

ITINERARY
CENTRAL ASIA
UZBEKISTAN, KAZAKHSTAN, & KYRGYZSTAN
May 22–June 12, 2024



*The Saxaul Sparrow is in the same genus as the familiar House Sparrow. These birds are found in desert habitats predominated by the Saxaul Tree, an amaranth family plant that provides much of their food resources.
Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours.*

We include here information for those interested in the 2024 Field Guides Central Asia tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

Those who register for the tour will be sent this additional material:

- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Central Asia, though somewhat vague a term, generally refers to the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, with Afghanistan also sometimes lumped into the region (including by the authors of the regional field guide). Even excluding Afghanistan, this is an immense area of great scenic beauty -- boundless deserts, rugged mountain ranges, expansive steppe grasslands, extensive wetlands--that would take a lifetime to explore in depth. Our tour covers just three of the countries that make up this region, yet even their area is enormous, equivalent to just under half the area of the USA's lower 48 states. But by carefully choosing our destinations, we'll be able to spend time in several major habitat regions and enjoy the special birds unique to each, giving us a reasonably comprehensive coverage of the regional avifauna, with plenty of stunning scenery along the way.

The heart of this region has long been renowned as a crossroads between the civilizations of the west and those of the east. Dating back to 130 B.C. when China officially opened trade with the west, the storied Silk Road served as a conduit for not only silk, but many other goods, as well as political, cultural, and religious ideas between these two disparate regions. The northern spur of the Silk Road (actually a network of tracks) passed through Uzbekistan, with the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara serving as important trading posts and waypoints along the way. The cores of these ancient cities remain in place today, and both have been designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites for their outstanding cultural and historical value. Though our tour is primarily geared towards birding, the first few days will feature a significant cultural component as we spend several afternoons exploring the many exceptional architectural and historical wonders of these fascinating cities in the company of a knowledgeable local guide. Of course, we'll devote our mornings to seeking out the many special birds of the surrounding hills, wetlands, and deserts, with targets ranging from Pygmy Cormorant and White-tailed Lapwing to White-throated Robin and the very local Turkestan (Pander's) Ground-Jay, a Central Asian endemic. Along the way, we should see some evidence of this region also serving as an avian crossroads, as both Eurasian and Himalayan griffons, European and Oriental Turtle-Doves, and Eurasian and Indian golden orioles are possible, among other closely related species pairs.



We'll spend time in habitats ranging from deserts to canyons and the high elevations of the Tien Shan Mountains. Here, Charyn Canyon National Park offers some stunning views. Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours.

Leaving Uzbekistan and its cultural delights behind, our tour will shift to a much more typical bird-oriented focus in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The majority of our remaining time will be spent in the former country, but with a brief jaunt across the border to explore the towering Tien Shan Mountains of neighboring Kyrgyzstan. While based at a comfortable 5800' in the city of Karakol, we'll visit the highest elevations we'll reach on this tour in the lofty Chon-Ashuu Pass. Here, amid the spectacular scenery of these rugged peaks and valleys, we'll seek out a number of high-elevation specialists, with birds like Ibisbill, Himalayan Snowcock, Himalayan Rubythroat, the lovely White-browed Tit-Warbler, both White-winged and Rufous-backed redstarts, and Fire-fronted Serin high on our list of targets before we make our way back across the border.

Time in Kazakhstan will be spent in several key areas, each with a suite of unique and interesting species. We'll begin to the southeast of the capital city of Almaty, in the colorful gorges of Charyn Canyon National Park and the nearby Sogeti Valley, where we'll search for Black-bellied and Pallas's sandgrouse, Cinereous and Egyptian vultures, and a great assortment of shrikes, larks, wheatears, buntings and finches, in a setting reminiscent of the USA's (much larger) Grand Canyon. Nearer the city, the lovely Kaskelen valley may produce Meadow, Red-headed, and Corn buntings, Brown and White-throated dippers, and a nice variety of raptors, while further afield, we'll spend a couple of nights at a comfortable

