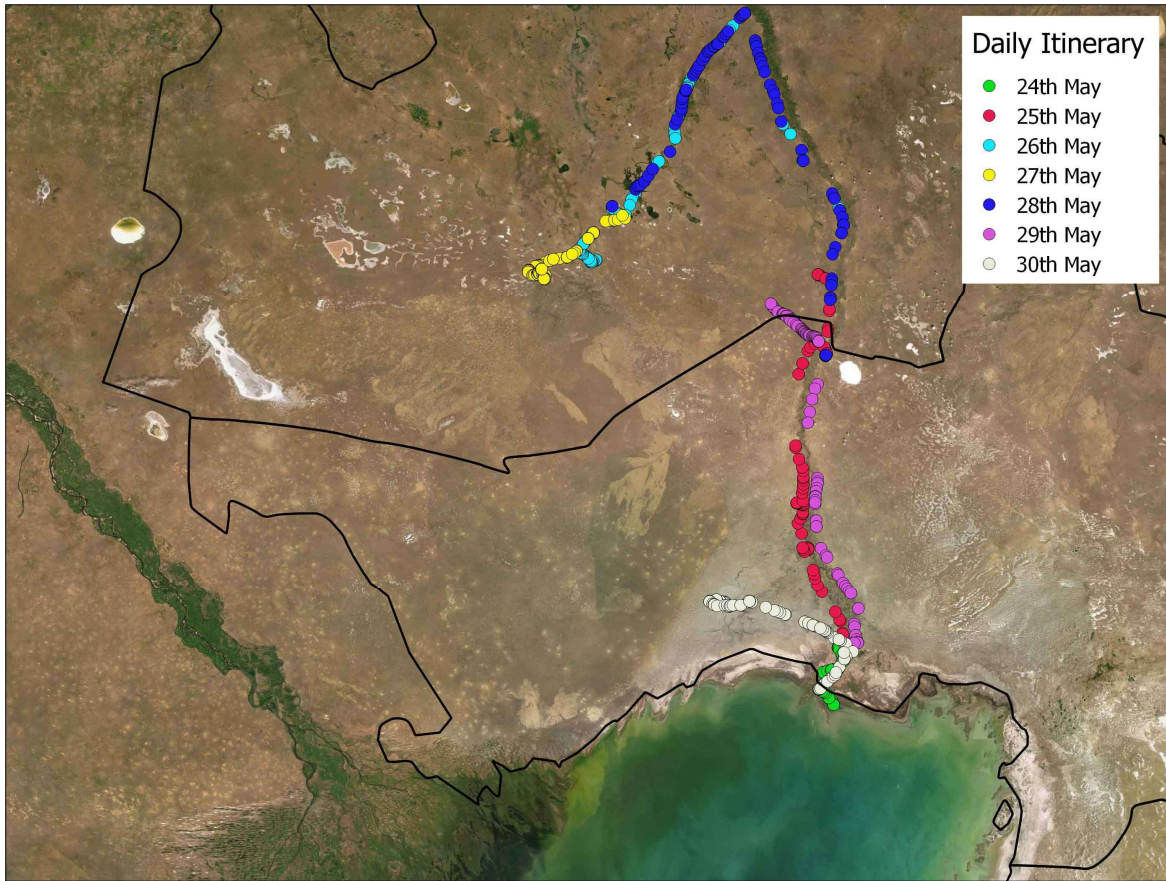
The package included a driver (Gumirkan aka our „Obelix), a local guide (Aleksander), a representative from ACBK-Tours (Ainur) and an interpreter (Bagdad) who accompanied us throughout the trip. Boris Herrera, Katya's husband from Ecuador, was also with us during the whole trip. Since there were only very experienced birdwatchers in our group who are well acquainted with the birdlife of the Western Palearctic, we could easily do the trip without a special birding guide.

### **Transport**

ACBK-Tours used their own, modern Mercedes Sprinter bus for this tour, which was brought from Astana to Atyrau by the driver, a distance of 2,100 kilometres and 29 hours of driving time!

### **Overnight stays**

We spent the first and the last two nights of the trip in the city of Atyrau in the Grand Hotel Atyrau. It is a luxurious hotel even by Western standards, but the price for a single room was only 37 euros (!) in May 2017. We spent the second and fifth night in the village of Inderbor in Gostinitza "Aksay", which is probably the only accommodation option in this small town. The rooms here were very simple but adequate, and the meals plentiful. We spent the third and fourth nights in tents on the shores of Lake Sokol near the small town of Zhanaqala. ACBK-Tours had procured new tents especially for the tour, the sumptuous meals prepared by two cooks from the area were eaten in a large yurt. When out in the field, lunch always consisted of a picnic prepared by the employees of ACBK Tours.



### Itinerary

May 23.: 18: 10-21: 45 Flight Vienna-Moscow

May 24: 01: 05-05: 40 Flight Moscow-Atyrau, Atyrau to Ural Delta and surroundings

May 25: Atyrau-Inderbor by car

May 26: Inderbor-Shapai-Zhanaquala

May 27: Surroundings of Zhanaquala

May 28: Zhanaquala- Inderbor

May 29: Surroundings of Inderbor-Atyrau

May 30: Steppe northwest of Atyrau

May 31: 06: 50-7: 30 flight Atyrau-Moscow, 09: 20-11: 05 Moscow-Vienna

The route we chose was based on the known or suspected occurrences of the target species of most of the participants: **Sykes Warbler**, **Red-headed Bunting**, **Black Lark**, **White-winged Lark** and **Caspian Plover**. Some participants also had additional species on their wish lists, like Demoiselle Crane. From Atyrau we visited the delta of the Ural River on the first day, at the edges we found our first two targets (**Sykes Warbler**, **Red-headed Bunting**) without any problems. Then we went north in the direction of the city of Inderbor. **White-winged Lark** turned out to be a widespread breeding bird in the steppe areas immediately adjacent to the road. We spent the next three days in the interior of the province of Western Kazakhstan near the small town of Zhanaquala. Here

Aleksander led us to a breeding area of Black Lark. On the penultimate day of the trip, another (larger) breeding site of Black Larks was visited in the steppe west of Inderbor. On the last day we went to an area of particularly sparse steppe northwest of the city of Atyrau to a breeding area of Caspian Plover after a tip from Belgian birders Vincent Legrand and David Monticelli, who saw the birds there the day before.

