

**Winter Birding in Kyrgyzstan**  
**22 December 2006 – 26 December 2006**  
**Central Asia Birding**



*Participants ;*  
*Madina Dyussebaeva*  
*Madina Rasulbaeva*  
*Machiel Valkenburg*

### **Central Asia Birding**

Central Asia Birding is the first company devoted to birding and nature holidays in Central Asia. We offer unique tours that will lead you to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. We offer fixed departure tours as well as private, customised tours for small groups. All tours are guided by professional local ornithologists and some tours are accompanied by a Dutch ornithologist.

Every trip will be accompanied by a tourist guide/interpreter. Ecotourism is important to us therefore we use guidelines set up by the International Tourism Society

Central Asia Birding are training young and enthusiastic people from Central Asia to become specialists in the nature of Central Asia. In the future these young people, the future of their countries, will lead birdwatching holidays and set up programs to protect nature reserves in their own countries.

### **Why a trip the end of December**

The reason for this trip was to explore the area and to visit all the local guesthouses and Hotels that will be used for our trips in spring and summer 2007. [www.Globenatuurreizen.nl](http://www.Globenatuurreizen.nl) will make the same trip in the beginning of July. We do the trip in 5 days they will be spending 2 weeks in the rough and beautiful nature of Kyrgyzstan.

### **Participants**

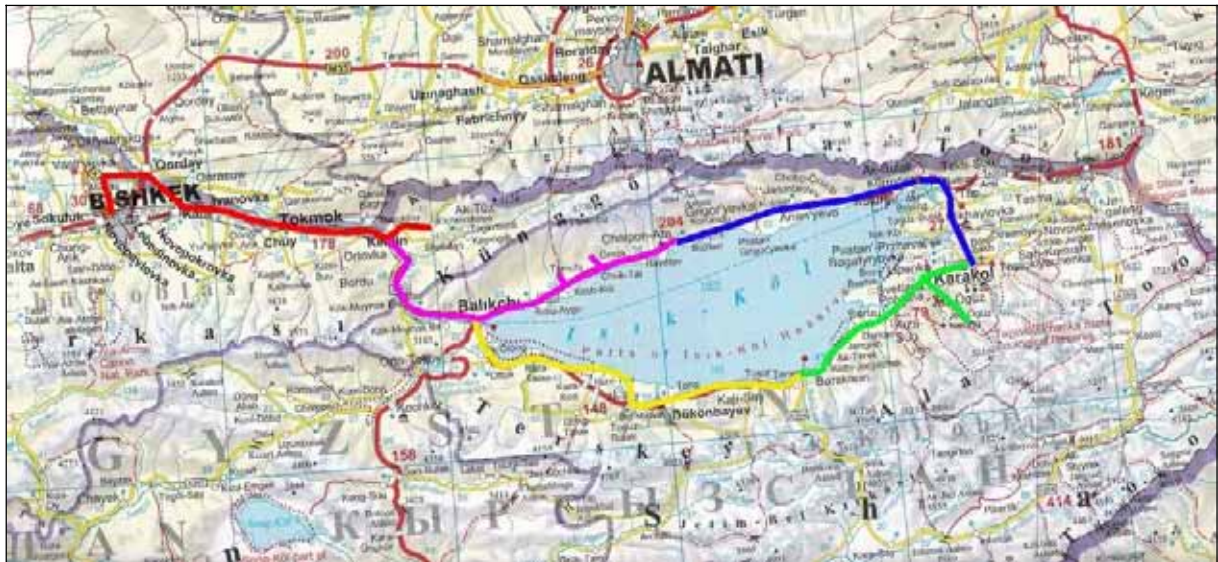
We were a small group of 3 people, Madina Dyussebayeva is co-owner of Central Asia Birding and is from Kazakh origin and a real nature fanatic. She is mostly interested in birds but also butterflies and plants have her interest. The second person in the group is Madina Rasulbaeva she young and an enthusiastic person and in her final year of university. She speaks perfectly English and is training to become a birdtour-leader in the future. Finally the last person in the group is myself. Machiel Valkenburg a birder from Holland who discovered the natural and avifaunal beauties of Central Asia a few years ago.

