



**TIEN SHAN – HEAVENLY MOUNTAINS
BEST OF KYRGYZSTAN BIRDWATCHING**

04 – 19 MAY 2024

Michael Westerbjerg Andersen – Miksture

Our 'Best of Kyrgyzstan bird birdwatching' shows you the best of Kyrgyzstan, a landlocked country with spectacular scenery, interesting historical and cultural sites, wide varieties of exciting habitats, and of course both well-represented with some of the finest Central Asian birds found in this fascinating country. We focus on the birds of Kyrgyzstan's mountain and semi-desert regions. During the Soviet era, most of Central Asia was closed to Westerners. The few ornithologists who visited Kyrgyzstan were escorted to bird sites near the capitals. Interesting bird sites, but certainly not adequate for the amazing avifauna. It is different today where visitors to a greater extent can choose. For the ornithologist, Kyrgyzstan has a lot to offer, and the bird life can be described as a cocktail of species from the Middle East, southern Siberia, and the steppes from eastern Austria to Mongolia. Several areas are ornithologically unknown and always contain ornithological surprises.

The theme is unambiguous - it's about observing as many of the region's birds - as good as possible too. A journey that also gives participants the opportunity to enjoy magnificent landscapes and meet Central Asia's nomadic people. The countries of Central Asia have been ornithological dream destinations for years but are still logistically difficult to access. The journey has an expedition-like character but is a quality product: maximum time in the field, excellent bird places, informal travel, and formidable nature. The ornithological ambition is a high priority, but there is room for ornithologists at all stages of knowledge. The most important thing is enthusiasm. The program is based, among other things, on Miksture's ornithological expeditions since 1994 as well as the undersigned's other experience in the areas.

We'll drive up into the Tien Shan Mountain range where the highly sought after Ibisbill occurs. Many mountain birds live in the mountains which roughly considered form the northernmost Himalayas with Tien-Shan as the all-dominated mountain range. This applies to species that we also know from the central and southern European mountains. In general, there are many species that are also widespread in southern Europe, as well as many local breeds, the most distinct of which, presumably over time, will gain status as independent species. Not only is a virtue made of seeing as many species as possible, but also as good as possible. Prior departure, a detailed species list and Practical information will be sent.

Tour start: Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan 04.th May 2023

Kind regards

Tour Leader Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen



TARGET SPECIES

Ruddy Shelduck, Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Daurian Partridge, Common Pheasant, Himalayan Snowcock, Pallas's Sandgrouse, Bar-headed Goose, Hill Pigeon, Oriental Turtle Dove, Eurasian Corn Crake, Demoiselle Crane, Horned Grebe, Ibisbill, Lesser Sand Plover, Terek Sandpiper, Pallas's Gull, White-winged Tern, Black Stork, White Stork, Pygmy Cormorant, Little Bittern, Great Egret, Bearded Vulture, Himalayan Vulture, Cinereous Vulture, Booted Eagle, Golden Eagle, Shikra, Upland Buzzard, Eurasian Scops Owl, Eurasian Hoopoe, European Roller, European Bee-eater, White-winged Woodpecker, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Saker Falcon, Turkestan Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Indian Golden Oriole, Rufous-naped Tit, Songar Tit, Azure Tit, Yellow-breasted Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Bearded Reedling, Horned Lark, Turkestan Short-toed Lark, Pale Sand Martin, White-browed Tit-warbler, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Booted Warbler, Sykes's Warbler, Upcher's Warbler, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler, Common Grasshopper Warbler, Barred Warbler, Hume's Whitethroat, Wallcreeper, Bar-tailed Treecreeper, Common Myna, Rosy Starling, White's Thrush, Himalayan Rubythroat, Little Forktail, Blue Whistling Thrush, Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, Black Redstart, Common Redstart, Gldenstdt's Redstart, Common Rock Thrush, Blue Rock Thrush, Siberian Stonechat, Isabelline Wheatear, Desert Wheatear, Pied Wheatear, White-throated Dipper, Brown Dipper, White-winged Snowfinch, Altai Accentor, Brown Accentor, Black-throated Accentor, Citrine Wagtail, Richard's Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Meadow Pipit, White-winged Grosbeak, Mongolian Finch, Plain Mountain Finch, Brandt's Mountain Finch, Common Rosefinch, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Twite, Red-fronted Serin and Pine Bunting

