Introduction
Reg Thorpe has been going to this area of Kazakhstan for a number of years and in 2015 a local South Wales birder, Martyn Hnatiuk, also went on one of the two back to back tours Naturetrek run each year. Reg had previously said how safe it was and MH had also confirmed it was both safe and a great birding destination. Timing is fairly important as most migrants pass through by mid-May but the Cosmos Station in the Tien Shan Mountains can still be blocked by late snow at this time. We decided that whilst seeing migrants would be nice it was the residents and summer breeders that were our goal so we opted for a 10 day trip during the last two weeks of May.

Ground agents
There are several companies offering birding tours to Kazakhstan. MCP set about contacting a few but we finally settled on www.rubythroatbirding.com who mainly work with VENT from North America along with Rockjumper and several other tour companies. The owner, Machiel Valkenburg was also personally available to lead our tour which was a bonus. After an exchange of emails we agreed on a standard three centre tour covering all the main sites with a minimum of three days in the mountains in case of any weather issues. Rubythroat Birding also had the advantage of using their own yurts for our two nights in the Taukum Desert rather than the canvas tents that the other tours use. Rubythroat Birding took care of all the necessary permits etc. once we had emailed scanned copies of our passports.

Flights
The two main airlines that fly into Almaty are the national carrier Air Astana and Turkish Airlines. The cheapest airline however was Ukrainian International Airlines but we opted for Turkish Airlines from Gatwick via Istanbul www.turkishairlines.com

Transport
Our transport throughout was in a spacious, 15 seater Mercedes tour bus. This proved more than adequate and managed to get us up to the Cosmos Station in Ili-Alatau National Park twice without any difficulty.

Weather
Generally the weather was very good. Mornings were cool but it then became comfortable later and never really hot. The weather in the mountains however was much more variable. We lost four hours to rain on 26th and a further three hours next day. There was a heavy fall of snow on 28th up at the Cosmos Station but it only lasted for around an hour. One of the two 2016 Naturetrek tours failed to even reach the Cosmos Station due to snow just before we arrived.

Accommodation
We stayed at four different locations during the trip.
Tourist Hotel, Almaty: Comfortable, clean and more than adequate. Nice buffet breakfast with good restaurant next door for evening meals.
Yurt Camp, Taükum Desert: A more desirable option to the tents that the other tours use at this site. Basic facilities with three sleeping yurts and a communal dining yurt. Good food cooked by the camp staff.
Ashgrove Hunting Lodge, Charyn : A former Russian hunting lodge that had been recently refurbished. Comfortable and clean. Food was a bit hit and miss for our European palate!
Alpine Rose Hotel, Ili-Alatau NP : Slightly run down but warm and clean. Very good meals provided.

Field guide
The Birds of Central Asia by Aye, Schweizer and Roth, published by Helm is now the standard guide for Kazakhstan. Also recently privately published by Arend Wassink is The New Birds of Kazakhstan (2015). It gives the up to date status on every species and sub-species recorded in the country along with an excellent gazetteer of localities in the country which we have tried to follow in this report.

Diary
19th May: Arrived at Almaty International Airport via Istanbul at around 05.30 and after over an hour waiting to get through immigration we finally met up with Machiel and our driver at around 07.00. We then headed quickly off in our
The spacious tour van to Kaskelen in the Ili-Alatau National Park for an introduction to Kazakh birding. We spent most of the day at the site which is situated around 45 minutes east of the airport. **Highlights:** Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture (3), Eurasian Black Vulture (5), Golden Eagle, Brown Dipper, Azure Tit (2), White-crowned Penduline Tit (2), [Grey-crowned] Goldfinch (40), Rock Bunting (2), Siberian Meadow Bunting (2). Overnight, Almaty.