### **Buzzards**

After the trip I had some discussions with Michael Westerberg (travelled extensively in Central Asia) and Arend Wassink (writer of the book Birds of Kazakhstan) about the Buzzard subspecies living in winter in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Michael told me he had seen and taken pictures of *Buteo buteo vulpinus* wintering around Issyk Kol Lake. Because of the micro-climate around the lake, the temperature is higher and maybe more suitable for wintering *B. b. vulpinus*, who normally moves to the south. Arend told me that it absolutely can not be possible to see *vulpinus* in winter in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. He does not believe this theory. So I call all the Buzzard that I have seen during this trip Buzzard spec. Here is definitely more research needed!!

## **The route**

We started our trip in Bishkek, the capitol of Kyrgyzstan. We first moved to the north for the Ozermayo fishing ponds. Following the Chuy river to Tokmok Forest and ended our first day in Chon Kemin Park. The second day we moved towards the Issyk Kul Lake and travelled the northern route to Cholpan Ata. From Cholpan Ata we move to our most eastern point in Karakol. Leaving Karakol behind us we depart for Yeti Oguz and Tamga. Our final day we drive from Tamga to Bishkek by way of Salt Lake.



## **22-12-2006 Ozermayo fishing ponds north of Bishkek to Chon Kemin**

We started the day at 8.00 and moved through the busy Bishkek city to the north-side of the city, where we would visit the Ozermayo fishing ponds. The weather was not as chilly as expected, 5 degrees Celsius! At arriving immediately we spotted 2 Caspian Gulls. Driving along the road we saw some fisherman on the ice in tents, they were ice fishing. Around the ponds are lots of Populus trees, which are full with Chaffinches. Beside the finches also 2 Pine Buntings were noticed. After a 2 hour stay at the lake we had Dark-throated Thrush, Sparrowhawk, lots of Chaffinches and a dark morph buzzard spec..



Our next aim was the Tokmok Forest. We would go there by following the Chuy River, the natural border with Kazakhstan. At 12 o'clock we stopped for lunch near the Chuy River and recorded immediately our first Pygmy Cormorant. Next to this we also saw Little Grebe, Great Egret, Red-breasted Merganser, Buzzard spec. and our first White-tailed Eagle. After the lunch which where noodles we headed further east to Tokmok. Along the way we wrote down the most interesting birds; White-tailed Eagle 4, Buzzard spec. 9, Long-legged Buzzard 3, Marsh Harrier 2, Great Egret 4 and Little Grebe with 34 individuals is also worth noticing. Arriving at Tokmok Forest it seemed that forest should not be taken to literally as there where trees but the biggest area was covered by Reed (*Phragmites spec.*). We eventually have some great sightings of Great Grey Shrike of the homeryi sub-specie and a large amount of teals, Pygmy Cormorants, Mistle Trushes and a single Hen Harrier.



White-tailed Eagle picture M.Valkenburg

After a few hours we continued to Chon Kemin by way of the Burana tower. This tower was build by the citizens of the eastern Kagenet's in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The Burana tower is accompanied by ruins of the palace, petroglyphs and gravestones, called by local people Balbals. The last 2 where collected from the Chuy Valley. The Burana tower is besides a beautiful historic place also a good place to spot migratory birds in autumn! After spending 45 minutes on the tower we headed to our final destination Chon Kemin. We arrived at 19.00 and where surprised about the luxurious and delightful traditional interior of the Ashu Guesthouse!

### **23-12-2006 Chon Kemin to Cholpan Ata at Issyk Kul Lake**

After a good breakfast at the guesthouse we went for some birding in the mountains of Chon Kemin. Immediately after departure we had a juvenile female Rough-legged Buzzard sitting in the top of a tree. In the local village always lots of Tree-sparrows, Myna's and Great Tits. We drove with the four-wheel drive car into the mountains till we could go no further, we then went by foot. Because of the early hour their was a lot of fog and little visibility. We started with a Eurasian Dipper of the subspecie leucogaster It was foraging in the stream where we parked the car. We decided to follow the steam up words. The first half hour

was very quiet with only a few magpies flying over. When we came to the edge of a pine forest and this combined with some bushes with berries and the stream the fun began. I heard Azure Tit and after a 5 minute search we found this splendid specie and all had good views of the bird.

