

# Kazakhstan

## *Bird paradise of Central Asia*

May 17 - June 1, 2021

Itinerary

### Day 1 / May 17: Madrid - Istanbul

Meet and welcome at Madrid International airport to take our flight to Istanbul, where we are planning to connect our flight to Almaty arriving the following morning, so this is basically a first journey day.

*\* You are welcome to fly on your own to Istanbul or straight to Almaty. Let us know please in advance your travel plans to accommodate you properly. Since flights are included in the package holiday we will discount the corresponding amount to your tour price if you decide to book your own tickets.*

### Day 2 / May 18: Arrival to Almaty - Kaskelen-Ili-Alatau N.P.

Once we arrive to Almaty (the greenest city of Central Asia) we will be met by our local guide to drive up straight to the Kaskelen Ili-Ala-Tau National Park where we will get acquainted with the commoner species of Kazakhstan such as Grey-crowned Goldfinch, White-crowned Penduline Tit and Azure Tit. Next to the commoner species we also may find here such gems as Siberian Meadow Bunting, Blue Whistling Thrush and Blue-capped Redstart!

Later in the afternoon we will drive back to Almaty where we will stay at Hotel Saraichik. Dinner and accommodation.

### Day 3 / May 19: Almaty - Sogety Valley - Kokpek Pass - Charyn River

Heading out from our hotel in Almaty this morning we travel 125 miles (200 km) east to one of the more spectacular and well-known sites in Kazakhstan - the red, yellow and black canyons of the Charyn River Gorge. Amidst this lovely scenery we should encounter beautiful species such as Chukar, Rufous-tailed and Blue Rock Thrushes, Hume's Whitethroat, Chestnut-breasted, Grey-necked, Rock and Red-headed Buntings. Raptor might include Egyptian, Himalayan Griffon and Cinereous Vultures, Long-legged Buzzard, Golden Eagle, Saker Falcon and Lesser Kestrel. We may come across roadside colonies of the bizarre, pink-and-black, nomadic Rosy Starlings. In the evening we visit a small artesian where leaking pipes created small puddles. We wait for incoming Desert Finches, many Mongolian Finches should be seen and hopefully also several much larger Asian Crimson-winged Finches should pass by for a drink. After this spectacle we drive to our basic hunting lodges which is located in an oasis of the Charyn River. Dinner and accommodation.

### Day 4 / May 20: Charyn Canyon and surrounding fields

We start our day with an early walk on the Sogety Valley where we are in search of one of the most sought after species in Central Asia: the Pallas's Sandgrouse! Here we also might come across: Steppe Eagle, Sykes's Warbler, Asian Desert Warbler, Horned Lark and Central Asian Lesser Whitethroat. During the walk on the Sogety plains we might flush a Persian Gazelle! After a successful excursion we set sails for the superb and astounding landscapes of the Charyn Canyon where we can expect close views of Lesser Kestrel, Pied Wheatear and Desert Wheatear.

Our journey continues in southern direction towards the Kyrgyz border where a lunch stop might render cute Rock Petronias. When we come close to the mountains the ground becomes more suitable for growing crops and in these agricultural lands we have chance to come across some really interesting birds such as Upland Buzzard and Saker Falcon. Groups of gentle Demoiselle Cranes are seen regularly. We return home to our lodges where dinner awaits us.

#### **Day 5 / May 21: Charyn Canyon - Almaty**

The day starts with a walk on the Sogety plains to secure that everybody has seen the Pallas's Sandgrouse. This elegant bird is unfortunately always difficult to see because of its skulky behaviour and rare existence in this part of Central Asia. In the Kokpek pass we might come across hundreds of Black-veined Whites (if warm weather!). These gorgeous butterflies fly in large numbers during the month of May. Birding en-route since we go back to Almaty. A stop in one of the small villages along the road might render Red-rumped Swallows, Indian Golden Oriole, Lesser Grey Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Greenish Warbler and lovely Laughing Doves. End of the afternoon we arrive back in our hotel in Almaty where a refreshing shower feels great!

