

TAJIKISTAN - 'in quest of the LBRW'

- Birdwatching from Pamir-Alay Mountains to
Badakhshan and the Wakhan Corridor 20.th –
29.th June 2023



Tajikistan 'in quest of the LBRW' – 10-days birdwatching from Pamir-Alay Mountain ranges to Badakshan, and the Wakham Corridor. 20.06 – 29.06.2023 with Miksture Expeditions. Tour start: Dushanbe, Tajikistan

The Large-billed Reed Warbler (Acrocephalus orinus) is an Old-World Warbler in the genus Acrocephalus. The species has been dubbed as "the world's least known bird". It was known from a single specimen collected in India in 1867 and rediscovered in the wild in Thailand in 2006. The length of the bill, which appears especially long, rather plain, unmarked face except for a paler area from the lore to the eye, a white throat, short primary projection, and a largely yellowish lower mandible – the Large-billed Reed Warbler Acrocephalus orinus - a cryptic, essentially unknown species – and surely the tour's top-target!

Tajikistan has stunning landscapes, fascinating culture and history, friendly people, and fantastic birding. Tajikistan is home to an impressive number of species of birds, has many Central Asian specialities and endemics - an excellent and important destination in the Palearctic. Although the avifauna in Tajikistan has been well reported in the last century, there still is species hardly known elsewhere. Tajikistan is a country with very low birdwatching pression. This tour is designed for birdwatchers and naturalists who are seeking to see as many species as possible.

Tajikistan is in the southern region of a global biodiversity hotspot, the mountains of Central Asia, which covers a subdivision of the Palearctic zone, Asia, bioregion of the Central Asia – Iranian Plateau. The region is characterised by the mountains of the Pamir-Alay and Tien Shan Mountain ranges, and more than 50% of the country stands at over 3000 m a.s.l. Mountains occupy 93% of the area of Tajikistan, and only less than 7% has arable land. The different mountain biomes and heavily varying climatic conditions at various altitudes have caused different vegetation zones. This factor has developed different habitats thus making the mountains of Tajikistan a sanctuary for a variety of wildlife species including 392 bird species and notable mammals like Marco Polo sheep, Bukhara Urial sheep, an endangered Markhor goats, Asiatic Ibex, and their predator the Snow Leopard. Besides you will learn about the local culture, enjoy local food, and make new friends. We shall be concentrating on the endemics and other regional specialities. The focus of this 10-day birding tour is to see as many of these species as possible, and we will seek out many other special and sought-after species; and, during this tour, we have the potential to rack up a very impressive bird list in terms of species numbers, and great sightings. This trip will surely be a once-in-a-lifetime experience in every sense of the word.



Brandt's Mountain Finch (Leucosticte brandti), also known as Black-headed Mountain Finch. Photo by MWA/Miksture

Our Tajikistan itinerary is comprehensive and include a long range of sought after Central Asian endemics. We can see the full range of habitats and we shall be concentrating on the many Central Asian endemics and other regional specialities, including the Long-billed Reed Warbler, one of the world's least known birds. Apart from the LBRW there is plenty of other interesting birds: Himalayan Snowcock, Tibetan Snowcock, Little Bittern, Pygmy Cormorant, Marbled Duck, Black-eared Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Barbary Falcon, Booted Eagle, Golden Eagle, Egyptian Vulture, Lammergeier, Cinereous Vulture, Himalayan Vulture, Eurasian Griffon Vulture, Saker Falcon, Oriental Turtle Dove, Eurasian Roller, Eurasian Bee-eater, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Hoopoe, Wire-tailed Swallow, Citrine Wagtail, Little Forktail, Turkestan Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Blue Whistling-thrush, Blue Rock Thrush, Pied Wheatear, Finsch's Wheatear, Variable (Eastern Pied) Wheatear, Streaked Laughingthrush, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, White-capped Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, White-winged Redstart, Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, Red-tailed Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, White-winged Grosbeak, Great Rosefinch, Plain Mountain-Finch, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, Bar-headed Goose, Tibetan Sandgrouse, Himalayan Rubythroat, Greenish Warbler, Pallid Harrier, Brown Accentor, Oriental Skylark, Eurasian Eagle Owl, Brandts Mountain Finch, Brown-headed Gull, Pied Bushchat, Siberian Stonechat, Red-fronted Serin, Western Crowned Warbler, Hume's Warbler, Plain Leaf Warbler, Upchers Warbler, Paddyfield Warbler, Eastern Orphean Warbler, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Grey-necked Bunting, Rufous-naped Tit, Yellow-breasted Azure, Humes Whitethroat, White-capped Penduline Tit, White-browed Tit-warbler, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Red-headed Bunting, White-capped Bunting, Lesser Sand-Plover, Hill Pigeon, White-winged Woodpecker, Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, Indian Golden Oriole, Turkestan Tit, Wallcreeper, White-throated Dipper, Brown Dipper, Little Swift, Barred Warbler, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Pallas's Gull, Hume's Lark, White Wagtail ssp personata, Syke's Warbler, Mountain Chiffchaff, Hume's Whitethroat, Plumbeous Water Redstart, etc



