

# KYRGYZSTAN

## ENDEMIC & SPECIALITIES

7 days bird tour with Miksture - Eastern and Central Kyrgyzstan's pristine and beautiful landscapes



Guiding by Danish biologist  
Michael Westerbjerg Andersen

## **Birding in Kyrgyzstan**

*Tour start and finish in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan*

*Miksture is pleased to offer this exclusive journey – a bird tour designed for the eager birder but also for those interested in seeing beautiful landscapes, nature, study butterflies, flowers, people, photographing, etc*

Situated in the northern Himalayas with over 80% of the country straddling the fabled Tien Shan and Pamir Mountains, Kyrgyzstan's intact and undisturbed alpine nature makes it among the world's most unique mountainous places. Kyrgyzstan is one of the Central Asian ex-Soviet states achieving independence in 1991 and since then continues to develop and flower making it to the most peaceful and beautiful of the Central Asian countries. It's wedged between Kazakhstan in North, Uzbekistan in west, Tadzhikistan in South and the huge China in east. Without any ocean (however the world's next-biggest mountain lake Issyk Kul) and palm-coral beaches Kyrgyzstan is luckily still visited by few tourists and those coming here do it to marvel the magnificent nature. Kyrgyzstan is a poor country compared to Kazakhstan – no oil & gas makes life here more problematic, but the population – both ethnic Kyrgyz and Russians are incredible hospitable and friendly. Here too the Silk Road in centuries formed the civilizations and even today travelers are welcomed. The summer months in Kyrgyzstan provides some of the most interesting and rewarding birding. All the non-resident migrants are long time arrived and fully busy feeding juveniles which makes otherwise shy and difficult seen birds more straightforward to observe. This is also the time of year where birds gather in the wetlands and the shorebirds migrate between their summer and the winter areas south of the Himalayas. So there is lots of interesting birds in Kyrgyzstan in summertime. Also it's a time of year where most people have the possibility making holiday – and when this is combined with the best season for birding in Kyrgyzstan, it's ideal. The weather is as in southern Europe – sunny – sometimes hot in the lowland but comfortable and warm during the day. In the mountains it's cooler, however pleasant and with a wonderful summer freshness and beauty smell of flowers and herbs. Visiting the pristine mountains of Kyrgyzstan, watching its birds and meet the hospitable friendly Kyrgyz people is the best experience and holiday one can make.

Travel conditions in Kyrgyzstan are less comfortable than in Europe but we have the best and most experienced team providing good meals, zero-problem and smooth way of making the tour, and of course the locations are very well known by us – the birds too. We don't make any compromise, however we always make priority not to flush and frighten the birds. On this journey, we will watch some of the most remarkable bird species and the bird list will be impressive with all the regions special and wanted bird, e.g. all the redstarts, the Northern Himalayas warblers and mountainous birds, Ibisbill, Pine Bunting, Himalayan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon, Black Vulture, Red-headed Bunting, Gray-necked Bunting, Azure-Tit, Demoiselle Crane, etc etc. Prior departure we send an updated and informative bird list

We have designed this tour to maximize the experience of staying outside as much as possible. It's an active holiday where we will make relaxed hikes in the pristine nature, and there is time enough to dwell in each traveler's special interest. We always respect and try to help and support each traveler's special wishes and projects – e.g. photographing, studying certain species. You can use the day according to your wishes, and we will do our best to help in that way. There will be more than enough time being out in the fresh air and use the time for birding.

We look forward to show you some of the most beautiful parts of this magnificent country!

*Welcome!*

*Miksture/Michael, Bishkek 10.June 2011*



#### Itinerary

Day 01: Bishkek – Karakol. Birding along the road – Tokmok Reserve. Night in Karakol

Day 02: Karakol & birding in the mountain and lake-area. Night in Karakol

Day 03: Karakol – Jeti Oghuz - Tamga. Night in Tamga

Day 04: Barskaun Gorge and Fairy place. Night in Tamga

Day 05: Tamga – Son Kul. Night in Son Kul yurtcamp

Day 06: Son Kul. Night in yurtcamp

Day 07: Transfer to Bishkek, birding enroute. Tour concludes at your accommodation.