## Literature

The literature on the bird life of Western Kazakhstan is extremely sparse. In 2006, the German magazine „Der Falke“ published a report on a tour to western Kazakhstan in June 2005 carried out with the author's own car ! (PDF available from the authors of this report): Brandt, T. (2006): West Kasachstan. Falke 53: 144-149.

A species list is available from this trip:

[https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/BRANDT\\_Kazakhstan\\_0607\\_2005.pdf](https://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/BRANDT_Kazakhstan_0607_2005.pdf)

Three reports have been written so far of the trips made by Birding Groups looking for western palearctic target species between 2014 and 2019:

Janne Aalto, June 2017 (independent)

<http://www.caligata.com/tripreports/en/lansi-kazakstan-7-13-6-2017>

Trip report June 2017 by Bob Swann (trip with Birdfinders)

<http://www.birdfinders.co.uk/pdf/kazakhstan-northwest-2017.pdf>

Short trip report June 2017 Dominic Mitchell (same trip with Birdfinders)

<https://www.birdguides.com/articles/travel/extreme-kazakhstan/>

Long-tailed Shrike in Atyrau <https://www.birdguides.com/articles/long-tailed-shrike-breeds-in-western-palearctic-for-first-time/>

## Detailed Itinerary

### Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Night flight with Aeroflot from Vienna to Moscow and after a three-and-a-half hour wait, we take an onward flight from Moscow to Atyrau.

### Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Just before six o'clock the plane lands at dawn in Atyrau. We are welcomed by Boris, our translator Bagdad, our driver Obelix/Gumirkan and our spacious bus; **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Red-backed Shrike** are the first species seen at the airport parking lot. We immediately start the journey to the Ural Delta south of the city, about 35 kilometres from the airport. During the drive we see plenty of **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Eurasian Hoopoe**, **European Roller**, **European Bee-eater**, **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**, **Lesser Grey Shrike** as well as our first **Pallas Gulls** in fine full breeding plumage.

After about an hour's drive, we come to a ranger station on the edge of the reed belt, where three boats including local guides are already waiting for us. Parts of the area are protected which is why we need an entry permit and some formalities that take some time to complete. We use the time to look around in the vicinity, where in the reeds and bushes we find **Great Reed warbler**, **Paddyfield Warbler**, **Bearded Tit**, **Cetti's Warbler**, **Penduline Tit** and **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**. Part of the group is lucky enough to spot a **Black-headed Penduline Tit**. This taxon (sometimes split as a species) was not expected by us to occur here, but as we later discover is described in the literature as a breeding bird of the Ural Delta. But we painfully realize that we are currently on the east bank of the Ural River and the sighting does not count for our WP lists ...



*Pallas's Gull. Ural Delta, May 24, 2017.*

After a long wait, we finally start and drive south along a long canal 12 km deeper into the delta. The number and variety of species we see here in a short period of time is remarkable: **Great White Heron**, **Purple Heron** and **Night Heron**, **Great Cormorant**

and **Pygmy Cormorant**, **Glossy Ibis** and **Eurasian Spoonbill**, **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Mute Swan**, **Mallard** and **Red-crested Pochard**, **Caspian** and **Common Terns**, **Caspian Gull** and **Western Marsh Harrier** are all seen often, but the highlight are the numerous Pallas`s Gulls in full breeding plumage that constantly fly around us at close range or sit in front of the boat on the water and are the favourite objects of the photographers.



*Male Red-headed Bunting, southwest of Atyrau, May 24, 2017.*

After almost three hours we are back on the mainland and the serious WP-Birders of the group are already looking forward to the drive to the right bank of the Urals, which will finally bring us to the Western Palearctic and thus provide us with our first WP-ticks. So it goes back through the suburbs then again to the outskirts of Atyrau and to the nearest bridge and then back to the southwest along a tributary of the Ural River. In the first suitable, somewhat bushy open land area, we stop and after a short time hear and see our first trip-target, a **Red-headed Bunting**. In the area we also see **Eurasian Hoopoes**, **Eurasian Bee-eaters**, **Eastern Olivaceous Warbler**, **Blyths Reed Warbler** (on migration) and **Willow Warblers**.

*Sykes's warbler, southwest of Atyrau, May 24, 2017.*



Just two kilometres further west along the course of the river Shirokyi (a tributary of the Ural River) there is another ranger post in a small tree plantation. Here we have lunch in the shade of a tree but right next to it there is a large stand of tamarisks in a dry river bed and immediately after eating we get WP-tick 2 with **Sykes Warbler**. After a short time we see one bird singing close and succeed in getting nice pictures. Altogether, at least three males are singing here, and there are several more **Red-headed Buntings** next to them. After this highlight, an unfortunately unsuccessful search for Black-headed Penduline Tit begins along the course of the river. We only see **Penduline Tits** of the brown-headed subspecies *caspia*, the **Blyth's Reed Warbler** and **Paddyfield Warbler** as well as **Lesser Grey Shrike** and **European Bee-eater**. A family of five **Long-eared Owls** on a day roost is a nice surprise.