yurt camp in the remote Taukum Desert, sure to be a highlight of our time in the country. The scarce and declining MacQueen's Bustard, Caspian Plover, and perhaps even Pin-tailed Sandgrouse will be among the species we look for in the vicinity of the camp, while in the general area, we'll target species such as White-winged Woodpecker, Yellow-eyed Dove, Asian Desert Warbler and Saxaul Sparrow, among the numerous other possibilities. Attesting to the wildness of this remote region, large mammals such as Goitered Gazelle and Gray Wolf have both been recorded in the vicinity of the camp, though we would need a fair amount of luck to see these. To round out the tour, we'll fly from Almaty to Nur-Sultan in the sweeping steppe landscape of the north, where the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing, and Black and White-winged larks will be among the highlights, as we bird the grasslands and a complex of wetlands teeming with waterfowl and shorebirds, all in brilliant breeding plumage at this time of year. It's sure to be an exciting finish to our Central Asian odyssey.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** For much of the tour, walking will be relatively easy on wide, flat trails. In the mountains south of Almaty and in Kyrgyzstan some steeper trails with rocky, uneven surfaces will be used, though most of the trails will be relatively short. There are no especially long hikes on this tour, though we will spend a fair bit of time on our feet and you can expect to walk roughly 2-3 miles on most days. In some areas we will spend time waiting at water holes, and a folding stool would come in very handy at these spots.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** Much of our birding will be in rather open situations in warm, sunny conditions, so adequate sun protection is imperative. Some long drives to and from birding sites are required. We will spend two nights of outfitted camping with shared bathroom facilities, limited hot water, and sporadic electricity, if any. Two nights in a basic lodge at the Charyn Canyon will feature similar shared facilities and limited hot water and electricity.
- **PACE:** In Uzbekistan, early starts will be the norm as we seek to take advantage of the cooler morning hours to bird before the heat sets in. Here, breakfasts may be very early (4:30-5:00am). Afternoons will be more relaxed and leisurely as we take in the cultural sights of the historic cities. For much of the rest of the tour, breakfast will be at a more civilized hour (6:00-7:00am) with some optional pre-breakfast birding on some mornings. Some days will be long with considerable travel time. Optional night-time excursions will be offered at a couple of the sites.
- **ELEVATION:** Parts of several days in Kyrgyzstan and in the mountains south of Almaty will be spent at elevations exceeding 8200' (~2500m) though we will always return to lower elevations for the night, with the hotel in Karakol being the highest at roughly 5800' (1770m).
- **WEATHER:** Quite variable, ranging from quite hot and dry (possibly up to 100°F or 40°C or higher at mid-day) at lower elevation sites and throughout Uzbekistan, to quite chilly in the mountains south of Almaty and in Kyrgyzstan (possibly down to freezing in the early mornings at higher elevations). Rain, and potentially even snow, is possible, especially in the mountainous areas, and open desert areas can be quite windy at times.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Whenever possible, we use modern, indoor restrooms, but on occasion, participants must be prepared to make a comfort stop in nature.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, participants can easily opt to sit out a day
- If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.



About the Birding Areas

Samarkand region—south of the city, the Takhta-Karacha pass will introduce us to a good variety of widespread Central Asian species as well as a handful of more local specialties. Here in the scrubby, rocky hillsides, we'll be on the lookout for Chukar, Bearded Vulture, both Eurasian and Himalayan griffons, Booted Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, the local Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, Red-tailed and Lesser Gray shrikes, Azure Tit, Hume's Lark, Upcher's and Eastern Orphean warblers, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, White-throated Robin, Pied and Finsch's wheatears, Red-headed and White-capped buntings, and many more.

Bukhara region—wetlands in the vicinity of this oasis city will reveal a host of wonderful waterbirds, including the lovely Red-crested Pochard, the rather rare and local Marbled Teal, Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, White-tailed Lapwing, and a number of migrant shorebirds in gorgeous breeding plumage. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Indian and/or Eurasian golden oriole, White-crowned Penduline-tit, Bearded Reedling, Crested Lark, Sykes's and Menetries's warblers, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, and Spanish Sparrow are among the many other mouth-watering possibilities. Further afield, we'll make an early morning trip to the red sands of the Kyzyl-Kum Desert, where the highly local Turkestan Ground-Jay, a Central Asian endemic, will be our main target, with a supporting cast that could include Barred, Scrub, and Asian Desert warblers, Isabelline Wheatear, Rosy Starling, and Desert Finch, to name a few.