WELCOME TO KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan is one of the former Central Asian Soviet republics. With border to China in the Southeast, Tajikistan in the South, Uzbekistan in the West, and Kazakhstan in the North. Several large mountain ranges characterize the landscape. In the eastern part Tien-Shan; the Heavenly Mountains, and in the South, Pamir; on Kyrgyz Bosom-I-Dunjah – "The Roof of the World. For many years, Kyrgyzstan was almost hermetically closed to foreigners - including binoculars-armed bird watchers. The country's rich deposits of minerals and location meant that top-secret factories and military bases

could operate undisturbed. It also meant that for more than 50 years the Kirghiz lived an isolated and decaying existence. But the presence of the Russians also meant progress: improved infrastructure, hospital services, jobs (e.g., in the weapons industry) and government-subsidized food. That is why Lenin's statue stands even more places in Bishkek, albeit as a faded symbol of a failed policy. And how could things be different when a leading Central Asian communist preached years ago: "I admire the genius of the Prophet Muhammad, who has preached the principles of socialism. I am happy that most of the principles of socialism are just the realization of Muhammad's instructions" The only reasonably navigable route the Silk Road from the Great Chinese cultures to the Middle East and European, ran like a branched road network through Kyrgyzstan, both north of Lake Issyk-Kul and south of the country. Although Kyrgyzstan was not favoured by wealth to the same extent as Bukhara and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, in the wake of the Silk Road caravans, Kyrgyzstan received many new impulses, in the form of other peoples, languages, religions etc. What Kyrgyzstan lacks architectural sights, is matched by Central Asia's finest mountain landscapes. From a bird's eye view, the permanently snow-capped peaks are the All-dominant landscape form. 97% of the land area is made up of mountains, including some of the highest on the planet with peaks over 7,000 m. The landscape is immensely beautiful. Everything associated with mountains exists. Here are stunning dimensions, pointed peaks, fabulous views, glaciers, valleys where mountain walls rise vertically and narrow the field of view, icy meltwater rivers with feisty whirlpools growing into small waterfalls, sprawling plains with nodding alpine flowers, snow-capped passes-an immense sanctuary for plants and animals. Welcome to Kyrgyzstan.

KYRGYZSTAN - A WELCOMING, HOSPITALE COUNTRY WITH A BEAUTIFUL NATURE AND CULTURE

In terms of naming conventions, the country's official name is "Kyrgyz Republic" whenever it is used in some international arenas and foreign relations. "Kyrgyz" is thought to be derived from the Turkic word for "forty" – a reference to the 40 clans of the great Manas. The country's flag, a nod to this, features a 40-ray sun. 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 flourish making it peaceful and beautiful. It's wedged between Kazakhstan in North, Uzbekistan in west, Tajikistan 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 ABOVE ALL A MOUNTAINOUS COUNTRY

The mountainous covers 80 per cent of the land. Kyrgyzstan lies where two great Central Asian Mountain systems, the Tian Shan, and the Pamirs, come together. The Tian Shan Mountains run northeast to form the country's eastern border with China; Kyrgyzstan's southern border with Tajikistan follows the Trans Alai Range along the northernmost part of the Pamirs. At its eastern extremity, next to the Uighur Autonomous Region of Sinkiang, China, rises Victory (Pobedy) Peak, Kyrgyzstan's highest peak at 7,439 meters. Mount Khan-Tengri is on the border with Kazakhstan and Peak Lenin (7,134 metres) in Gorno-Badakhshan on the border of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and is the second-highest point of both countries. It is considered one of the less technical 7,000 m peaks in the world to climb and it has by far the most ascents of any 7,000 m or higher peak on Earth, with every year seeing hundreds of mountaineers make their way to the summit.