Dinner and accommodation at Hotel Saraichik.

#### **Day 6 / May 22: Almaty - Taukum desert**

We depart this morning for our Taukum Desert adventure passing through fields of poppies and other wildflowers and all with the spectacular backdrop of the icy Tien Shan Mountains. Along the way we make a first stop at the fantastic Sorbulak Lake here a colony with European Rollers and European Bee-eaters might enjoy the photographers amongst us. On the lake itself gorgeous Dalmatian Pelicans, rare Ferruginous Ducks, Great Crested, Black-necked and the Slavonian Grebe might be seen. On the mud flats waders in the form of Little and Temminck's Stint are common, while Terek Sandpipers are seen yearly in good numbers. We will take an al fresco lunch in the field before continuing on to our yurt camp in the Taukum Desert. This is a luxurious tented camp, a nomadic dwelling used by the local inhabitants of this beautiful country. All things being equal we should arrive in time for afternoon tea and an opportunity to view Black-bellied and possibly Pin-tailed Sandgrouse coming to drink at an artesian waterhole.

#### **Day 7 / May 23: Taukum desert - Turangas woodland**

Today is a wonderful day in which we will encounter a wide variety of habitats and some fine birds and other wildlife. Awakening in the midst of this remote desert, we will likely be watching the amazing display of McQueen's Bustards close to our camp, Caspian Plovers are breeding nearby and Wolves are spotted together with Persian Gazelles all before breakfast! Then we will set forth along narrow back-roads through a variety of steppe/desert habitats to an area of unique Turanga woodland where with a bit of luck we should encounter such specialties as Turkestan Tit, Saxaul Sparrow, White-winged Woodpecker, Pale-backed Pigeon (Eversmann's or Yellow-eyed Dove) and if we are especially lucky Pallid Scops-Owl. Along the way we will undoubtedly encounter a myriad of Greater Short-toed, Lesser Short-toed and Calandra larks and Isabelline Wheatears and Isabelline (Rufous-tailed) Shrikes but amongst which we must diligently search for Steppe Grey Shrike. Other possible species along our way include Pied and Desert wheatears, Rock Petronia, Spanish Sparrow, gorgeous little Azure Tits and Black-headed Penduline-Tit. Dinner and accommodation at our yurts camp.

**Day 8 / May 24: Taukum desert - Almaty**

Early this morning we will drive for about 15-20 miles into the desert looking for beautifully marked Caspian Plover and Greater Sand Plover that should look exceptionally smart in breeding plumage. After breakfast we will break camp and head back towards Almaty. We will make several stops along the way including a fascinating area of ancient petroglyphs; a scrubby, rocky area for the perky Eastern Rock Nuthatch and a breeding colony of exotic Red-headed Buntings. Nearby fringing scrub acts as a magnet for migrant and nesting birds such as Eurasian Hoopoe, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Shikra, Lesser Gray Shrike, Blyth's Reed-warbler, Sykes's Warbler, Oriental Turtle-Dove and Desert finch. Dinner and accommodation at Hotel Saraichik.

**Day 9 / May 25: Almaty - Tien Shan Mountains**

It will take us about two hours to transfer from Almaty to the Astronomical Observatory, situated at the Big Almaty Gorge of the northern Tien Shan Mountains at an altitude of over 8,500 feet. During our ascent we'll pause to seek out the Brown and White-throated Dippers and Blue Whistling-thrush along the fast-flowing mountain streams. In the open patches of mature, mixed deciduous/coniferous forest Greenish and Hume's warblers are quite common. The observatory is an old Soviet construction in a lovely open area of flower-covered alpine meadows and juniper-covered slopes, with a 360 degree backdrop of steep alpine peaks. Arriving in time for lunch, we can spend the afternoon ambling close to the Observatory where the stunning little White-tailed Rubythroat and Fire-fronted Serins are to be found.

Dinner and accommodation in a rural hotel near Almaty lake.