Tashkent region— in the Chingan Hills to the east of the city, we'll spend a morning birding around a popular ski area and resort with the main goal being the local Rufous-naped Tit, which we're unlikely to see elsewhere on the tour route. Our morning in the mixed woodland and open meadows here may also turn up birds like White-winged Woodpecker, Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, both Indian and Eurasian golden-orioles, the yellow-breasted form of Azure Tit, Mistle Thrush, Common Nightingale, Red-rumped Swallow, European Greenfinch, Hawfinch, Rock Bunting, and a nice variety of raptors.

Chon Ashuu Pass—high in Kyrgyzstan's scenic Tien Shan Mountains, this pass, at over 12,500' (3800m) in elevation, will be the highest point reached on the tour. The road up to the pass gives us access to rushing, rocky rivers, swaths of mixed montane forest, and lush alpine meadows, with an enticing assortment of high mountain birds. The unique Ibisbill will be among our key targets here, while other species we may encounter here include Hill Pigeon, both Brown and White-throated dippers, Red-billed Chough, Himalayan Rubythroat, White-winged and Rufous-backed redstarts, the charming White-browed Tit-Warbler, Altai and Brown accentors, Plain and Black-headed mountain-finches, and Fire-fronted Serin.

Charyn Canyon and Sogeti Valley— in the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan, near the borders of both China and Kyrgyzstan, Charyn Canyon National Park is one of the country’s most well-known and impressive tourist sites. Here in the arid foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains, the Charyn River has carved through the colorful sedimentary rocks leaving behind a spectacular canyon up to 1000’ (300m) deep in places, and roughly 30 miles (50 km) in length. An impressive list of bird species may be encountered here and in the nearby Sogeti Valley, where surface water from an artesian well attracts in a variety of birds to bathe and drink in this arid landscape. Pallas’s and Black-bellied sandgrouse, Black Stork, Cinereous Vulture, Short-toed Snake-Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Little Owl, several species of shrike (Red-tailed, Isabelline, Long-tailed, Lesser Gray, and Great Gray!) Calandra Lark, Asian Desert Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat (Hume’s), Desert and Isabelline wheatears, Desert, Mongolian, and Crimson-winged finches, and Rock, Meadow, Gray-necked, and White-capped buntings are among the many species we’ll be searching for in this region.



*A number of shrikes are possible on this tour, including the attractive Red-tailed Shrike.
Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours.*

Taukum Desert— some 125+ miles (250 km) to the north of Almaty, this remote desert of low, scrub-covered sand dunes is an important habitat for the vulnerable and declining Macqueen’s Bustard, which will be among the main targets here. We’ll need some luck on our side to find these birds, but our base at a comfortable wilderness yurt camp maintained by our ground operators will have us well-positioned to search out these birds. And there will be plenty of other goodies around to keep us busy. Pin-tailed and Black-bellied Sandgrouse, breeding-plumaged Caspian and Greater Sand-Plovers, a good assortment of raptors, Bimaculated Lark, Brown-necked Raven, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, Rock Sparrow, and others will fill in our time as we bird this fascinating area. The desert is also home to a fair selection of mammals (including Corsac Fox, Goitered Gazelle, and Great Gerbil) and reptiles like Horsfield’s Tortoise and an assortment of lizards, and we’ll be on the lookout for these here as well. Also in this region, we’ll visit an area of Turanga forest (an endangered native species of poplar) to search for Yellow-eyed Pigeon, White-winged Woodpecker, Azure Tit, Great (Turkestan) Tit, Saxaul Sparrow, and more, and nearby wetland areas may turn up specialties like White-headed Duck and Black-headed Penduline-Tit.

Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve—set in the northern steppes roughly 90 miles (150km) west of Nur-Sultan, this large reserve is an important stopover for many migrant birds on their way to breeding grounds in Siberia. Dotted with over 200 steppe lakes, the reserve also hosts a large number of breeding species, including the most northerly breeding colony of Greater Flamingo. Though three of the most local and important targets are grassland species—the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing, and Black and White-winged larks—the abundance of water birds will also provide some wonderful

highlights. The lengthy list of species we could encounter here includes the likes of Whooper Swan, Ruddy and Common shelducks, Demoiselle and Common cranes, Pied Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Terek Sandpiper, Common and Spotted redshanks, Black-winged Pratincole, Slender-billed and Pallas's gulls, White-winged Tern, Great Bittern, Pallid and Montagu's harriers, Short-eared Owl, Red-footed Falcon, Red-backed Shrike, Paddyfield and Moustached warblers, Citrine and Western Yellow wagtails, Reed Bunting, and Twite, to name but a few.



The elegant Demoiselle Crane inhabits marshes and wetlands across central Asia. We'll look for them near Nur-Sultan at the Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve. Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours.

Itinerary for Central Asia

Days 1-2, Wed-Thu, 22-23 May. Departure from US; arrival in Tashkent. The most direct flight schedules will depart the US in the evening of Day 1 and arrive in Tashkent late at night on Day 2, or just after midnight on Day 3. Once you've passed through customs and retrieved your luggage, head to the exit (straightforward as it is a very small Arrivals hall) to find your driver for the transfer to our hotel located about a 20-minute drive from the airport. For those that would like to arrive early, extra nights can be arranged. Night in Tashkent.

Day 3, Fri, 24 May. Tashkent to Samarkand. After enjoying the hotel's buffet breakfast, we'll gather in the lobby with our luggage at 9:00am to meet up with our local guide and board the bus for our transfer to Samarkand. Though it's primarily a travel day, we will have some opportunities to bird en route, during which we'll be sure to encounter a good number of typical Central Asian bird species while we keep our eyes open for the impressive stick nests of White Storks, which will be in use at this time of year. A special stop will also be made to track down the rather local Variable Wheatear at one of the few spots we're likely to encounter this species on the tour. We expect to arrive in Samarkand early enough to enjoy an initial exploration of this city's many cultural sites. Night in Samarkand.

Day 4 Sat, 25 May. Samarkand region. We'll start today with an early departure for the nearby Takhta-Karacha Pass in the low mountains to the south of the city. We'll spend the morning scouring the area for local specialties like Hume's Lark, White-throated Robin, Eastern Orphean Warbler, the yellow-breasted form of Azure Tit, and Indian Paradise Flycatcher, while keeping an eye on the sky overhead for an assortment of raptors. After a full morning of birding, we'll return to the city for lunch, followed by a more in-depth visit into the ancient core of the city, replete with countless mosques, madrassas, and mausoleums. Among the sites we plan to visit are the famous Registan Square, the magnificent Bibi-Khanym Mosque, commissioned by the Timurid conqueror, Tamerlane, more than 6 centuries ago, and the stunning Shah-i-Zinda Necropolis. Night in Samarkand.

Day 5, Sun, 26 May. Morning birding near Samarkand; drive to Bukhara. Before leaving Samarkand behind, we'll visit a nearby wetland where among a variety of more widespread open country and water birds, we'll try to find the charming White-crowned Penduline-Tit. White-winged Woodpecker and Indian Golden Oriole are among other possibilities we may find before we get on the road for Bukhara. We'll plan to arrive in Bukhara in time to make an initial visit to the well-maintained historic center of the town, which is within easy walking distance of our hotel. Night in Bukhara.

Day 6, Mon, 27 May. Kyzyl-Kum Desert; Bukhara. In order to beat the inevitable heat, we'll be out early this morning en route to the expansive Kyzyl-Kum Desert (15th largest in the world!) the red sands of which (the name translates to "Red Sands") cover an area of more than 100,000 square miles across Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and southern Kazakhstan. It is here where we'll search for the Central Asia endemic Turkestan (or Pander's) Ground-Jay. While the ground-jays will be a priority, we'll be looking for other desert species as well, such as Scrub Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, and Desert Finch. We expect to return to our hotel with enough time to enjoy a leisurely guided walk in the heart of the city before dinner. Night in Bukhara.