Kyrgyzstan is one of 45 landlocked countries, but does have the consolation of Issyk-Kul, the world's second largest high-altitude lake (behind Titicaca in South America). Issyk-Kul Lake is 182 kilometres long, up to 60 kilometres wide and reaches 668 metres in depth. Its area is 6,236 square kilometres. About 118 rivers and streams flow into the lake; the largest are the Djyrgalan and Tyup. It is fed by springs, including many hot springs and snow melt. Issyk-Kul is an endorheic lake in the Northern Tian Shan mountains in eastern Kyrgyzstan. It is the seventh deepest lake in the world, the tenth largest lake in the world by volume (though not in surface area) and the second largest saline lake after the Caspian Sea. The lake has no current outlet, but some hydrologists hypothesize that the lake's water filters deep underground into the Chu River. The bottom of the lake contains the mineral monohydrocalcite: one of the few known



lacustrine deposits. Issyk-Kul means "warm lake" in the Kyrgyz language; although it is surrounded by snow-capped peaks, it never freezes. The lake is a Ramsar site of globally

significant biodiversity and forms part of the Issyk-Kul Biosphere Reserve. Kyrgyzstan might be one of the smallest countries in Central Asia, yet its landscapes are diverse: from exquisite mountain ranges, lush valleys and hundreds of rivers and alpine lakes to stark landscapes and sandstone canyons. Kyrgyzstan is a paradise for outdoor and adventure lovers! There are so many beautiful treks in the country that you'll need a lifetime to do them all! Canyons are one of the most spectacular features of Kyrgyzstan's nature. They are so scenic and often have a magical feel to it.

DAY 1. ARRIVAL BISHKEK, KYRGYZSTAN

Welcome to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. After arrival, transfer by private bus to our hotel in the centre of Bishkek. After a refreshing breakfast/lunch we make an excursion to the area north of Bishkek. Here is a small belt of extensive farmland that stretches 170 kilometres east-west in the Chui Valley. This is the southernmost part of the great Kazakhstan steppe. Further south, i.e., just 25 km south of this area, the mountains stretch almost endlessly south – from Kyrgyzstan's Tien-Shan mountains to the Pamirs, Kunlun Mnts, and the southern Himalayas. The area is rich in lakes, streams, and farmland mixed with smaller forest areas and village gardens that abound with fruit trees create a varied and bird-rich habitat:

Azure Tit, Common Nightingale, Black-eared Kite *M.m.lineatus*, White Wagtail ssp. *personata*, Common Shelduck, Garganey, Gadwall, Red-crested Pochard, Ferruginous Duck, Common Pheasant, Great Egret, Little Cormorant, Shikra, Black Kite (Black-eared K), Black-winged Stilt, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Terek Sandpiper, Marsh Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Caspian Gull, White-winged Tern, Black Tern, Oriental Turtle Dove, Alpine Swift, European Roller, European Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe, Eurasian Hobby, Long-tailed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Indian Golden Oriole, Azure Tit, White-crowned Penduline Tit, Pale Sand Martin, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Common Myna, Bluethroat, Siberian Stonechat, Isabel-line Wheatear, Western Yellow Wagtail (feldegg), Citrine Wagtail, White Wagtail (Masked), Common Rosefinch, Red-headed Bunting, etc. We return to Bishkek. O/N hotel in Bishkek. LD

BISHKEK – THE CAPITAL

Bishkek is the capital of Kyrgyzstan and the greenest city in Central Asia. It's the largest city in the country but most travellers don't stay here very long. They're more interested in conquering the Kyrgyz mountains. Bishkek is a green, peaceful city, and base for Miksture's office. There are great things to experience in Bishkek. There is an excellent range of good





restaurants and a cool nightlife. It is a peaceful city with many beautiful parks. It has all the qualities a big city and capital offers. Despite it is capital, it remains a quiet place compared to e.g., Tashkent, Almaty, Nur-Sultan, etc It's quite an experience to shop at a local market or at one of the chaotic bazaars in Kyrgyzstan. It's the place where the locals do their shopping, and the bazaars are an integral part of their life. You'll find everything you need: from local food, spices, fruits, and vegetables to household goods, dodgy electronic equipment, clothes, toys, and souvenirs.