## Tour Fact Sheet

**Key Species** NOTE! The list varies according time of season and is typical for a mid-summer journey. Before the tour, Miksture sends a detailed list of birds. Himalayan Snowcock, Black Stork, Oriental Honey-buzzard, Lammergeier, Himalaya Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Black Vulture, Long-legged Buzzard, Black-eared Kite, Pallid Harrier, Montague's Harrier, Upland Buzzard, Booted Eagle, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Barbary Falcon, Saker Falcon, Common Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Chukar, Common Quail, Common Pheasant, Little Bittern, Great Egret, Horned Grebe, Demoiselle Crane, Lesser Sand Plover, Ibisbill, Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Pallas's Gull, Caspian Gull, Oriental Turtle Dove, Hill Pigeon, Laughing Dove, European Scops Owl, Short-eared Owl, Alpine Swift, European Bee-eater, European Roller, Eurasian Hoopoe, White-winged Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Pale Sand Martin, Eurasian Crag Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, Tawny Pipit, Water Pipit, Citrine Wagtail, Grey Wagtail, Black-headed Wagtail. Masked Wagtail, Brown Dipper, White-throated Dipper, Black-throated Accentor, Brown Accentor, Altai Accentor, Common Nightingale, Bluethroat, White-tailed Rubythroat, Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, Gldenstdt's Redstart, Black Redstart, Siberian Stonechat, Isabelline Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, Blue Rock Thrush, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Blue Whistling Thrush, Cetti's Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Common Grasshopper Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Sykes's Warbler, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Barred Warbler, Hume's Whitethroat, Greenish Warbler, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, White-browed Tit Warbler, Bearded Reedling, Azure Tit, Yellow-breasted Tit, Rufous-naped Tit, Songar Tit, Wallcreeper, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Indian Oriole, Turkestan Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Rose-coloured Starling, Red-fronted Serin, Plain Mountain Finch, Brandt's Mountain Finch, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak, Grey-necked Bunting, Red-headed Bunting, Pine Bunting, Alpine Chough, Red-billed Chough, Carrion Crow, Spanish Sparrow, White-winged Snowfinch, Twite, Mongolian Finch, Common Rosefinch, Rock Bunting, etc.

**When to go!** From middle of May to end of September

**Number of participants** From 1 to 25 pax. All are welcome!

**Price** This tour can be specifically crafted and designed individually for You and your fellow travellers. Costs depends of number of participante, route and service. Pls contact Miksture for an non-obligatory quote!

**Ease of Birding & Tour Pace** Brisk but fair; early up. Birding all day with lunch-break - many birds to watch & long stretches and areas to cover.

**Habitats Covered** Agricultural and Mountains; Northern Himalayas (Kyrgyzstan)

Climate	Summer – variable; the weather is as in southern Europe – sunny – sometimes hot in the lowland but comfortable and warm during the day. In the mountains it's cooler, however pleasant and with a wonderful summer freshness and beauty smell of flowers and herbs.
Accommodation	Guesthouse, yurt-camp; ger (Son Kul)
Photographic Opportunities	Good - excellent
Other Attractions	Beautiful landscapes, butterflies & flora, mountains and culture

### Day-to-day program

*Miksture always try to make the journey according to the program, but sometimes it can happen that routes can be changed as well as the order of the locations (unpredictable circumstances). We always try to optimize the birding hence we can add extra locations or change locations according to the clients' wishes. Miksture mail an updated program one month before departure. Please note! These are the following meals provided during the days: B (Breakfast), L (Lunch) and D (Dinner). Miksture is always ready to answer the questions and give more information. Please feel free to contact us.*

#### **Day 1. Bishkek – Tokmok - Karakol**

*Drive to Karakol (250 km) at Eastern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul. Along the northern shore we will look for waterfowls and raptors. Probably we will witness a wonderful day in the pure Kyrgyzstan air with interesting sightings. We drive through small villages where people live a quiet existence and we stop on the way to visit local birding hotspots. Our first stop will be in a little gem of a nature reserve; actually the presidents hunting residence – though rarely used nowadays. As a curiosum it should be mentioned this was one of the favorite haunts for the long-time gone Russian president Brezhnev. Nowadays it's possible to see his little hunting hut that function as a museum. It's kind of bizarre, but an interesting glimpse of the past for those remembering Brezhnev and former days of USSR. Much more interesting is the Azure Tits in the bushes near the houses, and the calling Penduline Tits in the willow trees. Usually there is a good selection of waterfowl and raptors. After some hours we leave Tokmok which means "hammer" in Kyrgyz, and continue east along the Chui Valley with the river on our left-hand; the river that mark the border between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. This road is actually a part of the Silk Road, this ancient way that branched across Central Asia linkeing West to East. In the afternoon we arrive to our accommodation in Karakol for the next days; a comfortable guesthouse on the Eastern shore of Issyk Kul. Karakol, former Prezhevalsk (original named Karakol ("Black Hand") – then in 1866 renamed Prezhevalsk after the famous Russian explorer – Lenin gave it back its original name in 1926 only for a short time, until Stalin renamed it Prezhevalsk again in 1935 – Finally in 1991 it was renamed Karakol once more, and I suppose the name is valid still...). Accomodation in guesthouse. BLD*