The Scrub Warbler is a spritely little desert bird that breeds in central Asia. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Day 7, Tue, 28 May. Bukhara to Tashkent. Today begins with a visit to some productive wetlands not far from the city. A complex of marshes, extensive reed beds, and dry scrub should produce a good variety of species, among which we'll hope to see such things as Pygmy Cormorant, Dalmatian Pelican, the scarce and local Marbled Teal, White-tailed Lapwing, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, both Eurasian and Clamorous reed-warblers, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, and plenty more. In the afternoon, we'll bid Bukhara farewell as we board the high-speed train for Tashkent, where we plan to arrive by dinner time. Night in Tashkent.

Day 8, Wed, 29 May. Chimgan Hills. Our final day of birding in Uzbekistan will find us heading east of Tashkent up into the Chimgan Hills near the Beldersay Ski Resort. We will chiefly be searching for Rufous-naped Tit, a species we're unlikely to encounter elsewhere on the tour, but there should be plenty of other birds to keep our attention. Various raptors, Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, Mistle Thrush, Common Nightingale, Hawfinch, and Rock and White-capped buntings are just a few of the other species we hope to see before making our way back to Tashkent. Night in Tashkent.

Day 9, Thu, 30 May. Tashkent; flight to Almaty. Kaskelen NP. Today's activities will be dictated by our flight time, though we hope to arrive in Almaty with enough time to visit the Kaskelen National Park just south of the city. Meadow

Bunting, here at the westernmost edge of its range, will be our primary goal here, though there will also be a nice selection of other more widespread species to enjoy, perhaps including Common Cuckoo, Blue Whistling-Thrush, and Blue-capped Redstart. Night in Almaty.

Day 10, Fri, 31 May. Almaty to Sogeti Valley and Charyn Canyon NP. Heading east from Almaty, today we find ourselves en route to one of Kazakhstan's most famous natural wonders, the scenic Charyn Canyon. The magnificent scenery will serve as a stunning backdrop as we search the area for a great variety of dry country species. Raptors, shrikes, larks, finches and buntings are particularly well-represented in the region. Night in rustic hunting lodge along the Charyn River.

Day 11. Sat, 1 June. Sogeti Valley and Charyn Canyon. We'll spend the full day birding this region, dividing our time between several productive areas. In the late afternoons, we'll visit an artesian well in the Sogeti Valley, where puddles produced by the well serve as a magnet for birds in this arid landscape. Species that we hope to see here include both Pallas's and Black-bellied sandgrouse, and Mongolian, Desert, and Crimson-winged finches, among many others. Night in hunting lodge.



*We'll watch for the handsome Pallas's Sandgrouse in the Sogeti Valley of Kazakhstan.
Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours*

Day 12, Sun, 2 Jun. Charyn Canyon to Karakol, Kyrgyzstan. After a final morning in the Sogeti Valley, we'll be back on the road, working our way south into neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Climbing into the mountains, the land becomes less dry and more arable, and as we pass through agricultural areas, we'll be on the watch for flocks of stately Demoiselle Cranes, as well as Upland Buzzard and Saker Falcon. We'll aim to be at our charming hotel in Karakol in the late afternoon to early evening. Night in Karakol.

Days 13-14, Mon-Tue, 3-4 Jun. Tien Shan Mountains, Chon-Ashuu Pass. These days will find us climbing high into the Tien Shan Mountains, reaching our highest point of the tour in the Chon-Ashuu Pass at 12,500' (3800m). The singular Ibisbill will be on our radar for these days, and as we scour the river beds for that species, we may also see both Brown and White-throated dippers. Himalayan Rubythroat, White-browed Tit-Warbler, Brown and Altai accentors, and Rufous-backed and White-winged redstarts are among the many other key species we'll be targeting in this visually stunning area. Nights in Karakol.

Day 15, Wed, 5 Jun. Return to Almaty. This is primarily a travel day, as we cross back into Kazakhstan and make our way back to Almaty, though we will make a few stops to try to clean up on any species we may have missed during our first pass through this region. We aim to be back in the city by late afternoon. Night in Almaty.