Red-headed Bunting (Emberiza bruniceps), Photo by MWA/Miksture

Tajikistan is the smallest landlocked nation in Central Asia by area. It lies mostly between latitudes 36° and 41° N, and longitudes 67° and 75° E. Mountains cover more than 90% of the country. The Pamir range, and most of the country is over 3,000 metres (9,800 ft) above sea level. The only major areas of lower land are in the north (part of the Fergana Valley), and in the southern Kofarnihon and Vakhsh river valleys, which form the Amu Darya. The capital Dushanbe is located on the southern slopes above the Kofarnihon valley. The Amu Darya and Panj rivers mark the border with Afghanistan, and the glaciers in Tajikistan's mountains are the major source of runoff for the Aral Sea. There are over 900 rivers in Tajikistan longer than 10 kilometres.

Tajikistan is bordered by Afghanistan to the south, Uzbekistan to the west, Kyrgyzstan to the north and China to the east. Its boundaries are totally artificial, except to the south, where the border with Afghanistan is the river Pyandj, which becomes the mighty Amu Darya, the Oxus of Alexander the Great. The eastern half of the country, Badakhshan, comprises the Pamir mountains, one of the highest ranges in the world, and a very high mountain plateau with elevations up to 7000 m, currently characterized by extremely severe environmental conditions and harbouring a specialized montane fauna, which in part is shared with that of the Tibetan Plateau. It is separated narrowly from Pakistan by Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor. Badakhshan lies in the westernmost outliers of the Greater Himalayan range (the region lies at the junction of three main ranges: the Pamirs to the north, the Hindu Kush to the south-west and the Karakoram to the south-east). The Wakhan Corridor forms a tongue of land over 300 km long stretching up into the high Himalayas, sandwiched between Tajikistan, Pakistan, and China. The main Wakhan Corridor is a narrow strip of riverine terrace along the banks of the Amu Darya River (local name Panj), flanked in the south by the Hindu Kush Mountain range and dissected by many stony fans and flood washes originating from this range. Along the river, on both sides, there are cultivated lands that yield crops of wheat, barley, different peas, and small garden plots of potatoes. Along this strip there are also boggy sedge and grass pastures used by villages for common grazing. Yet on the Afghan side (south bank of the river) the wettest ground is still covered by a fringe of scrubby bushland that can be locally extensive and dense, such as in Goz Khun where the confluence of the Wakhan and Pamir rivers forms a delta. In the Wakhan this ecosystem seems to be the preferred habitat of Large-billed Reed Warbler. This riparian habitat is an oasis for more than 50 species of resident and migratory birds. In June, Large-billed share the lower and mid-strata of the scrub with several other species including Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, Cetti's Bush Warbler *Cettia cetti*, Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus*, Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* and Hume's Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca althaea*. The habitat is also a riverside corridor for a variety of mammals, such as Common Otter *Lutra lutra*, Cape Hare *Lepus capensis*, Stone Marten *Martes foina* and Grey Wolf *Canis lupus*.