DAY 2. BISHKEK – OSH (FLIGHT) – THE FORGOTTEN SILK ROAD CITY

After breakfast we check out of the hotel and drive to the airport. Here we jump on a domestic plane and move 300 km to Kyrgyzstan's second largest city, the 3,000-year-old Silk Road city of Osh. Our team and buses are waiting here, and we begin the next stage, and the exciting journey back to Bishkek. Osh, the country's second largest city, is also one of the oldest (3,000+ years) in the region. Its vast and bustling market – still going strong – was a key trading point on the Silk Road, the overland route taken by caravans heading between Europe and Asia. In Osh, the mountains were a beacon for travellers. Suleiman-Too was seen

as a sacred mountain and a major place of pilgrimage. From Osh we drive to Arslanbob. Along the way we stop if there are interesting birds (there certainly are). Arslanbob is a small mountain village in the Jalal-Abad Region. Beautifully situated at the foot of the mountain Gora babash-Ata in the Chatkal-range and surrounded by extensive walnut forest (*Juglans regia*). Two waterfalls are in the area which attract tourists, pilgrims and other visitors during the spring and summer months. Birdlife is great, and we are looking for species like Oriental Turtle Dove, Bearded Vulture, White-winged Woodpecker, Lesser Kestrel, Eurasian Hobby, Turkestan Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Indian Golden Oriole, Rufous-naped Tit, Yellow-breasted Azure Tit, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Blyth's Reed Warbler, Barred Warbler, Wallcreeper, Bar-tailed Treecreeper, Common Myna, Little Forktail, Blue Whistling Thrush, White-throated Dipper, Brown Dipper, Common Rosefinch, Red-fronted Serin, White-capped Bunting, etc. The village has no hotel, so we accommodate in private guesthouses, but don't worry – there are western toilets, hot water, and showers, as well as exceptional hospitality and delicious food. We are accommodated in Arslanbob for two nights. BLD



DAY 3. ARSLANBOB – WALNUT FOREST

We stay all day in Arslanbob and do an easy hike in the forest. We also visit one of the local waterfalls; only known site for Little Forktail in Kyrgyzstan. O/N in guesthouse. BLD

DAY 4. ARSLANBOB – TOKTOGUL RESERVOIR

We start early! Today we drive further north and have several important stops along the way. The first stop will be at the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border. The only population of White Stork in Kyrgyzstan breeds here. We continue into a narrow gorge where the Naryn river cuts through. The valley is narrow, and we pass, Tash-Kömür, one of the five largest towns of Jalal-Abad Region. It is a city of regional significance, not part of a district and its resident population was 44,065 in 2021. It is located along the West bank of the river Naryn, opposite the main Osh-Bishkek Road. Officially founded on December 17, 1943, Tash-Kömür, meaning stone-coal, grew into one of the largest industrial centres of the Central Asian region of the Soviet Union. It was primarily a mining town but had a cigarette factory and other industries as well, which complemented the output of the coal mines. We drive through the town and spend some hours bird-watching in the semi-desert area outside Tash-Kömür. The landscape is karst, and the vegetation consists mostly of drought-resistant and hardy bush vegetation. Birds we are looking

for include Upchers Warbler, Short-tailed Eagle, Sykes Warbler, White-capped Bunting, Egyptian Vulture, Booted Eagle, Rock Bunting, Eastern Rock Nuthatch, Rufous-tailed Bush Robin, Rose-coloured Starling, etc. For the latter, the only known breeding site for the species is in Central Asia. We continue and arrive at the end of the day at our accommodation at the large Toktogul Reservoir and the area's only hotel. O/N hotel. BLD

DAY 5. TOKTOGUL RESERVOIR - BISHKEK

We continue the drive and will reach Bishkek later today. We drive eastwards around the Toktogul Reservoir, and drive north through the Suusamyр valley via the spectacular Too-Ashuu Road tunnel (2.8-kilometre-long) connecting the Chui and Suusamyр valleys. Töö-Ashuu, literally "camel mountain pass" and is situated approximately 120 km from Bishkek. It's a beautiful landscape we drive through today, and you get the first impression and meeting with the Kyrgyz nomads. Along the road, syrts (a kind of elevated flatland in Russia and Central Asia) in more kilometre's altitude surrounded by snow-covered peaks) with sparse dotted nomadic dwellings can be seen, yurts and grazing flocks of sheep, cattle, horses and sometimes Yaks. The yurt (from the Turkic languages) or ger (Mongolian) is a portable, round tent covered and insulated with skins or felt and traditionally used by the nomads.