20th May: After a 07.00 breakfast we headed out of Almaty to our Yurt camp near the village of Kolshengel (sometimes referred to as Kanshengel on some maps) in the Taukum Desert. First stop was at the well-known Sorbulak Lake followed by a lunch stop at the famous ‘Wish Tree’. We then birded around Kolshengel village and at a well close by on the way out to our base. The final hour was spent walking around the camp area. **Highlights:** Ruddy Shelduck (11), Red-crested Pochard (40), Ferruginous Duck (5), White-headed Duck (3), White Pelican (17), Dalmatian Pelican, White-tailed Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Demoiselle Crane (17), Greater Sand Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Steppe Gull (2), Red-rumped Swallow, Siberian Chiffchaff (4), Eastern Nightingale, Black-throated Thrush, Brown-necked Raven, [Indian] House Sparrow (6), Red-headed Bunting (12), Ortolan Bunting. Overnight, Yurt Camp.

21st May: After breakfast we searched the area immediately around the camp and came up trumps with two Pallas’s Sandgrouse. Following a short visit to a local lorry stop with a wish tree we then headed out to the Topar Lakes area and the Tauranga *Populus diversifolia* woodland near the village of Zhelturanga (appears as Zheltorangly in some reports) for the rest of the day. A roadside stop at some Saxaul scrub *Haloxylon spp.* on the way produced our only Saxaul Sparrows. Unfortunately the usual site for Black-crowned Penduline Tit had been well and truly trashed with no recent sightings for well over a year. It appears the area has been extensively burned for grazing. **Highlights:** Ferruginous Duck (3), Black-necked Grebe (3), White-tailed Eagle, Shikra (3), Demoiselle Crane (41), Greater Sand Plover (3), Pallas’s Sandgrouse (2), Yellow-eyed Pigeon (8), Oriental Turtle Dove (25), White-winged Woodpecker (4), Sykes’s Warbler (3), Azure Tit (3), [Turkestan] Tit (15), Steppe Grey Shrike (5), Saxaul Sparrow (2), Spanish Sparrow (2), Red-headed Bunting (15). Overnight, Yurt Camp.

22nd May: After breakfast and whilst the Yurt camp was being broken down (we were the last guests of the spring) we unsuccessfully searched for both Macqueen’s Bustard & Caspian Plover. In the weeks leading up to our arrival there had been particularly heavy rains in the desert resulting in higher than normal vegetation making both these species very difficult to find. However we did hit the jackpot with not one, but two displaying male White-winged Larks. The
first one was found by Machiel at an impressive 1km range, the second by Phil back at the bus. We then had a short stop back at Kolshengel village before visiting Tamgaly prehistoric site for Eastern Rock Nuthatch in the afternoon. **Highlights:** Crested Honey Buzzard (2), Demoiselle Crane (85), Greater Sand Plover (2), Black-bellied Sandgrouse (120), Calandra Lark (100), Bimaculated Lark (100), White-winged Lark (2), Red-rumped Swallow, Hume’s Warbler (50), Eastern Rock Nuthatch (3), Brown-necked Raven (2), Rose-coloured Starling (2000), Desert Finch (2), Red-headed Bunting (20). Overnight, Almaty.

23rd May: Today we drove for several hours to our base in the Charyn Canyon. We birded the Kokpek Pass around midday before spending the rest of the afternoon in the Sugat Valley and visiting a drinking pool late in the day. Our final birding was calling in two Scops Owls at the Ashgrove Lodge. **Highlights:** Black-crowned Night Heron, Golden Eagle (2), Eurasian Scops Owl (2), Central Asian Horned Lark (3), Tawny Pipit (4), Eastern Nightingale (7), Desert Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush (2), Blue Rock-thrush, Sykes’s Warbler, Rock Sparrow (2), Mongolian Finch (140), White-capped Bunting (2), Rock Bunting (6), Grey-necked Bunting (8). Overnight, Ashgrove Hunting Lodge.