Day 1. Dushanbe – arrival

20.06: Dushanbe also spelled Dušanbe, or (1929–61) Stalinabad, city, and capital of Tajikistan. It lies along the Varzob (Dushanbinka) River in the Gissar valley, in the southwest of the republic. It was built in the Soviet period on the site of three former settlements, of which the largest was named Dyushambe (Tajik dush, meaning "Monday," its bazaar day). Dyushambe was for long a part of the Khanate of Bukhara (in present days Uzbekistan), and it suffered severely in the fighting that followed the overthrow of the emir by Soviet troops in 1920. In



1924 the site was chosen to serve as the capital of the new Tajik Autonomous S.S.R. (from 1929 to 1991 Tajik S.S.R., thereafter Tajikistan), and rapid industrial and population growth followed. Dushanbe is a clean, European-style city. The planned city has wide, straight, tree-lined streets, large public buildings, and several squares and parks. Except in the centre, most of the buildings



are one-story because of the danger of earthquakes. The summer heat is mitigated by breezes from the mountains to the northeast. The city has wide tree-lined streets with plenty of cafés to enjoy coffee or tea with local sweets. Dushanbe is the financial, political, administrative, and cultural capital of Tajikistan. All Government offices and Embassies are in Dushanbe. It is true that many streets in Dushanbe are named after writers and philosophers. The main points of business and interests are on or close to avenue named after Rudaki – founder of Tajik literature.

Arrive in Dushanbe. We plan this day more accurately when we know with which flight guests will arrive. Upon arrival, we let guests rest until around 11 am after check in to the hotel and start the program afterwards. We have lunch and arrange an excursion around the city: Victory Park or Botanical Garden, Navruz Palace - a massive teahouse with extraordinary architecture where high official meetings take place. National Museums natural history section - Guests will be introduced with different biomes and their fauna that are in Tajikistan.

Day 2. Dushanbe to Dashtijum; Markhor-area

21.05: Early in the morning we drive to Kulob town (around 4 hours), stopping for birding en route along the road. We look for Calandra and Crested Larks, Booted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Common Myna, Long-tailed, Isabeline, and Turkestan Shrike, Red-rumped Swallow, Little Swift, etc. We stop in Kulob city to have lunch and shortly visit its botanical garden to see Paradise Flycatcher. Next, we drive up the mountain to the Markhor area, where we possibly see Long legged and Common Buzzards, Common Rock-thrush, and White-throated Robin. After we drive up to the ridge of the mountain which is the ending of Hazrati shoh mountain range we leave the cars and hike to the camp, about 4 km (with some steep hiking). Tonight, we sleep in tents at the camp and look for Markhors in the evening before dark and next day in the morning.

Day 3. Dashtijum camp to Darvaz; Tajik-Afghan border

22.06: Early morning, we take positions to observe Markhors. Later we hike back to where we left cars and drive back down to Kulob, from where we continue driving further south-east. After a couple of hours, we will reach Tajik-Afghan border and drive all the way to Darvaz region. We will stay tonight at another Markhor conservancy camp right by the Panj river. Along the road we will make a couple of stops to find See-see partridge. Other birds that we will see include Egyptian Vulture, Eastern-Rock Nuthatch, Variable Wheatear, Cinerous and Griffon Vultures etc.



Day 4. Darvaz to Khorog: LBRW habitat

23.06: Today we drive along the Panj River all day. The valley will be getting wide and narrow along the road giving excellent landscape views. We will reach LBRW habitat in Rushan at afternoon and spend 2-3 hours finding, observing the birds. Later we will drive further 60 km to the capital of GBAO province- Khorog. Accomodation in hotel.



Day 5. Khorog to Yamg

24.06: We continue further south today to the famous Wakhan Valley. Wakhan is somewhat an exciting area for local birders because of it being close to the edge of several Indian bird's species range (Brahminy Starling, Tickells Thrush) and one of the least studied places in Tajikistan. Having rich cultural and historical heritage which you will certainly appreciate it is also the core area for LBRW breeding.



Day 6. Yamg to Alichur

25.06: It is going to be an exciting day today, as we will transfer from bottom valley with riparian forest patches on the river shores and cultivated fields to the high-altitude steppe like ecosystem from 2500 masl to 4000 masl over a 4344m Khargush pass. Along the road we will be able to see birds like Himalayan Snowcock, Crimson winged finch, White-winged Snowfinch, Citrine Wagtail, White winged Redstart, Black Redstart, Plain Mountain Finch, Great Rosefinch and many more. As we get to Alichur village we settle at a homestay.



Day 7. Alichur to Khorog

26.06: In the morning we drive to Bulunkul Lake to add some water birds to our Tajikistan checklist. Along the road we make a detour to see Lesser Sand Plover and Tibetan Sandgrouse. After this morning excursion we drive to Pamir Highway and head west to Khorog city. Staying at the same hotel as before - Lal Inn.

Day 8. Khorog to Darvaz

27.06: On this day we drive back to Darvaz region birding on the roadside along the route. Possibly seeing some late migrants. This time we stay at a guesthouse in Kalai Khumb town.

Day 9. Darvaz to Dushanbe

28.06: Here we have two options. If the road over Khaburobot pass will be open by this time we can drive on the different road back to Dushanbe from here, otherwise we drive back on the same road via Kulob town. If you are coming on the second half of June, the road will most likely will be open. If so, we drive over a mountainous road again. Upon arrival in Dushanbe, guests check in to the hotel and prepare for the evening farewell dinner.

Day 10. Departure – tour concludes

29.06 – after breakfast transfer to airport

It is possible to extend your stay in Central Asia: The steppe and semi-deserts in Kazakhstan, or more mountains in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan!



Price include: Guiding by Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen and his team • Local (English-speaking) ornithological guide • Transportation according to program in Tajikistan in private chartered vehicles with drivers • All accommodation in Tajikistan • All meals in Tajikistan from Day 1 to breakfast Day 10; (B) and dinners (D) in Morocco • Necessary permits sites and other paperwork • Services of tour leader • Administration from Miksture

Price does NOT include: International flights to/from Dushanbe, Tajikistan • Alcoholic beverages & drinks • Personal expenses for eventual extra arrangements not mentioned in the program • Tips to drivers and local guides • Travelinsurance – mandatory! • Money for own expenses and anything strictly personal (e.g. laundry, phone calls, any excess luggage charges, snacks). Single room: Contact Miksture

Two months before departure Miksture mail an updated program, Practical Information and Bird list.

Prices quoted are based on group participation and no refunds will be made for any part of the program you choose not to participate. It is understood that refunds cannot be made to passengers who do not complete the tour for any reason whatsoever. No refunds will be issued for failure of passenger to obtain proper documentation for entering countries visited, lost travel time or substitution of facilities, for itineraries amended after departure, for circumstances arising beyond the company's control, necessitating alternative arrangements being made to ensure the safety and/or further participation and enjoyment of the program, passenger not appearing for any accommodation, service, sightseeing or trip segment without notifying the company, or passenger leaving program after it has begun, or missing any scheduled sightseeing, activities, meals or accommodations. If Miksture fails to run the trip due to its own mistakes or circumstances (management problems, financial problems, bankruptcy), or decides to cancel it for reasons within its own

reach and reasons, all deposits and payments will be refunded. Personal Travel Insurance is MANDATORY for Each participant in Tajikistan.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to Miksture by its vendors and suppliers.

RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENT: Remaining balances are due no later than 18.th February 2023. Any reservation made within 90 days of commencement of a program may be accepted provided space is available and payment in full is received. Miksture does not accept responsibility for bank wire fees or rush mail delivery.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Full payment of the tour fee is due no later than 20.th April 2023. If the balance has not been received latest 20.th April 2023, Miksture might treat your reservation as cancelled, and the deposit shall be forfeited. All requests for cancellations must be received in writing. If you cancel: Fewer than 40 days before departure date - No refund available.

Contact information: Pls always feel welcome to contact me if you have questions.

Michael Westerbjerg Andersen/Miksture, Bishkek 22.07.2022

Mal: mi@miksture.com

WhatsApp: +996 700 102 104