Yurts take between 30 minutes and 3 hours to set up or take down and are generally used by between five and 15 people. Nomadic farming with yurts as housing has been the primary lifestyle in Central Asia, particularly Mongolia, for thousands of years. After driving through the Töö-Ashuu-tunnel we are in Chui-valley that leads eastwards to Bishkek (westwards to Tashkent, Uzbekistan). During the day drive we look for mountain birds such as Bearded Vulture, Lesser Kestrel, Humes Warbler, brown Dipper, Dipper, Black Vulture, White-capped Bunting, Red-fronted Serin, Snowfinch, Citrine Wagtail, White-tailed Rubythroat, etc. We arrive in Bishkek late afternoon or early evening. O/N hotel for two nights in Bishkek. BLD

DAY 6. ALA-ARCHA AND FISHPONDS

Daily excursion to Ala-Archa nature reserve 35 km south of Bishkek. From the valley of pine and coniferous forests, the surrounding mountains rise steeply. A walk from the parking lot for approx. 1,400 meters altitude to the mountain at the top, alternating between plant belts. From the forest at the bottom to open spaces with alpine plants and rugged, raw plains, with flocks of ragged Ravens and vultures hovering over the glaciers. Marmots sit between fallen boulders and follow our movements. From the paths there is an opportunity to see Ibex. Early morning, they graze on the slopes or along the

mountain streams, while in the middle of the day they keep calm. The most energetic hikers can reach the snow limit and the Adygene glacier at 3,300 meters altitude and the less energetic can enjoy the views from the waterfall, or dust around the landscape. Ala-Archa was among the few places that Westerners in Soviet times, under the strict supervision of Intertourist guides, had the opportunity to visit. Fortunately, it's in the past. Today we can romp in the landscape, which is an ornithological gem with species such as: Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Hobby Falcon, Himalayan Ruby-throat, Black-Throated Accentor, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Greenish Warbler, Blue-capped Redstart, Rufous-backed Redstart, Red-fronted Serin, Common Rosefinch, Red-mantled Rosefinch, White-winged Grosbeak, Common Dipper, Brown Dipper ssp. leucogaster, Azure tit, Blue Whistling Thrush, Eastern Turtledove, Common Myna, Rufous-naped Tit, Black Kite, White Wagtail ssp. personata, Grey Wagtail, Mistle Thrush, Black Redstart, Humes Leaf Warbler, Chukar Partridge, Rufous-naped Tit, Red-headed Bunting and the delightful White-browed Tit-warbler. At the end of the afternoon, we return to the hotel and in the evening, we have a good dinner in one of Bishkek's cafes. BLD

DAY 7. BISHKEK – CHOLPON ATA

After early breakfast we leave Bishkek and drive eastwards towards Cholpon-Ata at northern shore of Issyk-Kul Lake. Several great lowland-species in these extensive agricultural landscapes i.e., Red-headed Bunting, four species of shrikes, Golden Oriole (ssp 'Kundoo', Indian oriole), Roller, Common Hoopoe, Black-eared Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, etc. Enroute, we bird, and first stop (after approx. one hour). Several great lowland-species in these extensive agricultural landscapes i.e., Red-headed Bunting, Lesser Grey-shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Turkestan Shrike, Hobby, Goldfinch (Grey-headed form), Red-headed Bunting, Indian Oriole, Common Bee-eater, Common Quail, Roller, Common Hoopoe, Black-eared Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, etc. In the late afternoon we accommodate in a guesthouse for the next hours. O/N guesthouse/hotel. BLD