*Penduline Tit of the subspecies caspia, southwest of Atyrau, May 24, 2017.*

In the late afternoon we try our luck in Atyrau's Victoria Park, where a pair of Long-tailed Shrikes successfully bred in 2016. However, we have to make do with **Red-backed Shrike**, **Spotted Flycatcher** and **Eurasian Hobby**. We spend the night in the very luxurious Atyrau Grand Hotel.

#### **Thursday, May 25th, 2017**

At dawn we begin the drive north on the road that runs along the west bank of the Ural River, i.e. within the Western Palearctic. For breakfast we stop at the small village of Zhalgansay on the river bank, where **European Bee-eaters** breed. We also see, among other species **Black Kite**, **European Hoopoe** and **Blyth's Reed Warbler**. 30 kilometres to the north we make a short detour along a canal into the steppe, where we encounter several flocks of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse**, **Ruddy Shelduck**, **Black-winged Pratincole**, **Lesser Short-toed Lark**, **Red-headed Bunting**, **Lesser Grey Shrike**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Grey Plover** and **Little Ringed Plover**. Then we continue north to the junction to Inderbor (180 km north of Atyrau), where a short stop at a petrol station brings our first sighting of **White winged Lark** (target species no. 3) in the

adjacent steppe, as well as **Pied Wheatear, Lesser Short-toed, Calandra and Crested Larks.**



*White-winged Lark, Bagyrlay  
May 25, 2017.  
(Photo Klaus Drissner).*

We have lunch on the banks of the Ural River across from Inderbor with **Little Tern, Common Tern and White-winged Tern, Rosy Starling, Paddyfield Warbler** and others. Then we drive another 25km north from the crossroads past the first **Steppe Eagle** and **Long-legged Buzzards**. At the village of Tompaq we turn back into the steppe bordering the main road and drive about 5 km to a promising spot on the Bagyrlay River, where we discover several **Little Bustards** and the common **White-winged Larks**. In addition to the steppe species that are now typical for us (including the first **Demoiselle Cranes**), we see a large number of **Black-winged Pratincoles** (probably a breeding colony) as well as various species of migrating and breeding water birds. In the evening we return to Inderbor, where we stay overnight in a local hotel (probably the only one in town).

*Black-winged Pratincole,  
Bagyrlay, May 25, 2017.*





## Friday, May 26th, 2017

In the morning we drive without a break from Inderbor to Shapai (201 km). At a gas station we take the turnoff to the southwest and drive towards the small town of Zhanaquala. Along the way we cross several larger wetlands, otherwise the route mainly leads through steppe areas. The most common bird of prey here is **Long-legged Buzzard**, but we also encounter several **Steppe Eagles**. In total, we see 50 bird species on the three-hour drive. In the late morning we arrive at Sorkol Lake, where a tent camp with a yurt as a "dining room" has been set up for us.



*Steppe Eagle, northeast of Zhanaquala, May 26, 2017.*

We don't stay long at the camp and drive about an hour to a small village called Muqir. To the east of this village is a significantly different looking feather grass steppe, to which our local guide Alexander leads us specifically and where after a short time we find target species no. 4, **Black Lark**! In total we see 48 species of birds in three hours in the steppe and in an adjacent larger wetland.

*Black Lark, Muqir, May 26, 2017.*



*Camp at Sorkol Lake, May 27, 2017.*



In the evening we return to the camp – the location of the yurt and the tents is really fantastic: behind us the steppe with numerous larks; **Calandra Lark** and **Short-toed Lark** are the two common species with a few **Eurasian Skylarks**. To the east below us lies the vast Sorkol Lake. In the evening it gets down to business, the vodka flows in large quantities.

### **Saturday, May 27th, 2021**

After successfully denying the multiple offers of the camp staff to more intensely take part in their serious vodka drinking, it is easy for us to get up very early. During breakfast, a **Eurasian Bittern** calls out from the reeds, a **Dalmatian Pelican** flows by and the **Calandra Larks** are already singing above us. On the way to Novaya Kazanka (=Zhanaqazan) we frequently stop near bridges and this proves worthwhile – near Leninskoye (Mästeksay) we see 18 bird species within 20 minutes, including **Eurasian Oystercatcher**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Stone Curlew** and a large breeding colony of **Common House Martin** under the bridge. There is also a large colony of **Yellow Ground Squirrel** right next to the bridge. On further short stops we discover, among other things, **Tawny Pipit**, **Blyth`s Reed Warbler**, **Red-headed Bunting**, **Long-legged Buzzard** and **Eurasian Curlew** and of course the ubiquitous **Hooded Crows**, **Isabelline Wheatears** and **Barn Swallows**. Finally we reach Aydin Lake north of Novaya Kazanka and in the following we experience the five most species-rich hours of the entire trip!

*Paddyfield Warbler,*  
*Novaya Kazanka, May 27,*  
*2017.*  
*Photo: Klaus Drissner.*



It starts as soon as we arrive with about 50 **Red-necked Phalaropes**, followed by **Great Cormorant**, **Glossy Ibis**, **Eurasian** and **Little Bitterns**, **Common Cranes** and **Dalmatian Pelicans**, a **Water Rail**, many **Mute Swans** and a single **Whooper Swan**, **Red-crested Pochard**, **Eurasian Teal**, **Gadwall**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Common Pochard** and **Mallard**, **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Little Stint**, **Curlew sandpiper**, **Ruff**, **Common Redshank** and **Wood Sandpiper**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Black-winged Stilt** and **Pied Avocet**, **Black-winged Pratincole**, **Grey Plover**, **Kentish Plover**, a **Pallas`s Gull**, **Common**, **Little**, **Black** and **White-winged Tern**, **European Roller**, **European** and **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**. Among songbirds we are surrounded by **Paddyfield** and **Great Reed Warblers**, **Red-headed Buntings** and **Common Rosefinch**. Nearby we find a pair of **Citrine Wagtails** and **Yellow Wagtails** of the *beema* subspecies with young. Finally, a **Little Owl** surprises us at a homestead and is easily photographed from the bus.