## **Day 2. Karakol & birding in the area**

We will use this day to explore the area around Karakol and explore the beautiful landscape along the Eastern shore of Issyk Kul. There are several small hot-birding-spots in the landscape: numerous ponds, small lakes, and the beautiful mountains. We also devote the day to one of the famous birds in the Himalayas – the Ibisbill. This remarkable bird is endemic for the Himalayas and one of the ornithological highlights for everyone. Here we find the Ibisbill in pristine and incredible beautiful landscapes. This is the Kingdom of the Ibisbill; here it shares the summer landscapes with local nomads and their livestock. In the evening we return to our guesthouse. BLD

## **Day 3. Karakol – Djety Oguz – Tamga**

After breakfast we leave Karakol and drive to the valley of Djety Oguz 25 km South West of Karakol. A lush valley with some striking red sandstone formations called the "Seven Bulls" from which the valley takes its name. We make a long but easy hike into a valley - 2-3 hours each way. There is colourful Apollo-butterflies, and dozens of flowering plants – and interesting birds: Golden Eagle, Black-eared Kite, Oriental Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, Grey Wagtail, Dipper (White-throated Dipper), Brown Dipper, Greenish Warbler, Hume's Yellow-browed Warbler, Turkestan Shrike, Red-billed Chough, Alpine Chough, Fire-fronted Serin, Common Rosefinch, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Rock Bunting etc. In the afternoon we drive along the south coast of Issyk Kul towards the quiet Russian village, Tamga at the mouth of the Barskaun valley. Our guesthouse is situated with excellent view to the surroundings, in south, the towering Jetim-Bel range at the end of Barskaun valley. Across the road there is an apricot orchard which feathered inhabitants make frequently visits to the gardens a.o. Azure Tits, Common Rosefinch, Hoopoe, Common Mynah, etc. Five minutes from the guesthouse is the lakeshore. There are always plenty of water birds to observe. The fields east of the village are excellent for birding. In summertime the area teems with plenty interesting birds as: Black-eared Kite, Hobby, Common Quail, Corncrake, Common Pheasant, Oriental Turtle Dove, Hoopoe, European Roller, more species of larks, Citrine Wagtail e.g. ssp. *M.c.calcarata*, Grey Wagtail, five species of wheatears, Isabelline Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Rose-colored Starling, Golden Oriole, (Grey-headed) Goldfinch, more species of buntings, etc. Furthermore there is several species associated with semi-desert and mountain habitats. From our guesthouse it's possible to go swim in the Issyk-Kul Lake and try real Russian sauna. There is Azure Tit in the garden, and it's wonderful to stroll through the village at dusk and dawn. Night in guesthouse Tamga. BLD

## **Day 4. Barskaun Gorge – Mountain birds**

We spend most of the day in the mountainous areas south of Tamga. There are more roads leading to good bird locations. The most accessible but less charming is the Kumtor Mine road. This road used to be one of the routes of the Silk Road, passing over the Bedel Pass (4284 m) into China. It is now the main road leading to the Kumtor Gold mine – hence its well maintained and there is a reasonable amount of traffic – including lorries making their way up to the mine and back. Along the road there is an impressive waterfall, and there is an interesting monument along the road – a bust of Yuri Gagarin, who holidayed on the South shore of Issyk-Kul after his historic first manned space flight. We continue way up to a plateau and stop to explore the area. Species to be seen include: Black Vulture, Upland Buzzard, Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Altai Accentor [Himalayan Accentor], Himalayan Rubythroat, Golden Plover, Redstart, Black Redstart, Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-headed Redstart, Carrion Crow, Fire-fronted Serin, Red Crossbill, Brandt's Mountain Finch (Brandt's Rosy Finch), Plain Mountain Finch (Hodgson's Rosy-Finch, Hodgson's Mountain Finch) and Rock Bunting. In the afternoon we visit another excellent birding spot where we usually find Pied Wheatear, Rock Thrush, Blue Rock Thrush and Grey-necked Bunting. Night in guesthouse, Tamga. BLD