24th May: After a short look around the lodge area we headed off towards Kegen near the Kyrgyz border with the intention of searching for Upland Buzzard but not before a walk on the Sugat Plain for Asian Desert Warbler. On the way out we stopped at the village of Akcai to look for Lesser Kestrel at the cemetery and on the way back we again visited the drinking pool of the 23rd. **Highlights:** Black Stork, Egyptian Vulture, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Asian Black Vulture (3), Long-legged Buzzard (15), Golden Eagle (2), Lesser Kestrel (12), Saker, Pallas’s Sandgrouse, Eurasian Scops Owl, Central Asian Horned Lark, Pale Martin (2), Tawny Pipit (4), Desert Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush (2), Sykes’s Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler (7), Azure Tit, Indian Golden Oriole (2), Turkestan Shrike (4), Rock Sparrow (3), Asian Crimson-winged Finch, Mongolian Finch (290), Grey-necked Bunting (4). Overnight, Ashgrove Hunting Lodge.
25th May: Having had poor views of Pale Martin the day before we decided to search for a colony on the Almaty side of the Kokpek pass on our way to the mountains. A stop in the Kokpek was successful for Hume’s Whitethroat and we then found the Pale Martin colony without a problem in a sand quarry beside the road at Malabay. We finally reached the Alpine Rose Hotel, high above Almaty in the Ili-Alatau National Park in the late afternoon. It allowed enough time to search the excellent meadow above the hotel before dinner. Highlights: Common Pheasant, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Pale Martin (100), Black-throated Accentor (3), White-tailed Rubythroat, Pied Wheatear (5), Blue Whistling Thrush (2), Hume’s Whitethroat (2), Azure Tit (2), Willow (Songar) Tit (2), Indian Golden Oriole (2), Spotted Nutcracker (5), Rose-coloured Starling (2000), Red-fronted Serin (8), Red-headed Bunting. Overnight, Alpine Rose Hotel.

26th May: Before breakfast we birded the Alpine Rose meadow. We then spent the rest of the morning in the high mountains until heavy rain came in between 13.00 & 17.00. We managed to get up to the Cosmos Station in good weather then walked along the track at Big Almaty Lake before lunch. After the rain we visited the excellent meadow and scree slopes near the observatory with a further visit to the meadow at the hotel. Highlights: Ibisbill (2), Water Pipit (10), Brown Accentor, Black-throated Accentor (5), Altai Accentor (4), White-tailed Rubythroat (3), Eversmann’s Redstart (2), Blue-capped Redstart (4), Goldenstadt’s Redstart (3), Grasshopper Warbler (1), Sulphur-bellied Warbler (2), White-browed Tit-warbler (2), Willow [Songar] Tit (2), Alpine Chough (4), Red-billed Chough (2), Red-fronted Serin (20), Plain Mountain Finch (15), Red-mantled Rosefinch (3), White-winged Grosbeak (2). Overnight, Alpine Rose Hotel.
27th May: We again birded the hotel meadow before breakfast and then headed up the mountain to try and get as high as possible for Himalayan Snowcock. Unfortunately rain that set in between 11.00 and 15.00 sent us back for an early lunch but not before we found a Brown Dipper on the lower slopes below the hotel. After the rain we headed back up to scan the slopes just before the snowline and came up trumps with three Snowcocks. We then birded the same Observatory meadow as the day before on the way back down and finally the hotel meadow before dinner. **Highlights:** Himalayan Snowcock (3), Brown Dipper, Black-throated Accentor (3), White-tailed Rubythroat (2), Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart (2), Sulphur-bellied Warbler (2), White-browed Tit-warbler (3), Songar Tit (2), Spotted Nutcracker (3), Red-fronted Serin (30), Red Crossbill (3), Plain Mountain Finch (7), Red-mantled Rosefinch (4), White-winged Grosbeak (4). Overnight, Alpine Rose Hotel.