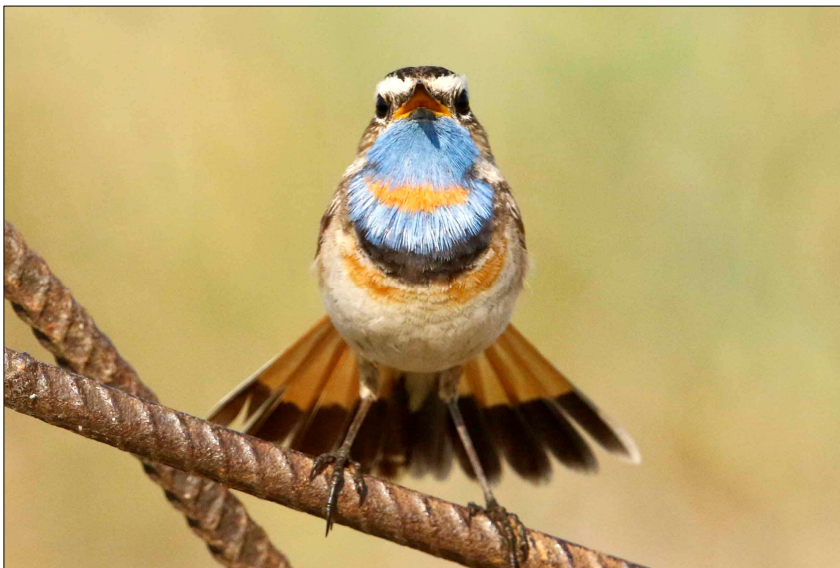
*Demoiselle Crane, south-*  
*west of Zhanaquala, May*  
*27, 2017.*



On the return drive, fully satisfied with all these sightings we meet a **Demoiselle Crane** close to the road and easily photographable. Back at the camp, we still have time before dinner to scan the lake for a few more birds: There are many **Common** and **Ruddy Shelducks**, as well as **Black-necked Grebes** and **Black Terns** around, but we also see a small group of passing **Little Terns** and a then a **Ruddy Turnstone** in a flock of **Little Stints** and **Curlew Sandpiper** as a first for the trip. Shortly before we all go into the dining yurt, we find two **Red-necked Grebes** far out on the lake. We end this very eventful day with a good, freshly prepared fish meal and one or the other beer or glass of cognac.

### **Sunday, May 28th, 2017**

As the last two days were very successful and we had practically seen everything we wanted, we decided to leave the camp and return to Inderbor. Concerning this short time change of plan, the tour operator proved to be extremely cooperative and flexible! Following breakfast and a last look at Sorkol Lake with **Curlew Sandpiper** and **Dunlin** we start our drive back to Inderbor. On the way back we stop several times before the big crossroads at Chapaev. The wetland south of Shimqudik is particularly productive. In addition to common waterbirds seen yesterday such as many **White-winged Terns**, we find three **Bluethroats** (of the orange-spotted subspecies *pallidogularis*) and a pair of **Citrine Wagtails**.



*Bluethroat, ssp.  
pallidogularis, northeast of  
Zhanaqala, May 28, 2017.*

The road southwest of Chapaev is particularly outstanding for birds of prey: There are several nests with young of **Steppe Eagle** and **Long-legged Buzzard** on low trees next to the road. **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, **Black Kite** as well as **Red-footed Falcon** and **Common Kestrel** can be observed frequently during today's trip. Stopping at Almaly about 10 km north of Taipaq, the adjacent steppe turns out to be a true paradise for larks. After a few steps into the grassland, many **White-winged Larks** are seen feeding in the grass as well as plenty of **Calandra Larks** and **Isabelline Wheatears** with young

fledglings. We think, amused, that only a few days ago we were nervously awaiting our first looks of the White winged Larks... A short while after starting our journey again we discover another **Demoiselle Crane**.



*Pied Wheatear, pair.  
Inderbor, May 28, 2017.  
Photo: Ernst Albegger.*

In the late afternoon we finally reach our hotel in Inderbor. **Common Starling** and **Northern Wheatear** are breeding under the desolate roofs of the hotel and the farm building, a **Blyth's Reed Warbler** sits in the bush next to the entrance door. Two particularly keen participants take a short walk a few hundred meters into the adjacent muddy wasteland on the southern outskirts of Inderbor Watch and find **Pied** and **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Rosy Starling**, **Tawny Pipit**, **Short-toed Lark** and even more **Red-headed Buntings**.

### **Monday, May 29th, 2017**

Since it rained several times during the night and a strong wind came up, part of the group decides to stay in the hotel and not to join the others on an excursion into the steppe northwest of Inderbor with two all-terrain vehicles from the Soviet era. However, this decision should turn out to be completely wrong, because those who take the adventure are fully rewarded: the bumpy ride first leads through an area with plenty of **Calandra**, **White-winged** and **Lesser Short-toed Larks** and we discover three **Steppe Grey Shrikes**, a group of **Twite**, one more pair of **Demoiselle Cranes**, two **European Nightjars** and a **Eurasian Hobby**. After a longer time of bumping in the middle of the steppe we reach a particular area of steppe grassland which is seemingly a very good Black Lark habitat. Despite the strong wind, we count at least eight **Black Larks** at this site.

*Soviet all terrain vehicles,  
northwest of Inderbor, May  
29, 2017.  
(Photo Gabi Drissner).*



*Black Lark, northwest of  
Inderbor, May 29, 2017.  
(Photo Klaus Drissner).*



On the way back to Inderbor, at the bridge over the Bagirlay, we find more **Black-winged Pratincoles**, **Little Terns**, and a **Sand Martin**-colony breeding in the banks of the river; the white in the wings of **White-winged Larks** flushing from the steppes is seen frequently until we reach the gas station on the A-28.