DAY 8. WHITE'S THRUSH; GRIGORIEV GORGE (CHON AKSU) - KARAKOL

We must get up shortly after midnight to reach the forests where the small population of Whites Thrush can be heard singing in the early hours of dawn; before even the first rays of daylight appear. Grigoriev Gorge (Kyrgyz name Chon Aksu) is one of the most famous and beautiful sights of Issyk-Kul Lake. This picturesque place is located 60 km from the town of Cholpon-Ata. Enjoying the beauty of the mountain slopes, covered with red poppy and sound of mountain water, here you can also see beautiful Tien-Shan spruce. There are three beautiful lakes with crystal clear water in the valley. From the village of Semyonovka, named after the Russian explorer Pyotr Semyonov, an asphalt road extends 15 kilometres into the mountains, following the Chon Ak-Suu (Big White Water) River, past the Kyrchyn tour base. The road leads to a jailoo, or summer pasture, located 2,010 m above sea level, where the Chon Ak-Suu meets with the Kichi Ak-Suu (Little White Water) River. The river flows 34 km (21 miles) from the glaciers down to Lake Issyk-Kul, through three small lakes. This jailoo was historically used as a meeting place for congresses of Kyrgyz elders. The two highest peaks: Kum-Bel (4200 m.) and the peak of Eshenbulak (4647 m.). Later in the morning other species takes over: Black-throated Accentors, Blue-capped Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Common Rosefinch, Greenish Warbler, etc. We depart the gorge and continue along the main road towards Karakol. We stop in a nearby village for breakfast and continue the drive. Enroute, we stop where birds appear and for sure, we make a stop in one of the

famous outdoor hot springs. We arrive in Karakol and are accommodated in a comfortable hotel for two nights. O/N hotel. BLD

DAY 9 AND 10. TIEN SHAN MOUNTAINS

We stay at our comfortable guesthouse for three nights. We have time to search for Eastern Kyrgyzstan specialities, like Richards Pipit, buntings, Pallas Grasshopper Warbler, etc. Ibisbill and many other montane birds awaits. We drive into the central Tien-Shan mountain-range there e.g., the mythic Ibisbill. Opportunity for other exciting mountain birds: White-tailed Ruby-throat, Humes warbler, Pine Bunting, Grasshopper Warbler, Siberian Stonechat, Upland Buzzard, Common Dipper, Golden eagle, Greenish Warbler, Cinerous Vulture, Brown Dipper, Black-Throated Accentor, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Red-fronted Serin, Plain Mountain Finch, Red-mantled Rosefinch, Altai Accentor, Himalayan Snowcock, Snowfinch and many other fine species. O/N hotel in Karakol. BLD

DAY 11. KARAKOL – JETI OGHUZ - TAMGA

Fifteen kilometres from Karakol is the Jeti Oghuz Valley, one of the most peculiar mountain valleys of Kyrgyzstan. Red sandstones form a fantastic backdrop in a landscape consisting of low drought-resistant shrub vegetation and coniferous forest: Upland Buzzard,

Tamga is a quiet village on the south coast of Issyk-Kul. The guesthouse is situated with excellent view to the surroundings, in south, the towering Jetim-Bel Mountain range at the end of Barskoun valley. Across the road there is an apricot orchard which feathered inhabitants make frequently visits to the gardens i.e., Azure Tits, Common Rosefinch, Hoopoe, Common Myna, etc. Five minutes from the guesthouse is the lakeshore. There are always good water birds to observe. The fields east of the village are excellent for birding. In spring and autumn, the area teems with roosting migrants. In breeding season 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 wheat-ears, Isabelline Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Rose-coloured 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 14 degrees in May) in the



Issyk-Kul Lake and try Russian Banja. Night in guesthouse. BLD

DAY 12. TAMGA – BARSKAUN GORGE

South of Tamga, a road goes up towards the Kumtor Mine (gold mine) and can be driven along it almost 40 km until you reach a large plateau approx. 3,800 m.o.h. A beautiful area with scattered small lakes and large grasslands. From the valley begins at Issyk-Kul and until it ends up in the mountains, the landscape changes as we rise higher. In the beginning gardens, fruit groves, extensively cultivated field plots, higher up coniferous forest that at 3500 meters altitude gives way to low juniper bushes. Lots of exciting birds of course. Target species Himalayan Snowcock, Lammergeier, Himalayan Griffon Vulture, Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, Brown Accentor, Black-throated Accentor, Altai Accentor [Himalayan Accentor], Himalayan Rubythroat, Gldenstdts Redstart, Black Redstart, Eversmann's Redstart, Blue-capped Redstart, Fire-fronted Serin, Brandt's Mountain Finch (Brandt's Rosy Finch), Plain Mountain Finch, Sulphur-bellied Warbler, Songar Tit, Brown Dipper, Rock Bunting, etc. Late afternoon we visit an area known for e.g., Mongolian Finch, Grey-necked Bunting, Pied Wheatear, etc. In afternoon we visit a desert-like area at the shore of Issyk-Kul; good for Humes Whitethroat, Grey-

necked Bunting, Pied Wheatear, etc. Night in guesthouse, Tamga. BLD
O/N Tamga. BLD