**Day 10 / May 26: Tien Shan Mountains**

We have a full day in this glorious high-altitude landscape to find a wonderful array of alpine specialists. Black-throated, Altai and Brown accentors, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak and the incomparable White-browed (Severtzov's) Tit-warbler await us! We will descend a short distance by coach to the Big Almaty Lake where wide, braided, stony river beds are home to the utterly unique Ibisbill. Higher up in the mountains above the Observatory at an altitude of 10,500 feet, we will look for Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon, Red-billed & Yellow-billed choughs, Plain Mountain-finches, White-winged (Güldenstädt's) Redstart and the star-attraction: Himalayan Snowcock which we have a good chance to see.

**Day 11 / May 27: Tien Shan Mountains - Almaty**

We will spend much of the day in the Tien Shan region and slowly make our way back to Almaty, arriving by late afternoon. This will allow for further searches at high altitude for anything so far missed, and also to descend slowly through the forests for Rufous-backed (Eversmann's) and Blue-capped redstarts, Songar Tit and the scarce Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker at mid-elevations. Dinner and accommodation at Hotel Sairichik.

**Day 12 / May 28: Almaty - Astana (Nursultan)**

In the morning we will board our domestic flight that will take us from Almaty 1,000 km north towards Astana (Nursultan). After arrival, we enjoy a little snack while driving out of the city. Here we are in search of the many waterfowl that are migrating north and use the lakes around the city as stopover. Our top targets here will be the

Pine Bunting, which shall be accompanied by several Red-footed Falcons and many Pallid Harriers. In the evening, we check-in to our hotel! Dinner and accommodation at Hotel Goldman Empire.

### Day 13 & 14/ May 29 & 30: Korgalzhyn Nature Reserve

An Early morning rise will see us depart at 6:00 am for the Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve. After a 3.5 hour's drive from Astana brings us to Korgalzhyn State Nature Reserve, it possesses a collection of birdlife that has recently attracted a nomination for UNESCO World Heritage Site status, the Korgalzhyn area remains surprisingly unknown, even within Kazakhstan. The vast wetland area, a combination of virgin steppe and lakes, is home to Wolves, Marmots and Saiga. However, it is the birds that are the real attraction. Located at the crossroads of two migration routes, the wetlands act as a giant motorway junction service station for birds (Lake Tengiz alone has the capacity to feed 15 million birds).

The area, most of which is protected as a 'Zapovednik' (national nature reserve), is home to the world's most northerly population of Greater Flamingo, one of over 300 species of birds, which includes one of the largest wildfowl population in Asia. Other notable residents include pelicans, cranes and a variety of birds of prey.

Our main targets here are nesting groups of the globally endangered Sociable Lapwing, which we have "staked-out" for you. There are many other fine attractions in this vast landscape. Roadside colonies of Black-winged Pratincoles and White-winged Black Terns in glorious breeding plumage should be dotted with migrant shorebirds such as Red-necked Phalaropes, Spotted Redshank, Terek Sandpiper, Ruffs displaying in all their finery, Little and Temminck's Stints. These enumerable wetlands and lakes should also produce breeding Dalmatian Pelican, Great Bittern, White-headed Duck, Red-necked and Eared grebes, Whooper Swan, Greylag Goose, Red-crested Pochard and Caspian Terns. More special still are often close colonies of splendid Great Black-headed Gulls, with a supporting cast of Steppe and Slender-billed gulls!

The damp grassy steppe contain elegant Demoiselle Cranes while scattered scrub, bush should hold Booted Warbler, Pallid Harrier and gorgeous little Red-footed Falcons. Two other very special birds we should find today are Black and White-winged Larks, often numerous along the roadside, both species confined to the Central Asian steppes. In the evening, we return to the village of Korgalzhyn where we check-in to our local basic guesthouse for a two-night stay.

### Day 15 / May 31: Korgalzhyn - Astana

After a final day's birding around Korgalzhyn for any missed species, we will return to the city where we will enjoy a large traditional meal in one of the fantastic restaurants of Astana. If time permits we will enjoy a city tour to this futuristic completely newly build city in the middle of the steppe! In the end of the day, we drive to the Astana Airport to catch our flight back home via Istanbul.