When we are finally all together again, we leave Inderbor for good and, due to the better road conditions, decide to take the P-103 south on the Asian side of the Ural river. The **Rook** breeding colonies on the route and a total of ten **European Rollers** were noteworthy.

Finally we reach Atyrau and in the center of the city south of the community center we take a walk on the bank of the Ural River. Hoping for **Black-headed Penduline Tit** we only find a pair of their brown-headed cousins (*caspius*), feeding **Black-headed**

**Wagtails, Great Reed, Reed and Blyth's Reed Warbler** and the only two **European Greenfinches** on the trip.

Afterwards we again settle into our very luxurious hotel which, despite the astonishingly moderate price, provides each of us with a medium-sized apartment of three rooms. After dinner we met Belgian birders Vincent Legrand and David Monticelli, who give us exact directions of a site for Caspian Plover they discovered. Ernst immediately starts working out a route for tomorrow.

## **Tuesday, May 30th, 2021**

The morning of the last day is devoted to the search for Caspian Plover. We drive west and with the help of the route drawn up the day before, Ernst leads us further and further into the steppe area west of Qarishiganaq. We see many species during short stops like **Bluethroat, European Roller, Black Kite, Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Hoopoe, European Bee-eater, Common Shelduck** with young, **Black-winged Pratincoles** as well as the ubiquitous **Isabelline Wheatear** and **Short-toed Lark**. When we finally leave the already bumpy track we very slowly drive over the roadless grassland towards the coordinates of our destination. When we finally arrive, we immediately get lucky after getting out of the bus and discover our first **Caspian Plover** in our spotting scopes! After this first bird, a female, we later find a male with a young bird at another site close by.



*Caspian Plover, northwest of Atyrau, May 30, 2017.*

Satisfied with this success, we wandere around the area on foot for a while and discover a pair of **Shore Larks** of the subspecies *brandti* with young birds, **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and two **Sykes's Warblers** perched on large rolls of wire rusting in the steppe.

*Steppe, northwest of Atyrau,  
May 30, 2017.  
(Photo Helmut  
Pfeifenberger).*



*Shore Lark, ssp. brandti,  
northwest of Atyrau,  
May 30, 2017.*



Back at the hotel, the group splits up and some decide to go back to the ranger station on the Asian side of the Ural Delta, which they visited on the day of arrival, to try again for the **Black-headed Penduline Tit**. Unfortunately we again don't succeed, but with many **Pallas`s Gulls**, several different herons, a lot of **Blue-cheeked** and **European Bee-eaters**, **Bearded Tits**, **Great-Reed Warbler**, **Cetti`s Warbler** and **Lesser Grey Shrike**, this last outing is a nice end to a wonderful week of birding. The last three of the more than 1400 entries made with the app "NaturList" are **Eurasian Tree** and **House Sparrows** and a pair of **Isabelline Wheatears**.



In the evening Boris invites us to a Kazakh restaurant, where we end this eventful week with a delicious dinner of fish accompanied by a plenty supply of beer.

### **Wednesday, May 31, 2021**

At 06:50 our flight goes back to Moscow, where the group parts ways. Most make way home, but Michael, Klaus and Gabi go to Ekatarinburg in Russia in the hope of finding Yellow-breasted Bunting there.

## Species list

A total of 150 bird species were observed on the trip. Nomenclature, english names and taxonomic sequence follows the IOC World Bird List Version 11.2 (<https://www.worldbirdnames.org>)

**Grey Partridge** *Perdix perdix*: 2 each flying on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Greylag Goose** *Anser anser*: 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and a total of 10 on the 28<sup>th</sup>, including a family group with 5 goslings.

**Mute Swan** *Cygnus olor*: in places numerous with over 50 at Lake Sorkol, over 40 northeast of Novaya Kazanka, only not observed on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*: a bird in its 2nd calendar year on the 27<sup>th</sup> northeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*: on the 26<sup>th</sup> 6 observations out of a total of 16 and on the 27<sup>th</sup> over 70 on Lake Sorkol and about 150 in the waters southeast of Novaya Kazanka. A pair on the 29<sup>th</sup> and a family group with 7 ducklings on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*: 3 observations out of a total of 5 on the 25<sup>th</sup>. On the 27<sup>th</sup>, often with over 16 at Lake Sorkol, over 20 northeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Garganey** *Spatula querquedula*: 2 each on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Northern Shoveler** *Spatula clypeata*: 1 on 26<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> on 27<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>th</sup> on 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Gadwall** *Mareca strepera*: from 25.-28. daily up to 4.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Mareca penelope*: 5 on the 27<sup>th</sup> at Sorkol Lake and 2 northeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*: 1 in the Ural Delta on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 1-2 daily from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*: 5 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and one male on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-crested pochard** *Netta rufina*: sporadic flying in the Ural Delta on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>. 7 on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 2 on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Very common on the 27<sup>th</sup> on Lake Sorkol and at least 130 in the waters southeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*: 4 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**European Nightjar** *Caprimulgus europaeus*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> in Inderborsk and 2 resting in the steppe scared off in daylight looking for larks on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Swift** *Apus apus*: observed daily except for the 27<sup>th</sup>. On the 27<sup>th</sup> at Almaty 67 moved low against the wind to the north.

**Little Bustard** *Tetrax tetrax*: a male flying on the 25<sup>th</sup> and a female somewhat distant about 8 km south-southwest of Taipaq.

**Common Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus*: except for the 28<sup>th</sup>, always seen several times a day.

**Black-bellied Sandgrouse** *Pterocles orientalis*: on May 25 about 6 km NNW of Sarytogay and 1 on the 30<sup>th</sup> near the wormwood plover.