28th May: As we had now seen just about everything possible in the national park we decided to re-visit the Cosmos Station. However, shortly after we arrived the weather closed in and it started to snow. Gradually the snow became a blizzard sending us back down to the Observatory meadow for some leisurely birding. This allowed the photographers to indulge in securing some frame-filling images. After a late lunch, we packed up and headed down to Almaty for some sight-seeing and a farewell dinner before being delivered to the airport for our early morning Turkish Airlines flight back to London. **Highlights:** Golden Eagle, Brown Accentor (2), Black-throated Accentor (4), Altai Accentor (2), White-tailed Rubythroat (6), Blue-capped Redstart (2), Guldénstadt's Redstart (3), Blue Whistling Thrush (2), Grasshopper Warbler (2), Sulphur-bellied Warbler (2), White-browed Tit-warbler (3), Willow [Songar] Tit (2), Alpine Chough (2), Red-billed Chough, Plain Mountain Finch (12), Red-mantled Rosefinch (3).
Systematic list

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*: 8 at Sorbulak Lake, a single at the Wish Tree and two at Kolshengel on 20th. 8 on 22nd including 4 on roadside pools on the way back to Almaty. 8 around Kegen on the 24th, a single on 25th in the Kokpek and 2 on 26th at Big Almaty Lake.

**Red-crested Pochard** *Netta rufina*: 40 on 20th at Sorbulak Lake and 18 next day on the Topar lakes.

**Ferruginous Duck** *Aythya nyroca*: 5 on 20th at Sorbulak Lake and 3 next day on the Topar lakes.

**White-headed Duck** *Oxyura leucocephala*: 3 on a small pool next to the main dam at Sorbulak Lake on 20th

**Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis sewerzowi*: A single was heard high up on the ridge as we walked out to see the Ibisbills on 26th. Thankfully we had more luck the next day with an apparent pair and another calling male seen reasonably well on the snow-line half way up to the Cosmos Station.

**(Kyrgyz) Common Pheasant** *Phasianus colchicus mongolicus*: A single on 25th seen from the van at Charyn (DRWG).

**Great White Pelican** *Pelecanus onocrotalus*: 17 at Sorbulak Lake on 20th.

**Dalmatian Pelican** *Pelecanus crispus*: A single bird at Sorbulak Lake on 20th.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*: A single bird flew over the van as we headed out of Almaty on 23rd.

**Black Stork** *Ciconia nigra*: A single bird over Ashgrove on 24th

**White Stork** *Ciconia ciconia*: A single bird on 20th.

**Crested Honey Buzzard** *Pernis ptilorhyncus orientalis*: As we drove out of the camp on 22nd we came across a grounded bird sat next to the track which allowed some great close photographs. Later in the day we then found a different individual circling over the desert near the camp.

**White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla*: An adult on 20th at Sorbulak Lake and another adult next day over the Topar lakes.

**Lammergeier** *Gypaetus barbatus*: A single at Kaskelen on the first day.

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*: An adult over the road as we approached Akcai on 24th.

**Himalayan Griffon Vulture** *Gyps himalayensis*: Three at Kaskelen on the 19th and a single over the Charyn Gorge on 24th.

**Eurasian Black Vulture** *Aegypius monachus*: Five at Kaskelen on the 19th and three over the Charyn Gorge on 24th.

**Montagu’s Harrier** *Circus pygargus*: Surprisingly only one bird noted, a male on 20th.

**Shikra** *Accipiter badius cenchroides*: Three birds in the Tauranga woodland near the village of Zhelturanga on 21st.

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** *Aquila heliaca*: Singles on 20th at Kolshengel and over the Sugaty Plain on 25th.

**Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni*: On 24th six in the cemetery at Akcai and a further 6 alongside the road in the hills back from Kegen.

**Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug hendersoni*: An adult over the Sugaty Valley drinking pool on 24th. Examination of images later revealed it was carrying a Giant Gerbil that was not apparent in the field!

**Demoiselle Crane** *Grus virgo*: 17 at Ardarly on 20th, 41 in the camp area on 21st with 85 next day (including a flock of 65) and 7 in the Sugaty Valley on 24th.

**Ibisbill** *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*: Two adults amongst the braided streams at the north end of Big Almaty Lake on 26th.