### Day 16 / June 1: Istanbul - Madrid

Arrival to Madrid after our flight from Istanbul.

*\*If improvements can be made or unforeseen conditions beyond our control make changes necessary, we reserve the right to vary this itinerary and substitute hotels.*

**PRICES:**

Per person sharing in twin / doubled-room with private facilities: **€ 3,150**

Single Supplement: **€ 274**

*Group size: Min. 10 – Max. 14 travelers plus our guide*

**The price includes:**

- \* Basic travel insurance
- \* Checklist of the birds of Kazakhstan
- \* Services of accredited translator Russian - English - Russian
- \* Ground transport in a Mercedes Sprinter minibus (2 vehicles if group exceeding 11 participants plus guides)
- \* Bird guide services: Santi Villa and local guide
- \* All meals starting on breakfast May 18 to dinner on June 1 (some of the lunches will be taken as a picnic) + water and soft drinks
- \* 13 night accommodation as showed in the itinerary (from them 2 nights at the yurts camp in the Taukum desert, 2 nights in basic hunting lodge in Charyn plus 2 nights in basic guest house in Korgalzhyn won't be possible single occupancy as an option having rooms for 2, 3 or even 4 people in the yurts)
- \* Domestic flight Almaty – Astana (Nur-Sultan)
- \* International flights Madrid – Almaty / Astana (Nur-Sultan) – Madrid (connecting flights in Istanbul both journeys)
- \* All taxes

**The price doesn't include:**

- \* Cancellation insurance
- \* Extra drinks during meals
- \* Any expenses of a pure personal nature such as telephone calls, laundry services, minibar, etc...
- \* Any tips to drivers and local guides

## 1. PAYMENTS

Reservations on our Kazakhstan tour (Cod.SBNT2021/3) running between May 17 and June 1, 2021 require a booking form and a deposit of **€ 600** in order to guarantee your place. This first payment must be sent to us by bank transfer or credit/debit card as soon as we approve your booking request in writing. We cannot accept as valid any request until we have received and acknowledged the deposit as above.

Balance payment for the tour (including single supplement if applicable) must be sent to us before February 16, 2021. Both payments can be done either by bank transfer or by credit / debit card through the secure on-line system available on our web site. If you decide to send the money via bank transfer our details are as follows:

*Holder: Spainbirds Nature Tours S.L.*

*Bank: Openbank*

*Address: Avda. De Cantabria, s/n*

*28660 - Bohadilla del Monte*

*Madrid*

*SPAIN*

*IBAN: ES55 0073 0100 56 0471764400*

*SWIFT / BIC: OPENESMM*

When making your payment, we recommend you include both the name and code number of the tour. All payments made by clients should be confirmed to Spainbirds Nature Tours either by email to [info@spainbirds.com](mailto:info@spainbirds.com) or by sending a text to the following mobile number: 00 34 687 83 77 19.

Please note that all payments to Spainbirds Nature Tours should be in Euros.

## 2. PERSONAL DETAILS AND PASSPORT

Travelers must advise any personal details required by Spainbirds Nature Tours to confirm their reservation, particularly important being name and surname exactly as shown on their passports in order to avoid any problem when we purchase group flight tickets.

**IMPORTANT NOTICE:** Travelers flying into Kazakhstan must have their passport in order and it must have an expiry date of at least 6 months after the return date of the tour. European Union, UK and USA citizens don't require a VISA to get into Kazakhstan. However we recommend you check with the embassy of Kazakhstan in your country to get any information about possible extra documents. This would particularly apply to UK travelers after 31st December 2020.

To assist Spainbirds in their organization of the tour, we ask travelers to advise if they are following a particular medical treatment, whether they have any allergies (especially food allergies), or if they have any specific diet requirements that we should know in advance.