### **Day 5. Tamga – Lake Son Kul**

We leave Tamga and drive towards Son Kul. During the drive we make few stops. In the afternoon we arrive. Son Kul is a mountain lake in the Central Tien Shan range, virtually in the centre of Kyrgyzstan. One translation of the name is "The Last Lake." At an altitude of 3016m a.s.l.; 29km long and 18 km wide and a maximum depth of 13,2m – it is Kyrgyzstan's second largest lake. The average temperature is about minus 3, 5 Celsius degrees, and in summer its about 11 Celsius degrees. Unlike Issyk Kul it does freeze over in the winter – between September and May. It is situated on a treeless, high mountain plateau, and is surrounded by lush mountain meadows (jailoo). As such it used by the shepherds of the Kochkor, Naryn and At-Bashi regions for summer pastures for their flocks: Sheep, goats, horses and Yaks. In fact, there is evidence that it has been used for pasture from very ancient times. The shepherds drive the livestock up into the mountains, establish a camp where they live for the summer months – setting up their yurts – round felt tents over a wooden frame are the typical nomadic dwelling found throughout Central Asia and Mongolia, you will see several scattered throughout the plain. Many shepherds welcome visitors and serve a cup of Kumyz – fermented mares milk. The beauty of the lake is unsurpassed! It's a huge area and birds tend to gather at certain points and locations. Access is restricted to the roads. There a lots of interesting birds, especially water- and mountain birds. In windy days, it's difficult to obtain good views of the waterfowl and it's recommended to spend such days in the surrounding hills and mountains. Another speciality from the lake is the Bar-headed Goose, but in the past years, numbers and sightings gradually decreased. Probably it does not breed at Son Kul and is now a rare bird in Kyrgyzstan, however single birds still occur. Birds: Slavonian Grebe, Black-necked Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, more species of ducks, Black Stork, Ruddy Shelduck, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Lammergeier, Cinerous Vulture, Merlin, Barbary Falcon, Demoiselle Crane, Lesser Sand Plover, Shore Lark, Yellow Wagtail, Citrine Wagtail, Brown Dipper (Himalayan Dipper), Alpine Accentor, Brown Accentor, Northern Wheatear, Isabelline Wheatear, Waterpipit, White-winged Snow Finch (Snow Finch), Wallcreeper, Suphur-bellied Warbler, etc. Night in yurtcamp. BLD

### **Day 6. Son Kul**

One more day at Son Kul: Program depending on weather conditions. Night in yurt camp BLD

### **Day 7. Son Kul - Bishkek**

Drive to Bishkek. Early up and off we go to Bishkek. Priority still goes to the birds, e.g. we make a stop at "Shrike-boulevard" where dozens of shrikes – Lesser Grey Shrike and Long-tailed occurs in good numbers. We arrive to Bishkek in late afternoon or in evening depending on our pace. Tour concludes in Bishkek at your accommodation. BL

**Transport:** Comfortable vans.

**Accommodation:** Comfortable guesthouses. We will have nights at basic yurt accommodation (the traditional felt accommodation in Son Kul)

**Photography:** We'll spend our time trying to see birds, but the keen photographer will find plenty of opportunity to make use of the often excellent light.

**Health:** Problems aggravated by altitude is as good as non-existing. We take very good care of our clients and we travel careful to reduce risks and uncomfortable and, anyone in general good health and reasonably fit should find that acclimatization is achieved within a few days of arrival, ensuring full enjoyment of this exciting journey.

**Meals:** The food is very delicious in Central Asia. When we are in the field we bring our own kitchen team who serve three meals a day: Good, healthy and delicious food! We provide mineral water during all tour, and serve tea and coffee to all meals. When possible and wished we make tea and coffee-breaks. Vegetarians are welcome too, and we have experience in preparing good meals, though it's of course not as home.

**Essential equipment:** Summer - cloth for warm weather; Rainproof jacket & ditto over trousers; hiking boots or good shoes; hat; sun glasses; sunscreen lotion & ditto lip balm; torch; towel. However prior departure we will provide informative and plentiful information about this matters. Winter – warm cloth!

**General note:** Though all possible efforts will be made to stick to the itinerary this may not always be possible due to circumstances beyond our control: a degree of flexibility is thus required, and participants must be adventurous and willing to put up with the rigors and discomforts inherent in travel in remote & culturally alien areas.

Trekking is restricted to short distances to/from the car according where the birds are: emphasis will be on seeing the birds, not on covering as many kilometers as possible on foot.

## **Mammals**

Though its birds we go for, there is an excellent range of mammals to be seen in the region, and good bird sites usually is good places for other animals... During the years we have made these tours we have seen a long list of mammals (and insects, butterflies, flowers, etc): Wolf, Deer, Wild Pigs, Ibex, Marco Polo Sheep, Persian Gazelles, Tolai Hare, Great Gerbil, Red Pika, Corsac Fox, Marbled Polecat, Murmeldyr (Long-tailed Marmot), Red Squirrel, Ground Squirrel, etc.



Participants should tolerate and be ready for, transportation on roads less comfortable etc the activity level is adjusted so it fit all clients, and everyone can enjoy this journey. There is certain flexibility, so individual wishes and pace can be respected. We don't climb mountains or endure tough levels of activity, but this is birding and participants should be ready getting up early – and participants should be ready to endure changing climatic conditions. We visit semi-deserts, mountains – with shifting cool & hot climate, etc when this is said, it should be stressed that Miksture and my team are very experienced in handling these tours. We know the areas and the conditions. We are well prepared, and make sure the participants achieve the best possible comfort – tasty, healthy and enough food! And comfortable accommodation whenever it's possible. Our vehicles are comfortable and our drivers are always sober and experienced. Please bear in mind, tourism and service are not the same high level here as in many other parts of the world. Tourism is new here and it took years before guesthouses and hotels were available. When I began here in 1993 and think back, it's incredible what a change have happened – year for year the comfort has increased and travelling nowadays is pleasure! So please bear this in mind and be patient if the breakfast on the guesthouse are served ten minutes later than agreed, or the breakfast served is different than at home... etc.

### **What to bring...?**

*Prior departure we send a detailed packing list and information about what to bring. Miksture are of course always prepared to assist and explain, so please feel free to ask us about every matter...*

**Price include:** Guiding by Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen • Local (English, German, French or Russian-speaking) interpreters • Transportation according program • All accommodation mentioned in the program; except in Bishkek • All food during the tour • All permits • Services of Miksture • Local entrees and fees according day-to-day program

**Price does NOT include** Alcoholic drinks at meals in restaurants and cafes • Personal expenses for eventual extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Tips to drivers and interpreter • Extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Money for own expenses • anything strictly personal (e g laundry, phone calls, snacks).

*Single room: Is usual available on the tour, except in the yurt camp at Son Kul. A single room surcharge will apply for anyone not sharing. Please note that, single room accommodation may not be available at some places, but this will be explained and agreed prior departure.*

*Welcome and best regards*

*Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen*

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*E-mail: [info@miksture.com](mailto:info@miksture.com)*

*I speak Danish (my native language), English, German, French and Russian. I understand Spanish (speak poor...) and speak other Swedish and Norwegian languages*

*Prior departure Miksture mail a detailed list of birds.*

*Miksture provide information about travelling in the region and specific ornithological information. My team and I can be hired for birding in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Southern Siberia and Western China. We are able to "tailor-make" the journey according your wishes – destinations & species as well as duration. It's possible to book me as leader or co-leader for your journey in the region. We use our own vehicles, own gear – tents, kitchen-team, etc. Everything to increase your birding experience and your safety. In addition our prices are reasonable for everyone. We have an excellent team by whom I have travelled and worked together with for more than ten years. They are some of my very best friends and in combination; we know thoroughly the areas and the birds. Usually we arrange tours for 4-16 pax – best group's size for birding is 5-12 participants; but we are flexible. Fair prices, security, honesty and great birding are keywords – try us! Please contact me for further information. Programs can be studied on our websites. You are welcome to contact me for further information and I welcome any remarks and dialogue.*



*Miksture was established with the purpose of encourage and combine Eco-tourism and biological scientific research in Central Asia; mainly Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. The approach of combining Eco-tourism and Nature Conservation is in many ways opposite activities, but in Kyrgyzstan we have done it without severe compromises for the visitors and the environment. Our tours are the result of friendship and strange ideas and our carefully planned itineraries and intensive approach have since 1994 given those who travel with us an unusually experience.*

*Miksture is an independent company, established and owned by Michael Westerbjerg Andersen. You will always be in contact with Michael when you contact us. All itineraries are accompanied by the staff of local agencies who possesses the knowledge and experience to make the tour wholly successful. We know the areas thoroughly and take pride in showing those who travel the local hotspots, confidently coping with any problems that may arise and so greatly increasing the chance that everything will run smoothly. Leading a tour in Europe or North America is one thing, leading one in Central Asia where logistical problems are a fact of life is quite another! Where practicable and necessary we obtain the assistance of local leaders who have both an intimate knowledge of their home areas and the ability to look after the group to the required standard.*

*Miksture/MWA/Bishkek/June 2011*