**Common Wood Pigeon** *Columba palumbus*: at least 3 on 26.

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*: 3 observations of 1-2 on the 24<sup>th</sup> and one each on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Water Rail** *Rallus aquaticus*: 1 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*: the only individual on the 25<sup>th</sup> in a small body of water north of Sarytogay on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*: 2 observations with 1 and 4 individuals on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 4 observations on the 27<sup>th</sup> with even more than 50 individuals in the water southeast of Novaya Kazanka and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Demoiselle Crane** *Grus virgo*: One pair each on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, as well as one adult each on the 27<sup>th</sup> (on the R-97 road) and on the 28<sup>th</sup> (next to the A-28 road).

**Common Crane** *Grus grus*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> near Shymkuduk and 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup> in the waters east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena*: 3 courting on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*: 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and a total of 7 on the 27<sup>th</sup> in Lake Sorkol near Zhanaqala.

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*: 2 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 90 on the 27<sup>th</sup> partly courting on Sorkol lake.

**Eurasian Stone Curlew** *Burhinus oedicephalus*: a pair on the 26<sup>th</sup> north of Leninskoye (photo to the right) and 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> about 1.5 km away.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus longipes*: a pair on the 26<sup>th</sup> about 8 km northeast of Leninskoye and another pair and a single animal on the 28<sup>th</sup> east of Leninskoye.

**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*: 27 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, more than 23 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and up to 7 on each of the following three days.



**Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta*: 5 am 27 east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*: from 25.-28. 2-3 observations of 1-3 individuals each day.

**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola*: 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula*: 4 on the 25<sup>th</sup> on the river southwest of Taipaq.

**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius*: 1 each on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> and 8 at 4 different locations on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus*: 4 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on the outskirts of Mukhor and 5 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Caspian Plover** *Charadrius asiaticus*: we first discovered a male with a young bird in the steppe west of Atyrau (47 20 50.31 N, 50 58 40.43 E)) and a single female about 8.7 km to the east (47 20 50.88 N, 50 54 1.17 E)).

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*: daily from 25.-28. with most observations on the 26<sup>th</sup> (7 times 1 each).

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*: 1 each on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*: 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and on the 28<sup>th</sup> at Lake Sorkol.

**Ruff** *Philomachus pugnax*: 5 observations and a total of 28 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*: flying on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta in a mixed troop with dunlins.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*: around 160 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on the eastern outskirts of Mukhor. slightly lower numbers on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka as well as on Sorkol Lake.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*: 40 flying on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta, 5 on the 26<sup>th</sup>, several again on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka and on the 28<sup>th</sup> of 20 at Lake Sorkol.

**Little Stint** *Calidris minuta*: 5 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 67 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on the eastern outskirts of Mukhor and many on 27<sup>th</sup> on Lake Sorkol.

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus*: 10 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on Lake Sorkol and more than 110 on the 27<sup>th</sup> in the waters north and east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 4 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus*: 2 on 25, 1 on 26 and 3 on 27.

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> on the eastern outskirts of Mukhor.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*: 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Black-winged Praticole** *Glareola nordmanni*: at least 10 pairs on the 25<sup>th</sup> breeding in a salt lake about 7 km southwest of Taipaq. Further observations of up to 3 each on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Slender-billed Gull** *Chroicocephalus genei*: 9 flying on the 24<sup>th</sup> at Atyrau airport.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*: isolated on 26, 27 and 29; in the Ural Delta on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Little Gull** *Hydrocoloeus minutus*: 7 migrating north on the 27<sup>th</sup> at Lake Sorkol.

**Pallas's Gull** *Ichthyaetus ichthyaeus*: common in the Ural Delta, 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Caspian Gull** *Larus cacchians*: the most common gull with numerous sightings every day. Maximum about 70 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Gull-billed Tern** *Gelochelidon nilotica*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> about 6 km southeast of Leninskoye.

**Caspian Tern** *Hydroprogne caspia*: at least 10 on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta.

**Little Tern** *Sternula albifrons*: a few almost daily: 4 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup>, 1 on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> each day.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*: Several foraging in the Ural Delta (24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>). 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup> at Inderbor and 12 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Whiskerd Tern** *Chlidonias hybrida*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 2 on the 28<sup>th</sup> in the water southwest of Taipaq.

**White-winged Tern** *Chlidonias leucopterus*: 11 and 6 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, at Shymkuduk on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 20 and 8 on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 3 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*: 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and on the 27<sup>th</sup> around 45 on Lake Sorkol and more than 22 in the waters east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Pygmy Cormorant** *Microcarbo pygmaeus*: 2 flying on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta.

**Great Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax carbo*: up to the 29<sup>th</sup> few individuals seen daily, only common in the Ural Delta.

**Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus*: common in the Ural Delta, 3 individuals on the 27<sup>th</sup> northeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*: a total of 3 flying on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta.

**Eurasian Bittern** *Botaurus stellaris*: heard in the large reedbeds of the Ural on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>, finally 1 on the 30<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta.

**Little Bittern** *Ixobrychus minutus*: 1 singing on the 27<sup>th</sup> northeast of Novaya Kazanka.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*: common in the Ural Delta and an observation of 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup> on the Ural River near Zhalgansay.

**Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*: 29 individual observations out of a total of 47, seen almost daily.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba*: somewhat rarer than Grey Heron with 13 observations from a total of 32 individuals, seen almost daily.

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*: found several times in the Ural Delta on both visits (24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>).

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*: 1 flying in the Ural Delta on 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*: 3 observations of a total of 11 flying in the Ural Delta on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 11 on the 26<sup>th</sup> near Leninskoye as well as in 6 individual observations a total of 19 on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Steppe Eagle** *Aquila nipalensis*: on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> a total of 10 observations, 7 of them on or around the eyries. These were all not very high on low-growing trees about 100 m from the road. On the 28<sup>th</sup> we were able to observe young birds sitting in the eyrie northeast of Mergenevo close to the main road.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*: From 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> one observation each, of which on the 26<sup>th</sup> an adult with 2 chicks in the eyrie.

**Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus*: Observed several times a day except for the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus*: a male on the 26<sup>th</sup> near Shymkuduk.

**Montagu`s Harrier** *Circus pygargus*: 1 each on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*: with a total of 23 birds in 15 observations, especially along the Ural River, rather common. During a somewhat longer stay on the river bank north of Zhalgansay, up to 4 individuals were observed on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus*: from 25.-30. a total of 43 observations and a total of 50 individuals. In the lines of trees along the roads we discovered several nests with young.

**Common Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*: One single observation on the 25<sup>th</sup> southwest of Saray-Jük.

**Little Owl** *Athene noctua*: 1 each on the 26<sup>th</sup> on the northern outskirts of Mukhor and on the 27<sup>th</sup> in a homestead about 3 km east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Long-eared Owl** *Asio otus*: 2 adult and 3 branchlings in a willow bush west of Yerinkala in the Ural Delta on 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*: in the wetlands northeast of Kyzylloba 2 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**European Roller** *Coracias garrulus*: on most days during the long bus journeys. In sum 29 individual observations.

**Blue-cheeked Bee-eater** *Merops persicus*: common in the Ural Delta (24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>), 4 individual observations on the 26<sup>th</sup> in the area around Leninskoye and Mukhor, 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**European Bee-eater** *Merops apiaster*: a few observations a day, apparently a little more common in the Ural Delta than Blue-cheeked Bee-eater.

**Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*: daily observations, on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> also carrying food.

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*: Observed several times a day outside the delta. At the edge of the forest next to the road about 4 km south of Kalenoe we were able to spot at least 10 animals flying at the same time in a short time.

**Red-footed Falcon** *Falco vespertinus*: from 25.-28. seen several times a day while driving.

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*: 2 each on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>, and 1 each on the 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Red-backed Shrike** *Lanius collurio*: frequent on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta (10 observations with a total of 12 individuals), one observation daily from 25<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Great Grey Shrike** *Lanius excubitor*: at least 3 on the 29<sup>th</sup> in the steppe about 25 km northwest of Inderbor (ssp. *pallidirostris*)

**Lesser Grey Shrike** *Lanius minor*: observed several times a day except for the 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Golden Oriole** *Oriolus oriolus*: 2 on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Ural Delta and 1 on the Urals on the 25<sup>th</sup> near Zhalgansay.

**Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica*: observed frequently, several times a day.

**Western Jackdaw** *Corvus monedula*: observed daily except for the 27<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, feeding young in Inderbor in a cave in a concrete power pole.

**Rook** *Corvus frugilegus*: observed daily, in the groves and on the high-voltage pylons, large breeding colonies often stretching over dozens of kilometres.

**Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*: observed frequently and daily, sometimes breeding or with young birds.

**Eurasian Penduline Tit** *Remiz pendulinus*: Ssp. *caspius*: on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Danube Delta 3, including a nest-building pair on the European side of the Urals and 1 on the Asian side. A pair on the 29<sup>th</sup> on the Ural bank in Atyrau.

**Black-headed Penduline Tit** *Remiz macronyx*: One bird on the 24<sup>th</sup>, but on the asian side of the Ural Delta, seen by Ernst.

**Bearded Reedling** *Panurus biarmicus*: 4 observations in the Ural Delta and 2 in the waters east of Novaya Kazanka on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**White-winged Lark** *Melanocorypha leucoptera*: much more common than Black Lark, observations on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup>. A short stop on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 2 km southwest of Almaly yielded 10, some of them carrying food. However, the highest densities were found on the 29<sup>th</sup> in the steppe about 8 km northwest of Inderbor, where birds flew up in front of our off-road vehicles about every 100 meters.

**Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis*: with 10 observations from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup>, not as common as Short-toed or Calandra Lark.

**Crested Lark** *Galerida cristata*: 4 observations in localities (25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>), 1 on the 30<sup>th</sup> in the steppe.

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris brandti*: 7 on the 30<sup>th</sup> about 8 km north of Akkystau, amongst them a family with 2 almost fledged young.

**Calandra Lark** *Melanocorypha calandra*: Very common in the steppes outside the Ural Delta.

**Black Lark** *Melanocorypha yeltoniensis*: about 2 km east of Mukhor on the 26<sup>th</sup> 2 males and 1 female (49 00 24.72 N, 50 04 31.08 E) and at least 8 (6 males, 2 females) on the 29<sup>th</sup> northwest of Inderbor (48 4733.71 N, 51 20 46.91 E).

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla*: A common breeding bird in the steppes.

**Turkestan Short-toed Lark** *Alaudala heinei*: A common breeding bird in the steppes (see photo to the right, 27<sup>th</sup>, Samara Lakes)



**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia*: observed daily, breeding colonies and flocks of up to 50 in wetlands.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*: observed more frequently and daily. Breeds in stables.

**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*: sporadic in Atyrau (24<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>) and nesting under bridges on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> on the R-97 near Leninskoye.

**Cetti's Warbler** *Cettia cetti*: probably the same singing male on a bridge in the Ural Delta on the 24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Willow Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochilus*: 1 on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, at least 5 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*: 1 on the 24<sup>th</sup> south of Atyrau.

**Great Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*: except on the 26<sup>th</sup> daily 1-5.

**Paddyfield Warbler** *Acrocephalus agricola*: 4 on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1 each on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> and at least 4 on the 30<sup>th</sup> about 8 km north of Akkystau.