Kyrgyzstan has the most vibrant and accessible nomadic culture of Central Asia. Staying in a yurt camp is one of the best and most wonderful things you can do when you want to learn more about the Central Asian nomadic culture. Many nomadic families' welcome travellers in their yurts. You can stay with them for a few nights, participate in their daily activities. Yurts still litter the steppes and just 36 per cent of the country's residents live in an urban location.

Horses have always played an essential role in the lives of the Central Asian nomads. They were the first people in the world to learn the skill of horseback riding. The nomads practically lived on their saddles while roaming the endless steppes and jailoos and their children learned how to ride horses before they could barely walk. The horse is still a loyal companion for the shepherds, and for many Kyrgyz. Nowadays horsemanship is still a much-revered skill in Kyrgyzstan. The boys in the small towns and villages learn from an early age to sit in the saddle and while they grow up, they master the skill of riding. The national horse game is Kok Boru, better known as Dead Goat Polo. Kok Boru is an ancient, honoured



tradition among the nomadic tribes and one of the most popular sports in Central Asia. It looks like a polo game, but it's played with the beheaded body of a goat. There are less hazardous games you can attend, like At Chabysh (a long-distance race), Kurosh and Oodarysh (wrestling games on horses), Kyz Kumay (catch the bride), Tiyyin Enmey (a game where the rider must pick up coins from the ground while riding at full speed) and many more. We show our visitors these games whenever possible. Sometimes we happen to come across such horse games by chance, and there are also organized festivals and events during the summer.

One of the most beautiful ways to experience the country in a real Kyrgyz style is by going on a horseback riding trip for one or several days. Miksture has organized such tours for many years. Kumyz, fermented mare's milk, is drunk with great gusto in the steppes of Kyrgyzstan.

DAY 13 AND 14. TAMGA – SON KUL

We continue to the Lake Son Kul. A stunningly beautiful area with many good bird places as well as a hospitable nomad population. It

takes most of the day to drive to Son Kul Lake located at 3,000 meters altitude on a large plateau with a tundra landscape and is known as one of the most beautiful places in Kyrgyzstan. Local shepherds from the Kochkorka Valley use the good grazing conditions in summer for their animals. Guests are welcomed and in addition to the interesting birds, there is also the opportunity to visit ethnic Kyrgyz in yurts and shop for a bite of the local cheese, drink fresh yogurt or fermented mare's milk; kumus. We visit several places: depending on the weather. Isabelline Wheatear and Horned Larks are common. Son-Kul and its surroundings has status as Reserve, with a population of Wolf and breeding ground for the beautiful Bar-headed Goose (although it no longer breeds every year). The surrounding mountains are excellent for montane small birds and in addition we can see Slavonian Grebe, Black Stork, Ruddy Shelduck. many duck species, Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Hobby, Lammergeier, Black Vulture, Himalayan Snowcock, Mongolian Plover and several more common shorebirds, Black-headed Gull, Pallas Gull, Citrine Wagtail, White-winged Snowfinch, Altai



Accentor, Black Stork, and Demoiselle Crane.
Overnight in Yurt Camp. BLD

DAY 15. SON KUL – BISHKEK

Early morning, we set course for Bishkek. We stop along the way at the Burana Tower and "Shrike-Boulevard" with Lesser Grey Shrike and Long-tailed Shrikes. Accommodation in hotel. Farewell dinner in a good cafe. BLD

DAY 16. HOMEBOUND OR EXTENSION

Departure from Bishkek Manas International Airport, or extension to the steppe in northern Kazakhstan (until Day 20 or 21)

MAMMALS

Only few ornithologists are not interested in other aspects of nature such as mammals, plants, butterflies & insects, amphibians, and the like. All places have exciting fauna elements.