**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii scythicus*: In the Taukum Desert, a single on 20th, 3 on 21st and 2 on 22nd.
Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* : One at Sorbulak Lake on 20th.
Steppe Gull *Larus fuscus barabensis* : Two at Sorbulak Lake on 20th.
Pallas’s Sandgrouse *Syrrhaptes paradoxus* : A pair flew past us near the camp on 21st. A single flew over DRWG on 24th whilst the rest of us were 750mtrs away on the Sugaty Plain.
Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni* : Eight in the *Tauranga* woodland near the village of Zhelturanga on 21st. The whitish back is obvious in flight.
Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis meena* : Widespread in the first 4 days, maximum 40 on 20th. Only a single bird noted once we left the Taukum area.
Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops pulchellus* : A single heard at Kaskelen on 19th. Two birds showed exceptionally well at the Ashgrove Lodge both nights we were there.
White-winged Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucopterus* : 4, including a pair attending a nest, in the *Tauranga* woodland on 21st.

Calandra Lark *Melanocorypha calandra psammochroa* : 20 in transit to the Taukum on 20th and a total of 100 on 22nd at various sites in the Taukum Desert.
Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata torquata* : Only seen around the Taukum Desert. 6 at a well near the camp on the 6th, 20 on the 21st and 100 on 22nd at various sites.
White-winged Lark *Alauda leucoptera* : We were aware of this species being around the camp before we left the UK so had high hopes of catching up with one. A search on 21st near the camp where one had been seen a few days before came up blank. A more concerted effort (whilst also searching for Macqueen’s Bustard) the next day resulted in excellent views of two displaying males.
Central Asian Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris branti* : 3 on 23rd and 1 next day alongside the track leading up to the drinking pools in the Sugaty Valley.
Pale Martin *Riparia diluta* : At least two high over the river near Kegen on 24th gave pretty poor views. On 25th, following up on a lead we had at least 100 with a few Sand Martins in a roadside colony just outside Malabay.
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica rufula* : Just two seen, 20th and 22nd.
Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* : 4 at the drinking pools above the Sugaty Plains on 23rd with 3 there next day. Also on the 23rd a single was seen whilst searching for the Asian Desert Warblers.
Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta blakistoni* : Reasonably common in the high mountains with 10 on 26th, 10 on 27th and 8 on 28th.
Masked Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata* : Seen daily away from the high mountains with a max. of 3 on 19th at Kaskelen.
Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii tenuirastris* : One at Kaskelen on 19th (DRWG) and one c2km below the Alpine Rose on 27th at a site known as the ‘Dam Wall’.
Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens* : A single on 26th and two on 28th alongside the road up to the Cosmos Station.
Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis huttoni* : Recorded at both the Alpine Rose Meadow & the Observatory meadow where they favoured the low Juniper bushes. 3 on 25th, 5 on 26th, 3 on 27th and 4 on 28th.
Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana* : Four at the Cosmos Station on 26th with 2 there on the 28th.
White-tailed Rubythroat *Luscinia pectoralis ballioni* : This species favoured exactly the same habitat and sites as Black-throated Accentor and were often seen together in the same bushes. One on 25th, 3 on 26th, 2 on 27th and at least 6 on 28th.
Eversmann’s Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronotus* : Two alongside the track to Big Almaty Lake on 26th and a male alongside the road before the Observatory barrier on 27th.
Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*: Unlike the other two species of Redstart, Blue-capped was often found high up in conifers, sometimes singing from the very top. Around the Alpine Rose we had 4 on 26th, 2 on 27th and 2 on 28th.

Guldenstadt’s Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis*: At the Cosmos Station we had very good views of this striking Redstart on both visits with 3 on 26th and 3 on 28th.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*: A total of 15 sightings with a maximum of 5 on 25th in the Kokpek Pass.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*: A male on both 23rd & 24th in the Sugaty Valley.

Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxitilis*: Two on 23rd in the Kokpek Pass and 2 alongside the road to Kegen on 24th.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius pandoo*: One high up in the Kokpek Pass whilst searching for White-capped Buntings on 23rd.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus temminckii*: Two showed well at the Dam Wall on 25th and 28th.

Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*: A female type flushed from a group of bushes near the Wish Tree on 20th.

(Seebohm’s) Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia straminea*: One heard on the 24th, otherwise only heard or seen at the Alpine Rose Hotel with two on 28th.

Blyth’s Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*: Common at a number of sites around the Taukum with 12 on 20th and 30 on 22nd.

Sykes’s Warbler *Iduna rama*: Two at the Saxaul Sparrow site and a single at Zeltorangly on 21st, singles in the Sugaty Valley on both 23rd and 24th.

Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*: A family part of 7 birds on the Sugaty Plain showed very well on 24th.

Hume’s Whitethroat *Sylvia althaea monticola*: Two in the Kokpek Pass on 25th.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*: Seen daily throughout the trip, max. 3 on 19th.

Hume’s Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*: Recorded in good numbers on passage, max 50 on 22nd and in the breeding area around the Alpine Rose Hotel/Observatory Station Meadow, max 20 on 26th.

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*: At the Observatory Meadow we had two of this boulder scree loving species on each visit on 26th, 27th and 28th probably involving 3 birds.

Siberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*: With the main passage probably over we only saw 4 on 20th and 1 on 21st.

(Tien Shan) Goldcrest *Regulus regulus tristis*: Several birds seen in the forest around the Alpine Rose, max. 3 on 25th.
White-browed Tit Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*: We had excellent views of this must see species in the juniper bushes at the base of the steep slopes at the Observatory Meadows. 2 on 26th and 27th and 3 on 28th probably involved 4 or 5 different birds.

Azure Tit *Cyanistes cyanus tianschanicus/koktalensis*: 2 on 19th at Kaskelen, 3 on 21st at Zeltorangly then a single on 24th and two next day at Ashgrove.

Great (Turkestan) Tit *Parus major bokharensis*: At least 15 in the Tauranga woodland on the 21st.

Willow (Songar) Tit *Poecile montanus songarus*: Two birds seen each day we were in the mountains, 25th – 28th, probably involving 4 birds.

Eastern Rock Nuthatch *Sitta tephronata*: Three birds around this year’s nest at the Tamgaly prehistoric site on 22nd.

White-crowned Penduline Tit *Remiz coronatus*: Two nest building over a stream at Kaskelen on 19th.

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo*: Heard on 19th and 23rd before finally seeing two on both 24th and 25th at Ashgrove.

Red-tailed (Turkestan) Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides*: A total of 14 birds, max. 5 on 21st. At Tamgaly on 22nd a male Red-backed x Red-tailed Shrike had us puzzled for a short time.

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor*: Reasonably common away from the mountains, a total of 18 birds seen, max. 6 on 22nd.

Steppe (Asian) Grey Shrike *Lanius (lahtora) pallidirostris*: Five in the dunes south of Topar Lakes on 21st.
Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes rothschildi*: 5 at the Alpine Rose Hotel on 25\textsuperscript{th}, 3 on 27\textsuperscript{th} and a single on 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus forsythia*: At the Cosmos Station, 4 on 26\textsuperscript{th} and 2 on 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis*: At the Cosmos Station, 2 on 26\textsuperscript{th} and a single on 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis*: One at Kolshegel on 20\textsuperscript{th} and 2 on the drive to Tamgaly on 22\textsuperscript{nd}.

Rose-coloured Starling *Pastor roseus*: At least 2000 in several large flocks at Tamgaly on 22\textsuperscript{nd} and 150 alongside the road back from Kegen on 24\textsuperscript{th}. On 25\textsuperscript{th} a minimum of 2000 in the Kokpek Pass were prospecting nest sites in the rock face along a 1km stretch of road.

Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri nigricans*: An apparent pair at a bus stop nest site near Zeltorangly on 21\textsuperscript{st}.

(Indian) House Sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus*: Six on 20\textsuperscript{th} at Kolshegel and 3 on 25\textsuperscript{th} near the Kokpek Pass were the only ones we were happy with.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia intermedia*: Two at the drinking pools in the Sugaty Valley on 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 3 Akcai cemetery on 24\textsuperscript{th}.

Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*: Common in the mountains especially around the Alpine Rose Hotel, max. 30 on 27\textsuperscript{th}.

(Grey-headed) Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis paropanisi*: At least 40 at Kaskelen on 19\textsuperscript{th}, otherwise seen in the mountains, max. 4 on 27\textsuperscript{th}.

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte memorica altaica*: Only seen above the tree-line from the Observatory meadow up to the Cosmos Station, 15 on 26\textsuperscript{th}, 7 on 27\textsuperscript{th} and 12 on 28\textsuperscript{th}.

Asian Crimson-winged Finch *Rhodopechys sanguineus*: One dropped into the drinking pools at the Sugaty Valley on 24\textsuperscript{th} affording excellent views.

Desert Finch *Rhodospiza obsoleta*: 2 at Kolshegel on 22\textsuperscript{nd}.

Mongolian Finch *Bucanetes mongolicus*: At the Sugaty Valley drinking pools there were 140 on 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 290 on 24\textsuperscript{th}. Birds were on constant view, usually drinking in small parties then flying off strongly into the distance.

Red-mantled Rosefinch *Carpodacus rhodochlamys*: This species was strongly associated with Juniper scrub at both the Alpine Rose and Observatory meadows. 3 on 26\textsuperscript{th}, 4 on 27\textsuperscript{th} and 3 on 28\textsuperscript{th}.

White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes*: A presumed pair in the Alpine Rose meadow on 26\textsuperscript{th} and 27\textsuperscript{th} with another apparent pair on 27\textsuperscript{th} near the Observatory.

Siberian Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides tarbagataica*: A pair at Kaskelen on 19\textsuperscript{th} got our trip off to an excellent start.

White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti*: Two showed very high up in the Kokpek Pass on 23\textsuperscript{rd}.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia par*: A total of 10 birds seen, max 6 on 23\textsuperscript{rd}.

Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani neobscura*: 3 in the Kokpek Pass on 23\textsuperscript{rd} and 5 at the Sugaty Valley drinking pools on 23\textsuperscript{rd} with 4 next day.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: One at Sorbulak Lake on 20\textsuperscript{th}.

Red-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps*: Seen at several sites around the Taikum Desert as well as alongside the road. A total of 47 birds recorded between 20\textsuperscript{th} and 22\textsuperscript{nd}. The only other record was a singing male whilst watching the Hume’s Whitethroats in the Kokpek on 25\textsuperscript{th}.

Other species recorded: Common Shelduck, Common Pochard, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Garganey, Chukar, Great Cormorant, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Great Crested Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Black (eared) Kite, Western Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Common (Steppe) Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Golden Eagle, Common Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Common Moorhen, Eurasian Coot, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Northern Lapwing, Temminck’s Stint, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Black-headed Gull, Black Tern,

Mammals

**Tolai Hare, Lepus tolai**: One on 21st and 2 on 24th.

**Eurasian Red Squirrel, Sciurus vulgaris**: One or two each day at Ili-Alatau National Park

**Grey Marmot, Marmotta baibacina**: 2 on 24th and small numbers regular at Ili-Alatau National Park, where dogs belonging to border guards caught at least one while we were there.

**Yellow Ground Squirrel, Spermophilus fulvus**: One on 21st near Zhelturanga.

**Small Five-toed Jerboa, Allactaga elater**: Four by torchlight at our camp in the Taukum Desert on 20th.

**Great Gerbil, Rhombomys opimus**: Up to five or more each day on the Sugaty Plain, on 23rd and 24th, where one was taken by a Saker.

**Corsac Fox, Vulpes corsac**: One near Kegen on 24th.

**Red Fox, Vulpes vulpes**: One at at Ili-Alatau National Park on 26th.

**Golden Jackal, Canis aureus**: One on 21st near Zhelturanga. The first our guide had seen here but the species is spreading rapidly.

[Photos Rich Andrews & John Martin]

M.C.Powell, December 2016

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