**Blyth's Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*: the 1st already on the 24<sup>th</sup> south of Atyrau, at least 7 on the 25<sup>th</sup>, 2-3 each in the next 3 days.

**Eurasian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*: on January 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka and on January 29<sup>th</sup> on the Ural bank in the middle of Atyrau. The birds here belong to the eastern subspecies *fuscus*.

**Booted Warbler** *Iduna caligata*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> east of Leninskoye and 2 on the 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Sykes's Warbler** *Iduna rama*: at least 3 on the 24<sup>th</sup> south of Atyrau near Yerkindala and 1 in a bale of metal wire in the steppe about 8 km north of Akkystau.

**Eastern Olivaceous Warbler** *Iduna pallida*: on the 24<sup>th</sup> 2 south of Atyrau near Yerkindala and 2 in the Ural Delta.

**Garden Warbler** *Sylvia borin*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> and 3 on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*: 1 on the 24<sup>th</sup>, at least 2 on the 27<sup>th</sup> and 1 on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Two very bright birds on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka could have belonged to the Central Asian subspecies *halimodendri*. According to Wassink (2015), however, this subspecies only occurs in the coastal area of the Caspian Sea.

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*: one singing each on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>.

**Rosy Starling** *Pastor roseus*: at least 10 on the 25<sup>th</sup> north of Inderbor and 57 on the 28<sup>th</sup> on the southern outskirts of Inderbor.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*: observed several times a day except for the 29<sup>th</sup>, carrying food frequently.

**Spotted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa striata*: a total of 15, almost every day except the 26<sup>th</sup>.

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica pallidogularis*: 1 singing male in the waters east of Novaya Kazanka on the 27<sup>th</sup>, 3 on the 28<sup>th</sup> south of Shymkuduk and 1 on the 30<sup>th</sup> in the suburbs north of.

**Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: on the 27<sup>th</sup> a female in a homestead about 3 km east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe*: Less common than Isabelline Wheatear, observations on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. A pair feeding young was in the inner courtyard of our hotel in Inderbor.

**Isabelline Wheatear** *Oenanthe isabellina*: The most common wheatear with daily sightings, also frequently feeding young.

**Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka*: one observation each in and north of Atyrau (24<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>), 2 on the 25<sup>th</sup> at the gas station on the way to Inderbor and at least 2 breeding pairs carrying food on the 28<sup>th</sup> in Inderbor.

**House Sparrow** *Passer domesticus*: repeatedly observed in small numbers in towns and villages up to the 27<sup>th</sup>.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*: observed in small numbers every day.

**Western Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla flava*: 1-4 observations daily except for the 25<sup>th</sup>, during which the subspecies was not always identified or noted. Bird of the subspecies *bema* were seen on the 26<sup>th</sup> (2), then 2 foraging on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka, and 2 pairs on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Black-headed Wagtail *M. f. feldegg* were observed on January 24<sup>th</sup> in Atyrau, 1 on 26<sup>th</sup>, 3 partially feeding breeding pairs on 29<sup>th</sup> on the banks of the River Ural in the urban area of Atyrau, 1 in the steppe 8 km north of Akkystau. A male of the morph "*superciliaris*": was seen and photographed on the 24<sup>th</sup> in the Victory Park, Atyrau (see photo by Helmut Schaffer).



**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola*: on the 27<sup>th</sup> 1 pair with at least 2 young birds east of Novaya Kazanka and on the 28<sup>th</sup> a pair about 15 km north of Kyzylöba.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba dukhunensis*: observed several times a day, also feeding adult birds or young birds that have already fledged.

**Tawny Pipit** *Anthus campestris*: 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> west of Leninskoye and 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup> on the southern outskirts of Inderbor.

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*: 2 on the 24<sup>th</sup> on the southern outskirts of Yerinkala south of Atyrau, 6 female coloured birds on the 27<sup>th</sup> east of Novaya Kazanka.

**European Greenfinch** *Chloris chloris*: on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February calling on the banks of the Ural River in the center of Atyrau.

**Twite** *Linaria flavirostris*: about 30 on the 29<sup>th</sup> in the steppe about 20 km northwest of Inderbor.



**Ortolan Bunting** *Emberiza hortulana*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> about 10 km NNE of Kyzyloba.

**Red-headed bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps*: mostly observed several times a day except for the last two days.

**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> in the wetland about 20 km NNE of Kyzyloba.

## **Mammals:**

**Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes*: 1 on the 26<sup>th</sup> east of Mukhor and a female with at least 4 cubs on the 28<sup>th</sup> about one km south of Shymkuduk.

**Wild Boar** *Sus scrofa*: 1 brook with at least 5 young in the Ural Delta on 24.

**Long-eared Hedgehog** *Hemiechinus auritus*: a road traffic victim on the 30<sup>th</sup> in the steppe northwest of Atyrau.

**Hare** *Lepus europaeus* or *L. tolai*: 1 on the 28<sup>th</sup> near Inderbor.

**Little Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus pygmaeus*: 5 sightings from 26<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>, larger colonies north of Kordon and west of Shapai.



**Yellow Ground Squirrel** *Spermophilus fulvus*: a colony with at least 5 north of Leninskoye, another with at least 10 at the bridge west of Leninskoye, a large colony next to a homestead about 3 km east of Novaya Kazanka. All sightings as well as a few others on 25.-27. and on 30.

**Muskrat** *Ondatra zibethicus*: 1 on the 27<sup>th</sup> in the waters east of Novaya Kazanka.

**Steppe Polecat** *Mustella eversmannii*: on the way to our campsite at Sorkol Lake, we were able to watch a spectacular fight with a dwarf ground squirrel from the bus.

## **Reptiles:**

**Eastern Green lizard** *Lacerta viridis*

**Spotted toad head Agama** *Phrynocephalus maculatus*

**Steppe-runner** *Eremias arguta*