Day 16, Thu, 6 Jun. Almaty to Taukum Desert via Sorbulak Lake. Setting out to the northwest of the city, our first birding stop today will be at Sorbulak Lake, part of a series of sewage treatment reservoirs created here in the 1970's, that is now a productive wetland. The endangered White-headed Duck is regularly seen here, and we'll search carefully for them amongst the throngs of waterfowl, which may include handsome Ruddy Shelduck, Garganey, and Ferruginous Duck to name a few. There should also be plenty of gulls, terns and shorebirds to keep us entertained. From Sorbulak, we continue north, aiming to reach our wonderful yurt camp in the remote Taukum Desert with enough time to stake out a local artesian well in hopes of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse. Night in yurt camp.

Day 17, Fri, 7 Jun. Taukum Desert, Topar Lake, Zheltorangy Forest. We'll have the full day to explore the desert and surrounding habitats for a series of local specialties including the declining Macqueen's Bustard, Caspian Plover, Yellow-eyed Pigeon, White-winged Woodpecker, Shikra, Saxaul Sparrow, and many more before returning to our camp for the night. Stargazers might get little sleep here as the lack of light pollution and clear skies should give us an unforgettable view of the starry skies. And spotlighting in the desert around the camp is likely to turn up Great Gerbil, Wonder Geckos, and other fascinating nocturnal creatures! Night in yurt camp.



The attractive White-winged Woodpecker is an endemic of central Asia that we'll look for in the forested areas of the Taukum desert region. Photograph courtesy of Rubythroat Birding Tours.

Day 18, Sat, 8 Jun. Taukum Desert to Almaty via Tamgaly Petroglyphs. We'll use our final morning in the Taukum Desert to try to clean up on any missing target species before we make our way back to Almaty. We'll drive a different road back, bringing us to the lush Tamgaly Gorge, home to one of the finest rock art sites in Central Asia. Here, more than 5000 images, many dating back to the Bronze Age, have been etched into the stone walls of the gorge, and we'll spend some time wandering through the site to view some of these while keeping a sharp eye open for birds like Little Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, and Red-headed Bunting. Night in Almaty.

Day 19, Sun, 9 Jun. Flight Almaty to Nur-Sultan; Nur-Sultan area. Our schedule is somewhat dependent on our flight time today, but we expect to have some time to explore around Nur-Sultan once we've arrived and settled in. The lovely Pine Bunting will be one of our main targets here, and birds like Pallid Harrier and Red-footed Falcon are also to be expected among many more widespread species. Night in Nur-Sultan.

Day 20, Mon, 10 Jun. Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve. An early start is required this morning in order to make the most of our visit to the spectacular Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve, a vast mosaic of virgin steppe and freshwater and saline wetlands

to the west of Nur-Sultan. Sitting at the junction between two major migratory flyways, the wetlands here are an incredibly important stopover for birds en route to nesting grounds in Siberia, and the region can be teeming with waterfowl and shorebirds, making the birding here truly exciting. High on our priority list for the area will be three local steppe species, Black and White-winged larks, and the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing, but there will be plenty of other birds, too, including Terek Sandpiper, Red-necked Phalarope (sometimes numbering in the thousands), Common and Demoiselle cranes, White-winged Tern, Pallas's and Slender-billed gulls, Black-winged Pratincole, Pallid and Montagu's Harrier, and many, many more. Night in Nur-Sultan.

Day 21, Tue, 11 Jun. Nur-Sultan wetlands. We will devote our final day in Kazakhstan to the wetlands around Nur-Sultan, trying to mop up any key species we might still be missing. Time permitting we'll plan to have a short tour of this modern city with its many fantastic, futuristic buildings. This evening we'll enjoy a fabulous final dinner at an authentic local restaurant to toast the end of a wonderful tour! Night in Nur-Sultan.

Day 22, Wed, 12 Jun. Flights home. Homeward flights can be booked for anytime today. Safe travels!