When spotting the Azure Tit a group of Red-fronted Serrin's flew over, around 20! When continuing the path next to the forest we extended our list with Goldcrest, Blackbird, Songar Tit and more Azure Tits. Because the fog was not clearing we decided to go back to the car. During the trip back we saw some Ravens and a single female Hen Harrier hunting. Near the car we saw a pair of beautiful Red-fronted



Rosefinches feeding on the berries!! We went back to the guesthouse and had spaghetti for lunch and then headed for Cholpan Ata.

After 5 km we had a first small stop for a group of 80 Grey-faced Goldfinches, who were just magnificent, they all had a fresh plumage. After some more small stops for pictures of the scenery we made a stop for 15 minutes and did some walking. We saw our first Black-throated Accentor, Bearded Vulture, Golden Eagle and again Azure Tits. Here in the Cholpan Ata Gorge we saw more Azure Tits then Great Tits!



Brown Accentor picture M.Valkenburg

In 3 hours it would be dark and we still had to drive 200 km to Cholpan Ata. We stopped few times for the amazing scenery and of course sometimes for some not clear raptors. Most of them where Buzzards spec. or Kestrel, also 1 Hobby was seen. We arrived at Cholpan Ata at 18.40 had dinner and then went for our beds.

### **24-12-2006 Cholpan Ata to Karakol along Issyk Kul Lake**

We left the hotel at 7.30 in the morning without breakfast because we had the idea to have our breakfast at the Lake with a rising sun. We stopped at a small beach with some scrubs and good views over the lake. We saw 4 Red-crested Pochards, lots of Mallards and 40 Black-necked Grebes diving together as a family. Again we witnessed the morning migration of an estimated 2000 Rooks and Carrion Crows.

After breakfast we continued to a local gorge where within 5 minutes we discovered Wallcreeper. We had close views of the bird and after 15 minutes we decided to go on to Karakol.



Wallcreeper gorge



Wallcreeper gorge

During the drive to Karakol we made some small stops with views over the lake and near some fields, Goldeneye, Great Crested Grebe, Corn Bunting, Yellowhammer, Pine Bunting, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Myna, Grey-faced Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Buzzard spec., Kestrel and Merlin where seen during the way. After arriving at Karakol we headed for Karakol Base at 2400 meters in the National Park. After 100 meter in the NP we saw immediate a Guldenstadt's Redstart and above in the sky we saw a big group of Chough's circling around the mountains. The scenery was amazing and all of us made many pictures of the views but unfortunately there where not many birds to be spotted. On the way back we saw the display of Brown Dipper in the water, it was going under and foraging heavily, he approached us on 5 meters!! We watched the bird for like 20 minutes till it was chased away by a Eurasian Dipper.

After this great wonder we went to Karakol city and searched for the guesthouse where we stayed for the night. We where treated with a big and tasty Kyrgyz meal. Then had a shower and went to bed.

### **25-12-2006 Karakol to Tamga by way of Yeti Oguz**

We started our day at 7 with a good breakfast with caviar! We went to Yeti Oguz only 20 km away from Karakol. Yeti Oguz is famous for its red sandstone mountains. When entering the park we immediately started with a fine male Guldenstadt's Redstart. In a time range of 20 minutes we had 6 individuals of Guldenstadt's!! They come down from the high mountains because of the snow and are now easily to see. In spring you have to make a lot more effort to see them. Our morning started perfect, only a half hour later we had a flat tire but with the help of some locals we did not lose much time. Driving further we saw the immense and beautiful red sandstone mountains, Madina D. discovered a Wallcreeper and a few minutes later I had a second one. The park has lots of Pine forest and we checked at the tops for Northern Hawk Owl but unfortunately we could not discover one. We did see Coal Tits, Buzzards spec. and Dipper. When leaving the forest area we saw a male Evermann's Redstart on 4 meters distance, all where in a state of ecstasy. Next we made a small stop near the river and of course we saw multiple Azure Tits. It seems if you have water and some high scrubs Azure Tit will be there. Next to these splendid Tits we also had Red-fronted Serin, Bearded Vulture and more Guldenstadt's as most beautiful birds.



Guldenstadt's Redstart picture M.Valkenburg

We then moved back to Karakol to repair the tire. We then had the transport to Tamga, during the 2 hour trip we had 8 Buzzards spec., 6 Kestrels, 23 Red-breasted Pochards and 1 Pine Bunting. We arrived at the guesthouse had our dinner and went straight for our beds.

### **26-12-2006 Tamga to Bishkek by way of Salt Lake**

We started the day early and departed from our guesthouse in Tamga at 7 am. On the Issyk Kol where many ducks. We spotted again large numbers of Red-crested Pochard (284), Pochard, Tufted Duck and Goldeneye. Besides ducks there where also some numbers of Black-necked Grebe. Just outside the village of Tamga we spotted a group of Chaffinches with 1 Great Tit. We where driving into the western direction to Salt Lake when we saw a large group of Chough's!! They where moving a lot but we estimated the number around 250 birds, in this

group we only saw 1 Jackdaw. Apparently they come down from the mountains and gather on these fields to find food.

A couple of minutes later after the group of Chough's we had to stop again for a group of 8 White-winged Crossbeaks. They were flying along with the car and finally sat down in a tree 50 meters from us. We had some splendid views!

We drive on and after some time we leave the main road and go right to Salt Lake. The landscape looks like we are birding on the moon. We see the first group of Buntings with Corn, Yellowhammer, Pine and a few hybrids of Pine and Yellowhammer.



A group of men are working, they were making a canal to fulfil the needs of the agricultural sector in the

region. Yes they are trying to grow crops in this moon landscape. While talking with the men I hear a few high sounds, Horned Larks!! It was a group of 41 birds. We move on towards our destination. When reaching the big Issyk Kul (Salt Lake is a small lake created by dropping of the water level of Issyk Kol) we decide to have lunch there. During lunch we spot 450 Red-crested Pochards, 3 Horned Grebe, 5 Black-necked Grebe, 1 Pontic Gull, and 2 White-tailed Eagles flying over. After a delicious lunch prepared by the lovely Madina's we move on.

With the four-wheel drive we reach the Salt Lake, it is frozen!! This is very unusual for a SALT lake. There is 1 small hole in the ice and there are many birds. I spot a rather rare bird for Kyrgyzstan, Little Gull, it is fishing together with 6 Common Gulls. We step out of the car and walk around a little. First Madina D. spots a Meadow Pipit and later on we discover a group of Brown Accentors, at least 6 birds. We find it enough and head back to the car because we have to drive back all the way to Bishkek today. After being 300 meters away from Salt Lake we stop again for a group of Grey Partridges. Very common for us people from Europe but in the book *Birds in Kyrgyz Republic* by Joost van der Ven it is situated as not observed in Kyrgyzstan. Looking at the habitat it is rather good for this species. I believe small and maybe some larger numbers can occur south of lake Issyk Kol. Again after a few minutes we stop for 3 Chukar Partridges, really beautiful birds, during this stop also 1 Wallcreeper. We move on back to the main road.



Lunch at Issyk Kul lake

Our short trip around the lake has come to an end we arrive late in Bishkek where we have our final dinner. The country is amazing and every time keeps surprising. Maybe that's why I love this country so much.....

**Birdlist:**

***Kaska Suu (40km south of Bishkek) 21-12-2006***

Long-legged Buzzard	2
Red-fronted Serin	45
Alpine Chough	2
White-winged Crossbeak	8
Songar Tit	1
Raven	2

***Ozermayo Fishing ponds 22-12-2006***

Pontic Gull	2	2 Adults flying into eastern direction, they were already in summer plumage!!
Black-throated Thrush	1	
Pine Bunting	2	
Buzzard spec.	2	

***Khun Chi village – Chuy River 22-12-2006***

Little Grebe	35	All adults sitting in a tree next to the Chuy River.
Pygmy Cormorant	6	
Red-breasted Merganser	1	
Great Egret	4	
White-tailed Eagle	5	

Buzzard spec.	9
Long-legged Buzzard	3
Lapwing	1
Moorhen	23
Tufted Duck	46
Coot	2
Marsh Harrier	2

***Tokmok Forest 22-12-2006***

Buzzard spec.	2
Great Grey Shrike (homeryi)	1
Pygmy Cormorant	3
Teal	7
Little Grebe	1
Pheasant	1
Coot	3
Moorhen	1
Mistle Thrush	21
Goshawk	1
Hen Harrier	1

***Road from Tokmok to Burana tower 22-12-2006***

Great Grey Shrike	1
Sparrowhawk	1
Buzzard spec.	1
Collared Dove	2

***Sailyck 22-12-2006***

Crow + Pied Crow	450	A large mixed flock migrating in NW direction.
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***Chon-Kemin NP 23-12-2006***

Red-mantled Rosefinch	2	Couple
Azure Tit	4	
Guldenstadt Redstart	1	Female
Songar Tit	2	
Hen Harrier	2	2 Females
Great Tit	3	
Goldcrest	2	
Dipper	1	
Blackbird	5	
Magpie	7	
White-winged Crossbeak	1	Only heard
Rough-legged Buzzard	1	Female
Goldfinch	105	
Bearded Vulture	1	
Tree Sparrow	75	

***Road from Chon Kemin to Cholpan Ata 23-12-2006***

Buzzard spec.	5
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Kestrel	2
Raven	3

**Road from Cholpan Ata to Karakol next to lake Issyk Kul 24-12-2006**

Red-crested Pochard	3	
Wilde Duck	40	
Great Crested Grebe	3	
Horned Grebe	39	
Buzzard spec.	10	
Corn Bunting	1	
Yellowhammer	40	
Kestrel	3	
Crow + Rook	2000	Migrating in a very large flock, probably leaving there sleeping quarters because it was very early in the morning.

**Gorge after Bozteri village 24-12-2006**

Wallcreeper	1
Magpie	5

**Hotel 'Flowers of the world' 24-12-2006**

Goldfinch	9	
Red-mantled Rosefinch	1	Female
Yellowhammer	2	
Goldeneye	3	
Great Crested Grebe	1	
Myna	4	
Great Tit	3	
Buzzard spec.	1	
Merlin	1	

**Karakol Mountains 24-12-2006**

Buzzard spec.	2
Guldenstadt Redstart	1
Alpine Chough	40
Great Tit	3
Magpie	3
Brown Dipper	1
Dipper	1

**Yeti Oguz 25-12-2006**

Kestrel	3
Buzzard spec.	2
Guldenstadt Redstart	6
Robin	1
Magpie	17
Wallcreeper	2
Dipper	1
Coal Tit	1
Evermann's Redstart	1

Bearded Vulture	1	Adult Male
Azure Tit	3	
Red-fronted Serin	12	

***Yssyk Kol near Tamga 25-12-2006***

Red-crested Pochard	23	
Wilde Duck	37	
Pine Bunting	1	

***Bay at Yssyk Kol just outside Tamga Village 26-12-2006***

Tufted Duck	100	
Red-crested Pochard	280	
Pochard	50	
Rudy Shelduck	3	
Horned Grebe	6	
Chaffinch	25	
Great Tit	1	
Blackbird	3	
Sparrowhawk	1	Female
Mute Swan	4	
Coot	70	
Chough	250	Foraging on field just outside of Tamga village.
Jackdaw	1	
Collared Dove	1	
Goldeneye	3	
Great Crested Grebe	1	
White-winged Crosbeak	8	
Mistle Thrush	6	

***Road from Tamga to Salt Lake 26-12-2006***

Corn Bunting	57	
Yellowhammer	33	
Tree Sparrow	250	

***Salt Lake 26-12-2006***

Horned Lark	41	
Red-crested Pochard	450	
White-tailed Eagle	2	Flying and hunting on Issyk Kol Lake.
Goldeneye	12	
Black-necked Grebe	3	
Common Gull	6	All foraging in an opening in the ice of Salt Lake.
Little Gull	1	Foraging together with the Common Gulls. Very active!!!
Grey Partridge	8	Birds in Kyrgyz Republic by J. van der Ven says, not observed in Kyrgyzstan.
Meadow Pipit	1	
Brown Accentor	6	

Chukar	3
Pontic Gull	1
Wallcreeper	1