### 3. TRAVEL INSURANCE

It is highly advisable to take out a personal travel and medical insurance policy before leaving your country. Please let us know the name of your company insurance before travelling. In addition we strongly recommend you have your own insurance for your optical equipment (binoculars, camera etc.). For information of all travellers Spainbirds Nature Tours has its own civil liability insurance through REALE SEGUROS, policy number 1331100001899/0, covering damages to third parties to a maximum of 1,800,000 Euros. As travel agency licensed by the Spanish Tourism Board, all our clients will be traveling covered by a basic travel insurance, but this may not be enough to cover certain personal circumstances or specific items.

### 4. CANCELLATIONS AND REFUNDS

Penalties and refunds if a cancellation is made by the client:

Any cancellation must be firstly reported by email or any other written form as a letter to our office address (see Contact Us section).

a) If the cancellation is made before February 16, 2021 we will refund 75% of the deposit paid. The remaining 25% will be used to cover any expenses related to change or cancellation of flight tickets or any deposits paid to ground agents, local guides or hotels.

b) If the cancellation is made between February 16, 2021 and April 2, 2021 (both days inclusive) we will refund the balance but the client will forfeit the entire deposit meaning 600 Euros for this specific Kazakhstan tour.

c) If the cancellation is made between April 3, 2021 and May 17, 2021 (including a no-show in the meeting point the same day that the trip starts) the client will forfeit the total amount paid to Spainbirds Nature Tours including any supplement or extras arranged previously related to this tour.

Any breach of the above instalments or unjustified delays in paying them will automatically lead to cancellation of the booking, the above mentioned rules then being applied. The post-cancellation sum of money to be reimbursed will be sent by wire transfer within the following fourteen days after the cancellation has been communicated. The client will also assume any expense related to possible bank commissions applied in the process.

Since the main objective of the penalties noted above is to guarantee the smooth functioning of this tour without affecting other clients or Spainbirds organization of the tour, we refund in full the amount paid if we are able to replace on time the cancelled place, excluding any expenses purely related to the nature of this change and any airline conditions, if the flight has been booked by Spainbirds

*Cancellation made by Spainbirds Nature Tours:*

We reserve the right to cancel any tour for which there are insufficient reservations - always before April 17, 2021. In case of such cancellation, all deposits and other payments will be automatically refunded in full to our clients.

If the cancellation of the tour is confirmed after April 17, 2021, Spainbirds Nature Tours will refund in full within the following 7 days the total amount paid by the client AND will compensate the client as follows below:

- a) A compensation equivalent to 10% of the total cost of the tour if cancellation is made between April 18 and April 27, 2021.
- b) A compensation equivalent to 15% of the total cost of the tour if cancellation is made between April 28 and May 17, 2021.

Spainbirds Nature Tours will not compensate to the client in the following cases:

- a) When the cancellation is made because the number of reservations is under the minimum required to run the tour as shown on our web site about this tour ([spainbirds.com/en](http://spainbirds.com/en)). In such case our travel agency reserves the right to cancel a tour and we will inform the client in writing of the cancellation as latest 20 days before the tour starts.
- b) When the cancellation is made due to reasons of force majeure, which would be acts, events or circumstances which could not have been anticipated and which would be beyond the control of the organizer.

#### 5. FLIGHTS SCHEDULE FROM MADRID (TURKISH AIRLINES)

TK 1858 May 17 MADRID 11:55 - ISTAMBUL 17:10  
TK350 May 17 ISTAMBUL 20:20 - ALMATY 04:35 (arriving on May 18)  
TK 355 June 1 NUR SULTAN 03:20 - ISTAMBUL 05:50  
TK1357 June 1 ISTAMBUL 10:10 - MADRID 13:40

The price of the package holiday includes return international flights from Madrid. Other existing alternatives from other airports might not be an option since prices given by the airline company usually depends on the number of reservations previously requested by Spainbirds Nature Tours. However, if you are planning to fly from your home country or any other different airport from Spain, please let us know by email in advance for us to consider your enquiry.

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