About Your Guides

Jay VanderGaast was introduced to birding by his father, and his obsession with birds was evident by age seven when he memorized the plates in Peterson's eastern field guide. He went on to earn a B.S. in biology at university and briefly contemplated a career in research, but two years on the mosquito-infested arctic tundra watching ptarmigan do little other than occasionally getting eaten by Gyrfalcons soon put an end to that plan! Instead, he strapped on a backpack and a pair of bins and began roaming the world in search of birds.

His travels eventually led him to Costa Rica, where he stumbled into a job as a birding guide at Rancho Naturalista Lodge. Amazed that he was actually getting paid to watch birds, he jealously guarded his position there for six years. His career with Field Guides coincided with the dawn of the new millennium (if you believe that began in 2000!), and since then he has guided more than 100 tours on several continents.

When he's not on tour, Jay's native habitat is his home near Montreal.

"Jay VanderGaast was a delight to travel with...incredible at finding the birds and extremely helpful in getting us on the birds—which was much appreciated!he made the trip an exceptional experience which I will remember for the rest of my life." L.K., Costa Rica

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Jay's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$8975

DEPOSIT: \$900

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 24, 2023

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$1275

LIMIT: 12

All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one). Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD: With two exceptions, all of our lodging will be in modern hotels with comfortable rooms and en-suite facilities. The exceptions are at the Charyn Canyon, where we'll stay in a rustic hunting lodge (situated in an oasis that is a wonderful migrant trap!), and be housed in three separate buildings, each with a shared bathroom (outside of the main buildings, though with western style facilities). At the Taukum Desert, we'll be staying in well set-up traditional yurts, with comfortable beds, but shared shower and toilet facilities.

Food will be a variety of traditional Central Asia cuisine and more familiar European style cuisine, particularly in the main cities. Mutton features heavily in the local cuisine, and vegetables lean mainly towards carrots, cabbage, onions, and tomatoes. Overall the food is tasty and not very spicy.

DOCUMENTS: A current passport is necessary for US citizens to enter all three countries, and passports should be valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of return and have two blank pages for each country. US citizens do not require a visa to enter Kyrgyzstan, however, a visa is required for entry into Uzbekistan and likely Kazakhstan (regulations are in flux). Visas for Uzbekistan can be obtained online at <https://e-visa.gov.uz/main> and information on the Kazakhstan visa can be found at <https://www.vmp.gov.kz/en>. When you register for the tour, our office will need a copy of the title page of your passport, and your visa(s), if required.

If you are not a US citizen, please check well in advance of the tour for your entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require two blank pages for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have two blank page per country you will visit or transit.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: Please check with your tour manager for the best flight itinerary from your home city to Tashkent and back home from Nur-Sultan. International flights from your home city are not included in your tour fee, but the tour fee does include the fare for the two internal flights during the tour (Tashkent to Almaty, which is domestic, and Almaty to Nur-Sultan which is international).

Field Guides is a full service travel agency and your tour manager will be happy to assist you with flights to join this tour. Field Guides does not charge a service fee for these services to clients booking a tour. However, we understand that tech-savvy clients often prefer to shop online or that you may wish to use mileage to purchase tickets. Regardless of which method you choose, your tour manager will be happy to provide assistance regarding ticket prices and schedules, along with extra hotel nights as needed.

Please be sure to check with your tour manager prior to purchasing your ticket to make sure the flights you have chosen will work well with the tour itinerary and that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. Once purchased, most airline tickets are non-refundable and carry a penalty to change. Field Guides cannot be responsible for these fees.

Also, it is imperative that we receive a copy of your comprehensive flight itinerary—including any and all flights not covered in the tour fee—so that we may track you in the event of missed connections, delays, or other mishaps.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is \$8975 for one person in double occupancy from Tashkent. This includes all lodging from Day 2 through Day 21, all meals from breakfast on Day 3 through dinner on Day 21, the flight from Tashkent to Almaty, and the domestic flight from Almaty to Nur-Sultan, all ground transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare from your home to Tashkent or from Nur-Sultan back home, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$1275, but *note that at two of our lodgings, singles are not available and you will be required to share a room*. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share for the entire tour, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are

based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$900** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by November 24, 2023. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past,

and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

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