The activity level is adapted to the group's composition - but is basically high! Those who want a cool and exhausting level of activity will of course get what they want, while those who want a more moderate pace will also be catered for; most in fair condition can easily join. The trip does not deal with mountain climbing and the like, but the participants must be willing to go shorter and longer distances when the birds are to be found. We are going to be very outdoors and in changing weather. The trip is not recommended for people with

walking difficulties. It is a good idea to get in shape before departure - it makes it much easier to get up the mountain slopes. Keep in mind that the air is thin at 3-4,000 meters altitude. On day trips we do not have to carry around a tent or large luggage - only a small backpack with what the individual finds necessary. Some flexibility is built in, so there is room for adjustments along the way. Everything is well organized, both in terms of transport, food, and accommodation. The days get long, but the reward is more experiences. The first hours of the day are usually the most productive and on any serious bird trip, you get up early! Ornithologists usually appreciate being with other like-minded people on a trip like this. On the other hand, it does not mean that the freedom of the individual is deprived along the way.

Central Asia is exciting, but conditions are somewhat different than most people are used to. The accommodation is not comparable to western standard, and the vehicles are less comfortable although air conditioning is now standard etc. We are subject to local conditions, so participants should show patience, flexibility, and forbearance. It is not always possible to be in the places at sunrise or at the times we find best. Things take time in Central Asia, especially the logistical (transportation) ones. Accommodation alternates between tourist class hotels and guesthouses and the



like. In some of the guesthouses we might share toilet and bathing facilities.

MEALS. The food is excellent! Good hearty, tasty and healthy home-cooked food in the best sense of the word based on fresh ingredients: Soups, poultry, vegetables, and pilaf - rice dishes with mutton and lamb and the indispensable bread nan. Tea is served with meals. There will also be an opportunity to taste the local wine or traditional kumus made from fermented mare's milk.

CLIMATE. Distinct mainland climate which is locally influenced by the heights. CLIMATE Kyrgyzstan's great distance from the oceans and the sharp change of elevation from adjacent plains strongly influence the country's climate. Deserts and plains surround Kyrgyzstan on the north, west, and southeast, making the contrast with the climate and landscape of its mountainous interior more striking. The lower parts of its fringing ranges lie in belts of high temperature and receive hot, drying winds from the deserts beyond. The amount of precipitation the country's westward- and northward-facing slopes receive increases with their height. The valleys have hot dry summers, with a mean July temperature of 28 °C. In January the average temperature is -18 °C. Annual precipitation varies from 180 mm in the eastern

Tien Shan to 760 to 1,000 mm in the Kyrgyz and Fergana ranges. In the most populous valleys, rainfall ranges from 100 to 500 mm a year.

Kyrgyzstan has plenty of natural hot springs! Some of them are very popular because they're so beneficial for the health. The water is known to help with diseases related to the nervous, endocrine, cardiovascular, and musculoskeletal systems.

What to bring? Prior departure, Miksture submits a detailed bird list and Practical Travel Tips.

Of course, Miksture are available at any time for additional information.



Price include: Domestic flight ticket Bishkek – Osh, Kyrgyzstan • Full board during the stay in Kyrgyzstan • Guiding by Miksture/Michael Westerbjerg Andersen and his team • All transportation according program in Kyrgyzstan • All accommodation in Kyrgyzstan according day-to-day program • Necessary permits for Restricted Area sites • Local entrees and fees in National Parks and other places visited according day-to-day program • Services of Miksture tour leader • Administration from Miksture • If needed - Visa support, e.g. Letter of Invitation

Price does NOT include international flight ticket (Miksture, of course helps to book the cheapest/best flight ticket) • Other transportation not mentioned in the program, domestic flights in homeland prior arrival/departure Kyrgyzstan • Beverage during the tour and at meals in restaurants and cafes • Arrangements not mentioned in the program • Tips to drivers – hotels, waitresses/waiters/drivers/local guides, etc.) • Travel insurance – mandatory! • Money for own expenses. • Anything strictly personal e.g., money for own expenses.

Welcome!

Miksture/[Michael Westerbjerg Andersen](#), Miksture, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan