

TRIP REPORT – SOUTHERN SIBERIA / WESTERN MONGOLIA

Birding in the heart of Asia

June 4th – June 27th 2009



Mongolian Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*, June 13 2009, NW-Mongolia

1. Introduction

This is a trip report of a birding trip to Southern Siberia and Western Mongolia in June 2009. 'Southern Siberia' and 'Western Mongolia' are indicative. Given the vastness of the area, and the infrastructural difficulties of travelling in this region, only relatively small parts of this larger area were visited. More or less, the area visited was situated between the city of Barnaul, Altai Krai, Siberia, Russian Federation (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnaul>), and the wider surroundings of Olgii, Bayan-Olgii Province, Mongolia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bayan-%C3%96lgii_Province). The 'wider surroundings of Olgii' can be described more accurately as the area to the north and east of this city. The easternmost point we reached was the lake called Khar Us Nuur.

Sorry for any spelling mistakes in this document. This stuff is sometimes written quite late in the evening ;-).

Participants

The four participants (in alphabetical order, with mentioning of country of origin) of this trip were:

- Paul De Potter (Belgium)
- Madina Dyussebayeva (Kazakhstan)
- Wouter Faveyts (Belgium)
- Machiel Valkenburg (the Netherlands, but residing in Kazakhstan)

Paul en Wouter travelled by airplane from Belgium on June 4th, arriving in Barnaul, Siberia at June 6th. Machiel and Madina reside in Almaty, Kazakhstan; they travelled by train from Almaty to Barnaul, arriving on June 8th.

Practical stuff

The practical preparations were made by Machiel Valkenburg and Madina Dyussebayeva of Central Asia Birding (<http://www.centralasiabirding.com>). Due to the fact that the tourist infrastructure in this part of the world is really not that great, to say the least, at least to western standards, this was a pretty tough job! All credits to both, and especially to Madina, who, as the only Russian speaker of our crew had to deal with almost any practical issue before and during the trip! As you will read further on, there was more than one such practical issue...

European visitors need a visa for both Russia and Mongolia. In Brussels, Belgium, both visa were quite easily obtained from the embassies of both countries. The visa for Mongolia costed 60 euro. The visa for Russia costed 35 euro, for a double entry visa. Concerning the Russian visa, there were some uncertainties ahead of applying for the visa, concerning the possibilities of whether or not it was possible to obtain a double entry tourist visa (the information on various websites was neither very conclusive, nor very cohesive...), but in the end (and thanks to the Russian of Madina!) it appeared to be possible to get a double entry tourist visa after all, for the same cost as a single entry visa. Beforehand, horrible tales were heard and read about the cues, the waiting time and client service at the Russian embassy in Brussels, but these turned out to be gravely exaggerated.

Applicants for a Russian visa have to provide several papers (check well in advance in case you plan a trip!), including an invitation. The latter was easily arranged through Madina of Central Asia Birding, via a Russian tourist agency (Universal Tour Russia). This invitation costed 27, 50 euro per person.

Inspiration for the trip were not in the least found in the trip report of some Swedish birders, who made a similar trip in May-June 2007 (http://www.club300.se/Files/TravelReports/Altai2007_MM.pdf). Besides this report, and a couple more that were more or less covering this region, and which were found on www.travellingbirder.com

The flight ticket from Brussels was booked through Aeroflot. Total cost was 570 euro (Brussels – Moscow – Barnaul – Moscow – Brussels).

Background literature brought along during the trip

General travel books:

- Lonely Planet – Russia
- Lonely Planet – Mongolia

Bird books:

- Collins Bird Guide, Killian Mullarney *et al.*
- Birds of East Asia, Mark Brazil
- Birds of the Indian Subcontinent, Richard Grimmett *et al.*

There is no bird guide of book fully covering this part of the world. Thus, one must combine using several guides in order to cover the bird species of the region. Even then, some bird species were not covered by any of the guides. Unfortunately, and contrary against what we had hoped for, 'Birds of Mongolia', by Axel Braunlich was not out yet at the time we made our trip. At the moment of writing this report (September 2009), this book has still not been published, but this guide is expected to cover most birds of the region concerned.

Contact

For more information about this report, you can email Wouter Faveyts (wouter.faveyts@telenet.be)

2. Daily reports

Below is a summary of the activities and the visited areas per day. The best bird species and sightings per day are mentioned as well. The names of the small places and all the coordinates in this overview were found through Google Earth.

- June 4, 2009

The long awaited day of take off for the two Belgian participants of the trip! The flight from Brussels to Moscow is one of the latest flights leaving from Zaventem airport that day, only taking off around 12 hours at night. As always, the last day preparation ahead of the trip were quite frantic, but then comes the time of relief when you can just sit back, relax and enjoy... the relatively short and sleepless night time flight to Moscow!

- June 5, 2009

About three and a half hours after leaving Brussels around midnight on the 4th, we arrive in Moscow around 6.30 in the morning (there is a three hour time difference between Brussels and Moscow). We had to shift from Sheremetyevo 2, Moscow's international airport, to Sheremetyevo 1, a smaller airport for domestic flights. This transfer is easy, short and – always nice – for free. Our flight from Moscow to Barnaul, in southern Siberia, was scheduled for 10.30 pm, so we were in for a horribly long day of waiting at the airport. We discussed the possibility of paying a visit to downtown Moscow, but we were somewhat reluctant to do this, as we had all our gear and luggage with us. In the end, we decided not to do this, and just stuck around. The time was spent with chatting, reading, listening to the MP3-player, walking around, trying to sleep at a table, looking and staring at people, eating, drinking and being bored in general. Having been on a fairly sleepless overnight flight from Brussels the night before did not help much, so in the evening we were dead tired, and Wouter felt pretty much like ****. Obviously, we were not the only ones who were in there for a long wait, as the hall of the airport was packed with other waiting people. The stereotype of heavy drinking in Russia proved to be true: people drink alcohol to an extent that is seldom seen in western Europe. By late afternoon, some of the people around us were so drunk they could barely stand on their feet. Two older guys were so drunk they were lucky to be together, so they could hold on to each other, in order to try and stay upright. The latter didn't work out that well, as one of the guys fell on his back several times. The crowd seemed to be rather bemused if anything. Clearly, public drinking is not that much of a big deal around here. Even on the plane to Barnaul, some drunk Russians were trying to be social to us, but it was pretty difficult to converse. It turned out they had a lot less to say when we arrived in Barnaul the morning after. A preview of what was to come in the coming weeks...

Some birds were seen in the immediate surroundings of the airport, including many Rooks and Jackdaws of the eastern subspecies *soemerringii*.

- June 6, 2009

Another early morning airport arrival. Arriving at Barnaul from the air was a rather impressive sight: the vastness of the Siberian taiga stretching all the way to the horizon to the north and the wide and winding floodplain of the Ob River looked amazing from above! We were expecting to be awaited by our guide at the airport, but this turned out not to be the case. We had not been in direct contact with this guide, as all such preparations had been made in Russian by Madina beforehand. All we knew was that a guide named Maxim would be there for us in a UAZ van. Due to a combination of tiredness and knowing that staying relaxed in such situations, we just waited in front of the airport. Sure enough, after little more than half an hour, our guide Maxim turned up, along with Victor, the driver, in the soon to become infamous UAZ van. The delay had been due to some technical issues with the van, a prelude of what was to come, as it turned out later. Greetings were exchanged and through sign language (Paul and Wouter did not speak any Russian, Maxim and Victor did not speak anything but Russian...) we made clear that we wanted to head for the hotel for some sleep first. Our **hotel** was situated **in the woodlands to the south of Barnaul** (<http://www.lesdali.ru/> - approximate coordinates: 53°17'17.26"N – 83°43'36.00"O). It was a basic but nice hotel, in a quiet setting. We agreed with Maxim they would pick us up around 2 pm, after which we headed for some badly needed sleep!

In the afternoon, we took off with the van for some wetlands along the Ob, at the other side of the river, to the east of Barnaul, more specifically right to the south and to the east of the village of Firsovo. Our first stop was at a beautiful marshy lake, surrounded by wet forest, some kilometres to the **south of Firsovo**, along the road between Firsovo and Lesnoy (approximate coordinates: 53°17'54.77"N – 83°58'02.35"O). An eyecatcher at this little lake was certainly the mixed breeding colony of Black Terns and White-winged Black Terns, both species showing very well at close range. Many Common Snipes were performing courtship displays in the vicinity. The star bird at this location definitely was Siberian Rubythroat, of which two singing males were heard, one of which was seen very well – truly a jewel of a bird! The first hybrid buntings between Yellowhammer and Pine Bunting were seen. Another area some kilometres to the **west of Firsovo** was visited as well, holding Barred Warbler, many Blyth's Reed Warblers and Long-tailed Rosefinch (approximate coordinates: 53°18'19.60"N – 83°53'52.82"O). Persistent rain quickly drove us away from this promising location, though. A breeding pair of Northern Hobby was vocal at their breeding place around the hotel in the evening, as were Golden Oriole, several Oriental Turtle Doves and Pied Flycatchers. Black Kites were common all around, as they would be for the entire rest of the trip. Scarlet Rosefinches were everywhere; their typical song could be heard all around, even in the pinewoods around the hotel.

- June 7, 2009

In the morning we left for a field trip to an area to the west of Barnaul, **close to the town of Pavlovsk**. We wanted to try and reach some areas that had come out promising from the trip report from 2007 of the Swedish birders. In the end, we did not find the exact same spots as the Swedes did in 2007, but this was not really that much of an issue, as we were out in the countryside and the Russian countryside, contrary to what is the case in western Europe, is still rich in birds. First, we stopped near a small dammed lake along the road (approximate coordinates: 53°17'28.21"N – 83°05'37.83"O). It was pretty windy, which made birding not too easy. Blyth Reed Warblers, Yellow Wagtails of the *beema* subspecies and Siberian Stonechats were numerous in the rough meadows along the lake. A Greater Spotted Eagle was definitely the highlight here, although the bird was only seen at a considerable distance, as it was soaring north of the lake. We took lunch at a roadside restaurant, after which we made it clear to our guide and driver that we wanted to head north, taking one of the country roads which would eventually lead to the Ob River. We left the main road at the hamlet of Sibirskye-Ogni (approximate coordinates: 53°18'16.25"N – 83°01'48.90"O), continuing until we reached a small and lush river valley **between the villages of Chernopyatovo and Kasmala** (approximate coordinates: 53°25'43.52"N – 83°13'48.53"O). Birding was quite nice in this area, with Honey Buzzards, Steppe Buzzards, Red-backed Shrikes, a large colony of Sand Martins and Ortolan Buntings. We then continued our quest towards the bank of the Ob River. Shortly after passing Kasmala, the road descended considerably into the floodplain, changing the soil type and the accompanying landscape: wet meadows, oxbow lakes and riverine forest took over from now on. We soon learned that, even though it was June, the tracks were still very wet at some spots: our van got stuck in a big puddle of mud. Some pushing and shoving, some mechanics tricks with the wheels by our driver, and we were soon on the road again. This area must be impassable for a considerable part of the year! After this, we reached a drier part of the track, and we got to **the river bank of the Ob** without any problems (approximate coordinates: 53°30'06.83"N – 83°12'03.36"O). Although it is still several thousands of kilometre from its mouth at the shores of the Arctic Ocean, the Ob is already a broad and mighty river this far south. Impressive riverine woodland was found here. The wind and the afternoon heat made it not so ideal for birding but we still had good birds here: Oriental Turtle Doves, Sedge Warbler, plenty of Golden Orioles and Icterine Warbler, to

name a few. On our way back towards the main road, we stopped along the banks of the small river just before reaching the village of **Chernopyatovo** (approximate coordinates: 53°24'05.49"N – 83°10'26.02"O); meadow birds like Redshanks and Common Snipes were common in the wet meadows here. We were back at the hotel by nightfall.

- June 8, 2009

First we did some early morning birding in the woodland around the hotel: several territories of both Common Redstart and Pied Flycatcher of the subspecies *sibirica* were observed, along with Nuthatches of the *asiatica* subspecies and Northern Bullfinch (with trumpeting calls!). Best bird was the singing Lanceolated Warbler that was seen and heard. Afterwards, we decided to head back to the same area we visited on June 6. First up before noon was the area to the west of Firsovo (approximate coordinates: 53°18'19.60"N – 83°53'52.82"O). On June 6, we had been chased off by train from this spot, but the area had looked very promising so we were eager to return. Birding was great here, with calling Quails and Corncrakes, Black Stork, Wryneck, plenty of Blyth's Reed Warblers, several Barred Warblers, Penduline Tit, and Long-tailed Rosefinches. The star bird beyond doubt, however, was the *fulvescens*-type Greater Spotted Eagle that was seen very well and from fairly close, soaring over the road. After noon, we headed a little further west, towards the river, where we birded in an open area of both wet and dry meadows, interspersed with marshy areas. Noteworthy here were many calling Quails, several Booted Warbler and at least four Yellow-breasted Buntings, including three singing males.

In the evening, we headed to Barnaul train station, to pick up Machiel and Madina, who were to come in after a 37-hour train ride from Almaty, Kazakhstan. It turned out that there had been a misunderstanding about the hour of arrival, though. For some weird reason, train timetables across Russia are all in Moscow time... So 8.30pm was not Barnaul time, but Moscow time, which was 3 hours ahead! Thus, the 8.30pm train in Barnaul does actually not arrive until 11.30pm... It's not that difficult, but you only have to know it! After we realised this, we turned back to the hotel, to go back into the city around 11. The train came in well in time; very nice to see each other back after so many months!

- June 9, 2009

Today, we started to head south towards the Altai mountains. South of Barnaul, the landscape is largely a mix of farming and small woodlands. We stopped in the city of Byisk around noon, for some food and for buying in food stuff for the coming weeks. From Byisk onwards, we would be heading into the Altai mountains and further on into Mongolia, so the chance and the choice to find food would dwindle. Therefore, it was necessary to buy large quantities of pasta, rice, canned vegetables etcetera. After Byisk, we drove to **Gorno-Altai**, the capital of the Altai Republic (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorno-Altaysk>). Here, we had to do the necessary registrations with the local authorities of the Altai Republic. One of the issues and hassles of travelling in Russia is that you have to register at all the places you visit. In touristic locations, this can often be done through the staff of the hotel where you are staying, but in the not so touristic areas (where we were staying for most of our trip), this was more of a hassle. Luckily, we had Madina and her Russian-speaking skills with us, so the other three of the company didn't have to worry about having to face this bureaucratic idiocy... After getting the right permits and stamps in Gorno-Altai we head into the mountains. The landscape quickly turned a lot more spectacular after Gorno-Altai, with mountains and wild mountain streams. We stayed overnight at a hunting lodge near the **village of Cherga** (approximate coordinates: 51°33'59.41"N – 85°33'17.41"O). The food was good here and the service was Russian-style (hence not so very friendly); some of the group enjoyed the Russian sauna before going to bed. Not much birding was done today. Good sightings were a Goosander flying over during a stop along a river in the Altai, Hawfinch and the first Masked Wagtails of the trip in Gorno-Altai and European Nightjar and Siberian Rubythroat both singing at dusk near the hunting lodge where we stayed for the night.

- June 10, 2009

In the morning, we had short but good views of a male Siberian Rubythroat next to our sleeping lodge, along with many Blyth's Reed Warblers and Spotted Flycatchers. Today we drove further down the **Chusky Tract**, as the M52 road south of Ust-Sema (a little bit south of Gorno-Altai) towards the Mongolian border is known. Although the weather turned more rainy as we drove deeper into the mountains, the scenery was still stunning! Not really mentioned in the reports of the previous days, as it is not very relevant for a bird trip report, our UAZ van was not really 'of the best quality', to say it euphemistically... As the terrain got more mountainous, the van got into more and more trouble, advancing only very slowly when going upslope and even cracking down several times.... This delayed our trip, and because of this delay, our guide Maxim did not want us to stop for birding en route. We didn't really plan to accept this, as we had not come all this way just to make a tour in a slow moving and crappy van! We made the van stop several times, which led to the guide becoming nervous and

urging us back into the van in order to move on. From about this point on, the relation with our guide started to turn a little sour... During the few short stops we made when moving up the **Seminsk Pass**, we encountered the first Cinereous Vulture of the trip, a colony of Black-throated Thrushes and a pair of Turkestan Shrikes, as well as several Nutcrackers. Around noon, we stopped for lunch in a canteen near the hotel at the top of the Seminsk Pass. The rain was pouring down by now, but we still managed to score a real good life bird: at least two Siberian Tits were allowing stunningly close views! Nuthatches of the *asiatica* subspecies and a Brambling were observed here as well. Further on route, we saw an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle, many Steppe Buzzards sitting on electricity poles in the pouring rain along the road, as well as the first Ruddy Shelducks and Demoiselle Cranes of the trip. The appearance of Tawny Pipit, and Isabelline Wheatear and Pied Wheatear was a sign that we were moving into different, drier habitat, as was the switch from Goldfinches of the *carduelis*-subspecies we know from Europe to the grey-headed *parapanisi*. In late afternoon we reached the **Chike Taman Pass** (approximate coordinates: 50°38'42.71"N – 86°18'43.36"O). The rain had stopped by now, and we climbed up the rocks for some very nice views of the area: no less than three Booted Eagles and over 40 migrating Fork-tailed Swifts were the best birds here. We camped in a little valley along the road just east of Chike Taman. Near the camping place we saw an Eastern Imperial Eagle, several Ortolan Buntings and a large flock of Common Crossbills, but undoubtedly the best bird here was a singing Dark-sided Flycatcher, which we found only at dusk, right next to our camping spot! This was a species we had not expected, and it took us a while to find out what it was – good that we had the 'Birds of East-Asia' guide with us!

- June 11, 2009

We birded around our camping spot until 10am. It turned out there were no less than four Dark-sided Flycatchers around! We obtained reasonably good photographs of this species, and were still happy with this unexpected treat. Besides, we were treated to some other really good species like Dusky Warbler and Taiga Flycatcher and mega-species like Oriental Cuckoo and Scaly Thrush! Then we continued our drive eastwards towards Mongolia. We made some stops along the road, with sightings of several Cinereous Vultures, Golden Eagles, at least six Lesser Kestrels and three Hill Pigeons. At first, our UAZ van held it out pretty well, but half way the afternoon, things turned for the worse again: the van gave some serious trouble and we had to make a necessary stop some distance to the west of the little town of **Aktash** (approximate coordinates: 50°18'50.89"N – 87°36'11.91"O). We got ourselves some rooms in a cheap and very basic hotel (beds, no shower or bad), while the driver and the guide went on a search for some spare parts. We birded around the hotel, with a Brown Shrike undoubtedly being the best find. Ortolan Bunting were numerous here, and among the usual Pine Bunting x Yellowhammer hybrids, we found two pure looking birds (a male and a female) that did not show any visible signs pointing to a hybrid origin.

There was no restaurant or anything even distantly reminding of a place where we could eat, so we had to make our own food in the hotel, where a small kitchen and some utensils were available. Machiel had a strong craving for real Belgian-style fries, so we decided to try and make fries in the and only way this is supposed to be done: Belgian-style (bake 'em twice, that is!). Quite some potatoes were peeled and cut, and oil was heated in a pot... When the fries were thrown in the burning oil, however, things got 'just a little bit' out of hand: the oil was clearly not ideal to bake fries in, and the content of the pot started to sizzle severely. Flames jumped out of the pot, and we were lucky to be able to take the pot quickly off the stove! A thick smoke and the smell of badly burned oil filled the kitchen. We opened doors and windows for the smoke to clear up, and then just baked the remaining potatoes. It was all pretty laughable in the end, but we realised we had been a little lucky that the place didn't end up burned down.

On this day, things also turned for the worse with our guide, Maxim: he knew shit about what he was doing, he was not well prepared (shitty van, hardly any maps, etc.) and he 'suddenly' realised the border post would be closed tomorrow, because of a holiday. The day after that, the weekend started, which meant a closed border too; this would mean we would have to delay our planned crossing into Mongolia with several days. After some phone calls, the border turned out to be probably open after all tomorrow. Such situations were fairly typical with our guide, we had gotten to know by now. He had had a few months to prepare this trip for us, so he had had plenty of time to be up and ready for it all, but he clearly was not...

- June 12, 2009

We had an early rise, in order to be on our way as soon as possible. It was not until 7am we were on our way after all, not in the least because of the by now usual issues with our guide, which involved a lot of discussing. Along the way, the landscape gradually changed, becoming increasingly dry and more treeless. We passed the **Kuray Steppe** (approximate coordinates: 50°12'42.78"N – 87°57'29.27"O) without a stop, sadly enough because it looked like good habitat, but our guide wanted to reach the border in time. With our shitty van, this meant many more hours of driving. We didn't get that far, though, because just as we entered the **Chuya Steppe**

(approximate coordinates: 50°04'07.39"N – 88°26'36.96"O), the van broke down badly. We went for a walk in the surrounding area while the driver tried to repair it, but this turned out to be in vain. In the end, another van was called in from the town of **Kosh-Agash** (approximate coordinates: 49°59'39.21"N – 88°40'53.83"O), about 70 km to the east of where our van had broken down. We were supposed to switch to this second van anyway for the part of our trip in Mongolia; it had been planned to switch vans in Kosh-Agash. We did some more birding in the surrounding semi desert and river bank while the new van came in. Ruddy Shelducks were common along the river nearby, a Bar-headed Goose flew by, an Upland Buzzard was seen from a distance, an immature Steppe Eagle flew over, many Fork-tailed Swifts hunted among swallow and martins and Shore Larks were everywhere, so we didn't really get bored at all! When the second van came, we switched luggage, some more discussions were held between Madina and Maxim (Russian seems to be a great language for endless discussions...), we managed to rent tents and sleeping bags from Maxim and then we were off, leaving Maxim and his crew to themselves. This early goodbye was not planned, but it was necessary if we wanted our trip to have a chance to succeed. Our new driver Alexei, a Russian of Kazakh ethnicity quickly took us to Kosh-Agash, where got our necessary registrations done and where we stored about 200 litres of gasoline, as we could not expect to find the gasoline the van needed during our seven day trip in Mongolia. Then we rushed towards the Russian-Mongolian border, hoping to pass the border in time before it closed. Leaving Russia meant lots of bureaucratic shit, which mainly seems to serve the purpose of giving as many people the idea that they are very important in their uniform. At times like these, one is remembered how really convenient the free movement of people across the EU and the Schengen-zone is! Between the border posts of Russia and Mongolia, there is a long part of no man's land. We crossed the Mongolian border just in time; our late arrival meant we didn't have to go through many security issues, as the personnel clearly wanted to go home after their shift. While waiting for some formalities at the Mongolian side of the border, we taught some of the local kids how to 'high 5'! Then we headed for the first village on our way in Mongolia, **Tsaganuur** (approximate coordinates: 49°30'22.64"N – 89°43'54.74"O). On a small lake en route, we saw our first Whooper Swans and some Bar-headed Geese. We ended up staying at the house of an ethnic Kazakh family, where we were warmly welcomed. We were invited to sleep in the bedroom of the family. The morning after, it turned out that the hospitality had a price though... Brown Accentor and Desert Wheatear were seen around the house at dusk.

- June 13, 2009

In the morning, it turned out that our stay over had made it necessary for some of the family members to sleep in unusual spots; one of the young men came out of the wrecked car in front of the house. What had seemed like Kazakh hospitality the evening before turned out be hospitality for a price in the morning, when we were presented with the bill for our stay... So far for the myth of nice locals that share everything they have with visitors! ☺ Nevertheless, the people were nice, and it was an interesting experience to be among local people for a while. A Brown Accentor was singing on top of the house where we had stayed. We then headed for some birding along the **north shore of Lake Tsaganuur** (approximate coordinates: 49°31'8.65"N – 89°47'55.43"O). There were not too many birds to be seen, with Black-throated Divers, Whooper Swans, Brown Accentors and Water Pipits most noteworthy. The weather was rather chilly. After this, we took the road through a **gorge at the north-eastern end of the lake** (approximate coordinates: 49°32'41.62"N – 89°53'14.56"O). We slowly made our way, stopping en route for birding and collecting some firewood for the days to come, as we planned to camp out. We did not see too many birds, with Golden Eagle and Crag Martins. Our prime target was the **plains** that were reached **at the eastern end of the gorge** (approximate coordinates: 49°34'49.79"N – 90° 7'27.82"O). From the trip report of the Swedes from 2007, we had learned that this was an area to search for one of most highly sought-after birds of the trip: Mongolian Ground Jay! We fanned out to scan an area that looked good for the species. It was not an easy tick though, as it took as several hours before Machiel finally found a pair! Partly this was because we had not searched the right habitat the whole time: the birds were found in a sparsely vegetated area, which consisted of gravel with scattered bushes of 1-2 meter tall. We enjoyed these birds, a breeding pair, for quite a while, from some distance. Other birds of notice in this area were at least six Cinereous Vultures, a flock of nine Hill Pigeons, Barred Warbler, many Daurian Shrikes and Mongolian Finch.

After lunch we headed towards the city of **Olgii** (approximate coordinates: 48°58'1.68"N – 89°57'21.53"O), to the south of where we were. It was a long drive, over roads that were difficult to drive and difficult to find. We had to go to Olgii to have our driver register with the local authorities. The other four of us had managed to get registered the day before at the border, because we had visas, but our driver still had to be registered, for some weird bureaucratic reason we didn't bother too much about as it's practically impossible to understand all this administrative crap. The afternoon and evening in Olgii turned out be quite eventful... It is not necessary to go into too much detail but our ordeal included much waiting with the local authorities (we must have been important because it took several hours and quite a few officials and 'semi-officials' to get the administrative shit done), some bribing left and right, our driver suddenly becoming scared of driving in Mongolia (it had turned out by now it was his first time in Mongolia too... - another fine example of the organisation skills of our ex-guide

Maxim!), our van rather suddenly becoming badly broke (maybe, just maybe there was a link between this and our driver becoming scared, or would that be too suspicious? ☺) and having to camp on a windy plain just outside Olgii. We had been offered a local guide for the rest of our stay in Mongolia, but we said we wanted to think it over. It was a pretty sucky night, to make it short...

- June 14, 2009

This day seemed to start like the previous one had ended, with some bureaucratic crap, but things went a little better. We had decided by now that it would be necessary to take a local guide, with good knowledge of the areas we wanted to visit. As we had dumped our previous guide (which would not have been of much use anyway...) and he had provided us with no good maps, we needed such a plan B. With help from someone from the local authorities, we found a guy who would show us around. So around noon, we could finally get the hell out of Olgii, which by now had been renamed by us as 'Ugly'. We headed towards the North East, in the direction of Lake Achit Nuur. The stunning landscapes quickly made us forget the ordeals of the passed 24 hours. We made a stop at the edge of a **riverine forest** (approximate coordinates: 49° 3'51.69"N – 90°10'47.04"O), where we found 2 unfamiliar looking and at first unknown rosefinches. The birds were clearly a couple, as one bird was courting to the other. Unfortunately, the male was a young 2CY bird, with thus the same drab colours as the female. The guidebooks we had with us made us guess we were looking at Great Rosefinches, but we could not be sure, as we did not even know that this species even occurred in this part of Asia. We managed to take some good pictures, and after checking at home, it turned they really were Great Rosefinches. We then continued across a high and very windy plateau, until we reached the shores of **Lake Achit Nuur**. We did some birding along the southern shore of the lake (approximate coordinates: 49°22'47.13"N – 90°37'39.47"O). The shoreline was badly overgrazed by cattle, which meant there was little vegetation and, hence, relatively few birds. There were some ducks, mainly Mallards and Pintails; Lesser Short-toed Larks were common here. We found a beautiful camping place along the **Khovd River** (approximate coordinates: 49°18'51.89"N – 90°51'19.95"O) to the south-west of Lake Achit Nuur. Birds we saw near the camping place were Whooper Swans with chicks, Goosander with chicks, Booted Eagle, Hill Pigeon, Azure Tit and Long-tailed Rosefinch.

- June 15, 2009

We left our riverside **camping spot near the Khovd river** in the morning, 2 fly-over Cinereous Vultures waving us goodbye. Our target was to reach another lake to the South-East of Achit Nuur, named Khar-es-Nuur. There appear to be several lakes called Khar-es-Nuur in Mongolia. 'Our' Khar-es-Nuur was a fairly small lake, not too far away (to Mongolian standards!) from Achit Nuur. We made some stops along the way, at places that looked good for some birding. Grey-necked Bunting and Little Owl were nice additions to the species trip list. At a small lake called **Shatsagay Nuur** (approximate coordinates: 49°13'8.21"N – 91°16'5.82"O), we saw good numbers of ducks like Common Pochard and Common Goldeneye; about 40 Stejneger's Scoters far out on the lake were the best species here. A Barred Warbler was in a bush along the lakeshore. We reached **Khar-es-Nuur** (approximate coordinates: 49° 7'4.90"N – 91°50'28.42"O) half way the afternoon. As soon as we got out of the van at our chosen camping spot in the grasslands along the lake, we saw one of the target species of this part of the trip: a Mongolian Lark singing in the sky above us! Many waterbirds were on the lake, including several duck species, >150 Bar-headed Geese, 70 Pied Avocets, 4 Greater Sand Plovers and the only Little Gulls for the trip. Countless Common Swifts and Fork-tailed Swifts were hunting en masse. Some Cinereous Vultures soared over the area and 2 Pallas's Sandgrouse flew over. Wouter, who had been sick to some extent for pretty the much the whole trip so far was not feeling too great and headed to sleep as soon as the tent was set up.

- June 16, 2009

We stayed around **Khar-es-Nuur** the whole day, birding in the grasslands and along the lakeshore. This was a welcome event after all the driving we had been doing so far! The weather on the high plateaus of Mongolia proved to be rather whimsical: windless warm moments switching quickly to rainy and windy, almost stormy conditions – dressing in layers was the way to go! Some 12 hours of sleep had been a blessing for Wouter's health. On the lake were still many waterbirds, including at least 6 Stejneger's Scoters and a tight flock of about 100 marsh terns (ca. 80 White-winged Black Terns and ca. 20 Black Terns). At least 8 Greater Sand Plover could be compared nicely to the common Kentish Plovers and Little Ringed Plovers along the lake. An Upland Buzzard hunted over the distant hillsides. Larks were common: Mongolian Larks, Shorelarks and Lesser Short-toed Larks in the drier grasslands and Skylarks in the more wet meadows along the lake. In the latter habitat, we also found at least 3 Blyth's Pipits. No less than 90 Pallas's Sandgrouse (in flocks of up to 40 birds) flew over the camp in the evening; these birds came from the surrounding area to drink at the lake. A nice anecdote was

the old-timer of about 75 years old who told us, when asked about the road out of the broad plain in which the lake was situated, that he didn't really know since he had never left this plain in all his life... Our driver and our guide were getting a little grumpy of the mainly vegetarian food we were cooking (and which they had to eat as well); both were ethnic Kazakh (one of Russian nationality and one of Mongolian nationality) and these people clearly are hooked on eating meat! Meat is not easy to preserve though and canned meat tastes like s**t, so we had mainly gone for vegetables, pasta and rice. We could not complain ourselves though, as the vegetarian stews that we made were pretty damn good!

- June 17, 2009

In the morning we did some birding around our camp site at Lake Khar-es-Nuur. A total of no less than 111 fly over Pallas's Sandgrouse (largest flock counted 55 birds) was amazing! The birds passed over low, and the fact that they utter only soft calls, contrary to other sandgrouse species we are familiar with, we often only noticed them when they flew just past us. For the 2 photographers in the group, some great photographic opportunities were missed, but this could not spoil the fun! We then tried to head north, into the mountains. The road proved more difficult than anticipated though, and our driver did not want to risk driving too far into unknown territories (also for our guide) because he feared to run out of fuel. We decided to head back towards Achit Nuur, as we thought that this area could yield some more birds than we had found on our first visit. We drove back towards our riverside camping place of June 14, which took us most of the day, as the road conditions were bad and we stopped regularly for some birding en route. Some species seen along the road were Black Stork, Cinereous Vultures, a pair of Upland Buzzards, a small colony of Lesser Kestrels and most noticeable, two sightings of Père David's Snowfinch.

- June 18, 2009

We broke up the **camp near the Khovd-river** early and headed for birding at **Lake Achit Nuur**, some 20 km to the Northwest of the camping place. First we spent some time at the south-eastern edge of the lake. Good birds here were some Lesser Kestrels and some fly-by Pallas's Gulls. Then we headed towards the north-eastern shore, where we happened to find a really interesting habitat (approximate coordinates: 49°33'40.43"N – 90°41'47.86"O). There were reeds and there was shallow water, and the place was teeming with birds. It did not take us too long to decide to stay here until late in the afternoon. The best species here was a summer plumaged Asiatic Dowitcher which showed really well. Besides, there hundreds of ducks (including >150 Red-crested Pochards), several Marsh Sandpipers (including a nest containing four eggs), >100 Common Terns, two singing Blyth's Pipits, over 20 singing Paddyfield Warblers, several singing Great Reed Warblers and many Bearded Reedlings. Also of interest were the Yellow Wagtails of the subspecies *leucocephala* that were seen at this spot – this must surely be one of the most attractive subspecies of the whole range of Yellow Wagtail subspecies! Then we headed back towards Olgii, but our drive was soon interrupted by two immature raptors that were seen within a few kilometres of one another. They turned out to be young Pallas's Fish Eagles, and one of them allowed for a real close approach, which resulted in great pictures! We reached a camping spot in the evening among a large **riverine forest some 30 km north-east from Olgii** (approximate coordinates: 49° 3'51.69"N – 90°10'47.04"O). Here we camped among the gers of the locals, the children found us a nice attraction and had fun in gathering firewood for us, an offer we happily accepted and returned with chocolate!

- June 19, 2009

From our camping spot, we quickly reached **Olgii**, where we dropped off our guide. We spent some time at the market of Olgii to photograph Black Kites, which were scanning low for food. When the locals noticed the westerners with their binoculars and big cameras were interested in those big scavenging birds, they very quickly realised the potential business opportunity: in sign language they made it clear that we could by chicken remains from them which they could then toss out in order to lure the kites even closer. The kites were close enough for us though, so we turned their offer down; they ended up throwing out the chicken remains for the birds anyway, as they appeared to find it funny how these westerners were gazing at these raptors. Then we headed towards the border, where we started a 6-7 hour ordeal to pass it. It took us two hours to get through the Mongolian customs, and then at least another four hours at the Russian side. Amazing what hassle they make of crossing a border; on the Russian side, we had to show our passports no less than nine times over a distance of less than 500 meters, every time to yet another uniformed dude or lady who tried to look as serious and important as possible. We made it in the end though, and we reached the town of **Kosh-Agash** around sunset, not before having to register again with the local authorities there. We took the only hotel available in Kosh-Agash, the Transit Hotel. This name was chosen rather well, as this was not exactly the type of hotel where one would like to remain for a prolonged stay ☺. We didn't care about staying here for a night though: at least there

was a (hard) bed and a (sketchy) shower! We further celebrated our newfound sense for luxury after a week of camping in the wild in Mongolia by going out for dinner to one of the only restaurants in town. We were the only customers to enjoy the Uzbek-style plov-meal. The shower after dinner felt great and it was very nice to be able to load all our electric devices again, not in the least the camera batteries.

Birds were hardly seen on this mainly travelling day: many Black Kites, some Cinereous Vultures, some Greenish Warblers at the morning camping spot, a pair of the Daurian Shrikes at the camping spot, and a Mongolian Lark and a Père David's Snowfinch en route between Olgii and the border.

- June 20, 2009

The guy who had been driving us around since we had ditched our previous van was not available for the rest of our trip, so we had to find some new wheels again. This is no problem in this part of the world where pretty much everyone with a vehicle is a potential taxi driver! Through the hotel owner, we contacted some potential drivers for the rest of our trip back towards Barnaul. The word spread fast, and quite some people came over to offer their services. There were even two guys who were trying to convince us that it was no problem at all to drive us around and to haul all our luggage in and on their... small Lada car! Maybe some other time, guys! ☺ In the end we found a guy, Alec, with a decent UAZ van, who seemed trustworthy and who was prepared to drive us all the way to Barnaul. Around noon, we could take off; by this time the weather had turned pretty rainy. We drove towards the town of **Aktash**, stopping several times en route for some birding. In the **Kuray Steppe**, we saw a Merlin perched in a spruce tree, as well as Cinereous Vulture, Booted Eagle, Steppe Eagle and many Pied Wheatears. From Aktash, we took a **mountain pass towards the North** (approximate coordinates: 50°31'43.38"N – 87°43'53.10"O), to the village of **Ulagan** (approximate coordinates: 50°38'0.57"N – 87°57'34.74"O). By this time the rain was pouring down, and the sight in the mountains was limited. A few roadside stops were nevertheless good for Bluethroat, Eversmann's Redstart, Back-throated Thrush, both Hume's Warbler and Yellow-browed Warbler, Dusky Warbler and Siberian Tit. Here we stayed in a rural hotel. The chicken that we had bought in Kosh-Agask for lunch came back with a vengeance for Wouter, who spent a considerable part of the night 'cleansing his body'.

- June 21, 2009

The next day, the weather quickly cleared out. This allowed us to take the road back south to Aktash slower than we had the day before, stopping more for birding en route. Our first stop was in an area that looked good for one of our main target species that we were still missing. Sure enough, as soon as we got out, we heard a song that sounded very promising, and after some searching, there was our star bird singing high in the top of a tall spruce tree: Red-flanked Bluetail! There turned out to be at least four singing birds in the area. Furthermore, we saw a Booted Eagle, Siberian Rubythroat, some more Red-flanked Bluethroats at other stopping places, Yellow-browed Warbler and many Dusky Warblers. In the early afternoon, we reached **Aktash**. We then drove towards Belyy Bom, seeing an Imperial Eagle along the road, from where we headed into the mountains towards the **Shavla mountain top** (approximate coordinates: 50°17'19.31"N – 86°58'8.43"O), along a very narrow and pretty rough road that went steep up into the mountains, frequently passing through fairly deep streams. We went all the way up to the radar station at the mountain top, from where we had stunning views over the Altai mountains against the backdrop of a beautiful sunset. We then drove back downhill to find a good camping spot for the night. This turned out to be finally difficult, and when we finally found one, our driver got a little freaky about all the ticks he soon discovered on his body. Well, he was the one who was walking around on slippers and in a t-shirt! We ended up driving further down into the valley where we rented a small cabin for the night at Belyy Bom (approximate coordinates: 50°22'07.82"N – 87°02'15.30"O); a European Nightjar flew in front of the car just before reaching **Belyy Bom**.

- June 22, 2009

Today we drove from **Belyy Bom** towards the top of the **Seminsk Pass** (approximate coordinates: 51° 2'44.41"N – 85°36'12.46"O). We drove slowly, birding en route and stopping frequently at places that looked good or when we saw good birds. Very noteworthy was a number of no less than 13 Eastern Imperial Eagles (of all age classes, from 2CY birds to adult plumage birds) that were seen along the distance of ca. 80 kilometres! Furthermore, we saw Cinereous Vultures, Black Stork, European Honey Buzzard, more than 10 Lesser Kestrels (including a colony of at least 4 breeding birds in a low cliff right along the road, giving excellent and close up views and photographic opportunities), Rock Thrush and Ortolan Bunting as a common roadside bird, sitting on wires along the road. We had lunch at the **Chike Taman Pass**. In the evening, we found a great camping spot at the eastern edge of the top of the pass (approximate coordinates: 51° 3'12.65"N – 85°36'32.65"O), with a stunning view towards Sarlyk Mountain to the east of us. It was great weather to camp out here, a beautiful summer

evening, interspersed with a some showers half way. Birding was very good here: Oriental Turtle Dove, Black-throated Accentor, at least 2 singing Red-flanked Bluetails, many Black-throated Thrushes, at least 3 singing Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers (giving stunning close up views!), Greenish Warbler, Hume's Warbler, Siberian Tit and Nutcracker. The top of the bill, however, beyond doubt, was the last bird of the day: Ural Owl! First, the bird flew quickly over the forest clearing in the valley below our tents before disappearing again in the forest. Paul and Wouter were birding away from the tents, and only Machiel saw it. A search in the surrounding forest revealed no owl, much to our regret. Finally, at deep dusk, the bird appeared again, and it then allowed amazing and fairly close up views, sitting in the top of a tree at the forest edge, and successfully hunting right in front of us – what a killer bird!

- June 23, 2009

In the morning, some birding hours were spent at our camping spot. We got even more convinced that this was a great area for birds: Black-throated Accentor, Red-flanked Bluetail, Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler and Siberian Tit were obviously present. A new very good species was found: a strongly territorial Olive-backed Pipit. Those great birding hours in the morning were a strong contrast with what was to follow: soon we were to be reminded again strongly that we were in Russia...: it was registration time again! We had to do this in **Gorno Altaisk**, where we had also stopped some days before. Registering had gone pretty quickly on that previous passage through town, but this was not to be the case this time though. It took for hours for some people to stamp off some papers... It's been said before in this report and it is about to be said again: the whole administrative and registration process in Russia is such a crappy hassle, which seems to serve for little more than annoying people and providing jobs to people with a talent for bureaucracy. Ah well, in the end, one can only take it philosophically and consider it to be one of the things that go with travelling outside the western world. It is very helpful when there is someone in your crew who speaks fluent Russian (although this also means that most of the stress is for this person...); if you have to get through all this s**t without speaking any Russian, then it could get quite tough!

Finally we could travel further towards Barnaul, dropping of the tents and sleeping bags in **Byisk**, where Maxim, our first (and fired!) guide, lived. Working with him had proved to be very difficult, but we had to be grateful that he had allowed us to use the tents and the bags. In **Barnaul**, we ended up sleeping in a apartment that we could rent cheaply. The apartment was located in Soviet-style housing blocks, that was situated among many more such housing blocks. It looked like the people who had these blocks built did not really pursue any sense for individuality... ☺. It was an interesting experience to move through the depressing hallway in the building, the squeaky elevator and being cramped in a small apartment, realising that a whole family had to permanently in such a small space.

- June 24, 2009

In the morning, we first tried to find a detailed map of the wider region around **Barnaul**, in order to find good birding spots. We did not find anything usable, though, so we decided to get out of the city, and try to find a map again in the evening. We headed for birding in the area we had already visited at the beginning of the trip, the woodland and marshland to the **west of the village of Firsovo**, as Machiel and Madina had not been there yet and as this was a very good area for birds anyway. We watched birds at an easy pace for the whole day, at various locations between Firsovo and the River Ob. At the first location (approximate coordinates: 53°18'19.60"N – 83°53'52.82"O), we did not get bored at all: Black Stork, two White-backed Woodpeckers, at least three singing Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers (this species had not been present here at the beginning of June, and it turned out they had arrived en masse by now), Penduline Tits and Northern Bullfinch with the characteristic trumpeter call. The second location, more to the west, in the open area with dry and wet meadows closer to the Ob, we saw a gorgeous adult male Pallid Harrier, and evenly gorgeous adult male Red-footed Falcon, White-backed Woodpecker, hundreds of Sand Martins, numerous Siberian Stonechats and Yellow Wagtails of the *beema*-type, many Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers singing their typical song, many Booted Warblers and at least five territories of Yellow-breasted Bunting. The third location was the little lake along the road **between Firsovo and Lesnoy** (approximate coordinates: 53°17'54.77"N – 83°58'02.35"O): White-winged Black Terns and Black Terns were still numerous here, and at least three Northern Hobbies were hunting dragonflies overhead. We tried to find more good birding spots a little more to the south in this area, but it was difficult to access the impenetrable marshy woodlands. In the evening, we went back to Barnaul. Our search for a map was fruitless, despite visiting several bookstores. We also switched apartment, to something that was more modern, albeit still in a crappy building.

- June 25, 2009

On this day, we visited generally the same area we had already been to on June 7, *to the west of Barnaul*, close to the town of **Pavlovsk**, as Machiel and Madina had not been here. En route, an adult male Pallid Harrier was seen hunting in fields along the road. First up for a thorough check was the area just to **north of the village of Chernopyatovo** (approximate coordinates: 53°24'16.75"N – 83°10'25.95"O), where we scanned the meadows and woodland edges: Oriental Turtle Doves, at least two Richards Pipits (presumably a breeding pair), many Pied Flycatchers, Northern Bullfinch with the characteristic trumpeter call, Hawfinch and plenty of hybrid buntings (Yellowhammer x Pine Bunting).

Then we went for the **small river valley between the villages of Chernopyatovo and Kasmala** (approximate coordinates: 53°25'43.52"N – 83°13'48.53"O), where we spent several hours of birding. We recorded Black Stork, European Honey Buzzard, at least three Corncrakes, two Marsh Sandpipers, Oriental Turtle Doves, Wryneck, two Richards Pipits (including a persistently singing bird), Citrine Wagtail and here also plenty of hybrid buntings (Yellowhammer x Pine Bunting).

- June 26, 2009

Today, Machiel and Madina were going to visit tour operators in **Barnaul**, to see if they could get good and reliable contacts to operate bird tours in this part of Russia in the future. Paul and Wouter headed out on their own, with the driver. Using a not so detailed map we had, we tried to reach a new area, further south of Firsovo, along the Ob-river, where the map showed promising habitat, comprised of wet forest and wetland. In the end, we didn't find any usable road into the area. Through sign language, we tried to make clear to our driver where we wanted to go, and the driver in his turn tried to find out from local people along the road and in the village of Lesnoy, but this did not lead us into good riverine birding areas. The amount of vast areas that look very good for birds, but that are just as inaccessible to visit is simply stunning, and the little pieces that do allow to be surveyed are so good that one can only imagine how many birds live in this part of Siberia and the whole of Siberia in general... In the end, we decided that we had been sitting in the van for long enough; we wanted to do as much birding as possible on our last day in the field in Russia, so we made it clear to the driver that we wanted to go back to the now familiar **area to the west of Firsovo**. The same area as before, but there were still parts we hadn't seen of it, and at least it was accessible and good for birds as well. This was a good choice: a number of sightings of Black Storks, an adult White-tailed Eagle, our only Marsh Harrier of the trip (surprisingly!), Greater Spotted Eagle (distant), Spotted Crake, Corncrake, many Black Thern and White-winged Black Terns, Citrine Wagtails, White-spotted Bluethroat, many Sedge Warblers, many Booted Warblers, loads of Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers, Grasshopper Warbler, a fairly obliging pair of Barred Warblers, Penduline Tits and Long-tailed Rosefinch etc.; you have to admit that there are far worse places to spend a day of birding! ☺

A very nice way to end a great birding trip. In the evening, we had a nice farewell dinner at our apartment in Barnaul, and then we headed out for some drinks. We had quiet some beers and cocktails in a trendy but largely empty bar in downtown Barnaul. Together with the trendy interior of the bar, the nicely smiling and friendly waitresses, the flat screen tv's on the wall in the bar, the news that Michael Jackson had just died (this answers the question that could once follow in life; 'Where were you when Michael Jackson died?' pretty well ☺) made it clear that we had definitely left the Siberian wilds behind us. We went to bed with a good amount of alcohol in our blood. For Paul and Wouter, it was to be a short sleep, as their flight to Moscow took off early in the morning.

- June 27, 2009

Not much to say about the last day. An early rise, saying goodbyes between the Belgian part of the crew and the Dutch-Kazakh part of the crew, a taxi drive back to the airport, and then we were off for our first flight of the day from Barnaul to Moscow. In Moscow, we spent a long day of waiting for our flight to Brussels. We considered taking a taxi and going for some sightseeing of Moscow, but then again, we were tired and had all our language with us and blablabla; in the end, we just hung around at the airport: drinking, eating, snoozing, looking at people, reading, listening to music,..., for about 11 hours! Our flight to Brussels took off around 10.30pm; we were back in Brussels around 12pm local time – a great birding trip had definitely come to an end...

3. Overview of bird species

Below is an overview of all the bird species that were observed on this trip. More accurate information on sightings and other relevant issues is given for every species. The sightings for Russia and Mongolia are mentioned separately, unless where the distinction was not considered very relevant.

In this overview, geographical locations are shown as abbreviations. In alphabetical order, the abbreviations below have been used (due to the incredible vastness of the landscapes in this part of the world, the description of the sites and the exact localities are sometimes not very precise):

Russia:

Abbreviation	Location	approximate coordinates
AM	Altai Mountains	-
BA	Barnaul	53°21'19.94"N – 83°45'45.42"O
BB	Belyy Bom	50°22'07.82"N – 87°02'15.30"O
CH	Cherga (village in Altai, south of Gorno-Altaiisk)	51°33'59.41"N – 85°33'17.41"O
CK	(small and lush river valley) between the villages of Chernopyatovo and Kasmala	53°25'43.52"N – 83°13'48.53"O
CO	near the village of Chernopyatovo	53°24'16.75"N – 83°10'25.95"O
CS	Chuya Steppe	50°04'07.39"N – 88°26'36.96"O
CTP	Chike Taman pass	50°38'42.71"N – 86°18'43.36"O
DP	small dammed lake east of Pavlovsk	
FS	South of the village of Firsovo, between Firsovo and Lesnoy , east of Barnaul	53°17'54.77"N – 83°58'02.35"O
FW	West of the village of of Firsovo, east of Barnaul	53°18'19.60"N – 83°53'52.82"O
HA	'hotel' west of Aktash	Not refound on Google Earth
HB	Hotel in the woodlands south of Barnaul, where we stayed on June 6-8	53°18'19.60"N – 83°53'52.82"O
KA	Kosh-Agash	49°59'39.21"N – 88°40'53.83"O
KS	Kuray Steppe	50°12'42.78"N – 87°57'29.27"O
MPU	mountain pass north Aktash, towards Ulagan	50°31'43.38"N – 87°43'53.10"O
OK	bank of the Ob-river north of Kasmala	53°30'06.83"N – 83°12'03.36"O
SP	Seminsk Pass	51° 2'44.41"N – 85°36'12.46"O

Mongolia:

Abbreviation	Location	approximate coordinates
CKR	camping site at the Khovd-river south-east of lake Achit Nuur	49°18'51.89"N – 90°51'19.95"O
KEN	Lake Khar-es-Nuur	49° 7'4.90"N – 91°50'28.42"O
LAN	Lake Achit Nuur	49°29'18.98"N – 90°31'44.67"O
LTS	Lake Tsaganuur	49°31'8.65"N – 89°47'55.43"O
OL	Olgii (city)	48°58'1.68"N – 89°57'21.53"O
RNEO	riverine forest north-east of Olgii	49° 3'51.69"N – 90°10'47.04"O
SN	Shatsagay Nuur	49°13'8.21"N – 91°16'5.82"O
TS	Tsaganuur	49°30'22.64"N – 89°43'54.74"O

1. Whooper Swan – *Cygnus cygnus*

Mongolia. This species was only observed in Mongolia. It was rather surprising to see how regular Whooper Swans were in the desert and steppe lakes and rivers of Western Mongolia, given the fact that it is a typical breeding bird of northern marshland in Europe. Whooper Swans were seen on every day of our stay on Mongolia. The first two birds were seen between the Russian-Mongolian border and the town of TS on June 12. At least 11 birds at LTS on June 13. The species appeared even on small lakes, like in the gorge at the north-eastern end LTS on June 13 (two pairs) and on rivers (a breeding pair with six young at CKR on June 14).

2. Greylag Goose – *Anser anser*

Mongolia. 62 birds at LAN on June 18.

3. **Bar-headed Goose** – *Anser indicus*
Russia. The first birds (2) were seen flying over along a river in the CS on June 12.
Mongolia. The species was rather common in Mongolia: 12 birds at a small lake between the Russian-Mongolian border and TS. At least 12 birds at LTS on June 13. The highest numbers were recorded at KEN on June 15-17 (> 150 birds).
4. **Ruddy Shelduck** – *Tadorna ferruginea*
Russia and Mongolia. Common at water bodies in the AM and in Mongolia. The first birds on the way south were seen between CH and CTP on June 10. At least 20 birds in the CS on June 12. Fairly common at water bodies in Mongolia.
5. **Shelduck** – *Tadorna tadorna*
Mongolia. A few birds at KEN on June 15-17.
6. **Red-crested Pochard** – *Netta rufina*
Russia. Some birds seen from the vehicle in small lakes along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12 and on June 20.
Mongolia. Six birds at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17. > 150 birds at LAN on June 18.
7. **Pochard** – *Aythya ferina*
Russia. Commonly seen from the vehicle in small lakes along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12 and June 20 (>100 birds).
Mongolia. High numbers were recorded at SN on June 15 (> 150 birds) and at KEN on June 15 and June 16 (> 100 birds). > 150 birds at LAN on June 18. See general remark under Gadwall.
8. **Tufted Duck** – *Aythya fuligula*
Russia. Commonly seen from the vehicle in small lakes along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12 and June 20 (>100 birds).
Mongolia. High numbers were recorded at KEN on June 15 and June 16 (> 200 birds). See general remark under Gadwall.
9. **Gadwall** – *Anas strepera*
Russia. Three birds at CK on June 7. Two birds in the CS on June 12. Five birds at CK on June 25. General remark: all duck species were surprisingly rare in the wetland habitats in lowland Siberia around BA. Similar habitats in Western Europe would yield many more birds of these species!
Mongolia. Two birds at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17.
10. **Eurasian Wigeon** – *Anas penelope*
Mongolia. Six birds at LAN on June 14..
11. **Shoveler** – *Anas clypeata*
Russia. 1 pair at OK on June 7.
Mongolia. Five birds at KEN on June 15. See general remark under Gadwall.
12. **Mallard** – *Anas platyrhynchos*
Russia. Very small numbers in wetland habitat in lowland Siberia around BA. Two birds seen from the vehicle in a small lake along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12. See general remark under Gadwall.
Mongolia. >50 birds at LAN on June 14.
13. **Pintail** – *Anas acuta*
Mongolia. >30 birds at LAN on June 14. 40 birds at KEN on June 15. See also general remark under Gadwall.
14. **Garganey** – *Anas querquedula*
Russia. 1 male at OK on June 7. See general remark under Gadwall.
Mongolia. Up to eight birds at KEN on June 15-16.
15. **Common Teal** – *Anas crecca*
Russia. 1 male at FS at June 6. Three birds FW on June 26. See general remark under Gadwall.
Mongolia. Seven birds at KEN on June 15. Two birds at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17.
16. **Goldeneye** – *Bucephala clangula*
Russia. Two birds in the CS on June 12.
Mongolia. One male at LAN on June 14 and a female at CKR on June 14. High numbers were recorded at SN on June 15 (> 50 birds) and at KEN on June 15 and June 16 (> 100 birds). Two birds at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17.
17. **Goosander** – *Mergus merganser*
Russia. One female flying over in a river valley in the AM on June 9. Two birds in the CS on June 12.

- Mongolia. One female with four young at CKR on June 14.
- 18. Stejneger's Scoter** – *Melanitta deglandi*
Mongolia. At least 40 birds were recorded from a considerable distance at SN on June 15. Six birds at KEN on June 16.
- 19. Common Quail** – *Coturnix coturnix*
Russia. Common to very common in typical habitat around BA. For example, >15 singing birds at FW on June 24 and June 26. Common at CK and CO on June 25.
- 20. Black-throated Loon** – *Gavia arctica*
Mongolia. Three birds from a considerable distance on LTS on June 13.
- 21. Great Cormorant** – *Phalacrocrax carbo*
Mongolia. At least 20 birds at LTS on June 13. >10 birds at LAN on June 14. Two birds at CKR on June 15. A colony of about 100 active nests on a small island in a little lake at the north-eastern shore of LAN on June 18; a few 100 birds foraging in the surroundings.
- 22. Great White Egret** – *Casmerodius albus*
Mongolia. Eight birds at LAN on June 18.
- 23. Grey Heron** – *Ardea cinerea*
Russia. A few birds near BA on June, 6. Four birds at OK on June 7. Two birds at CK on June 25. At least two birds at FW on June 26.
Mongolia. Two birds at LTS on June 13. One bird at LAN on June 14. One bird at KEN on June 15. > 10 birds at LAN on June 18; also apparently breeding among Great Cormorants on the ground on a small island in a little lake at the north-eastern shore of LAN on June 18.
- 24. Black Stork** – *Ciconia nigra*
Russia. Not uncommon around Barnaul. 1 adult over FW on June 8. One bird just south of the SP on June 22. One bird at FW and one bird at FS on June 24. One bird at CK on June 25. Four sightings of at least two different birds (adult and 2CY) at FW on June 26.
Mongolia. One bird between KEN and CKR on June 17.
- 25. Great Crested Grebe** – *Podiceps cristatus*
Russia. One bird seen from the vehicle in small lakes along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12.
Mongolia. A few birds at SN on June 15. > 50 birds at LAN on June 18.
- 26. European Honey Buzzard** – *Pernis apivorus*
Russia. Two adults at CK on June 7. One adult male between CTP and SP on June 22. One light-morphed male at CK on June 25. No sign of Crested Honey Buzzard; all honey buzzards seen on the trip were checked with this species in mind, but they were all pure European Honey Buzzards.
- 27. Black(-eared) Kite** – *Milvus migrans (lineatus)*
Russia and Mongolia. Beyond doubt the most common bird of prey! Both in Russia and in Mongolia, Black Kites were numerous all around, both in cities, towns and villages, and in the countryside. The birds could thus be seen from the most urban areas, like the centre of BA (a city of >750.000 inhabitants), the most remote upland areas in Mongolia. The birds were not shy at all, and when camping out in the field in Mongolia, Black Kites even actively came flying over the small camp (of only two tents and a van) to see if any food could be scored. The majority of birds showed good features for Black-eared Kite *Milvus milvus lineatus*, but birds with characters that pointed to not being fully pure Black-eared Kites were also seen, especially birds with lighter irises, even in Mongolia.
- 28. White-tailed Eagle** – *Haliaeetus albicilla*
One adult at FW on June 26.
- 29. Pallas's Fish Eagle** – *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*
Mongolia. Two juveniles along the south-eastern shore of LAN on June 18, one of them allowing a rather close approach, offering great views and photographic opportunities!
- 30. Cinereous Vulture** – *Aegypius monachus*
Russia and Mongolia. Regular sightings in the AM and in Mongolia.
Russia. On the way south, the first bird was seen between CH and CTP on June 10. One bird in the KS on June 20.
Mongolia. At least six birds in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13. Two birds over CKR on June 15. Four birds at KEN on June 15. At least seven birds over at KEN on June 16. Two birds between KEN and CKR on June 17. Three birds over the centre of OL and one bird near LTS on June 19. Two birds at BB on June 22. Two birds between BB and SP on June 22.

31. **Marsh Harrier** – *Circus aeruginosus*
Russia. One adult female hunting at FW on June 26. This species was surprisingly rare in the Siberian lowland around BA. Probably, the lack of reedbeds must have had something to do with this.
32. **Pallid Harrier** – *Circus macrourus*
Russia. One adult male hunting at FW on June 24. One adult male hunting over arable fields along the road between BA and Pavlovsk on June 25.
33. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** – *Accipiter nisus*
Russia. One adult female near the camping spot at CTP on June 11.
34. **Goshawk** – *Accipiter gentilis*
Russia. One bird near the camping spot at CTP on June 11. One bird at the CTP on June 22.
35. **Steppe Buzzard** – *Buteo buteo vulpinus*
Russia. Only the subspecies *vulpinus* was observed, in quite good numbers, in most areas. The species was seen both in the lowlands around Barnaul and higher up in the AM. For example, at least 8 birds were counted along the road between CH and CTP on June 10 (sitting on roadside poles on this fairly rainy day). A dark-morphed bird was seen near the camping spot at CTP on June 11.
Some interesting facts were noted. A 2CY bird at FW on June 26 showed that birds of this age class reach these far eastern breeding areas already in their first summer. It could not be judged whether this bird was breeding or not though. An adult bird near FW on June 8 was actively moulting (p4 in the right wing and p4-5 in the left wing). Most bird seen were of the foxy-red morph, but darker birds were seen as well.
36. **Upland Buzzard** – *Buteo hemilasius*
Russia. One bird seen from a considerable distance in the CS on June 12.
Mongolia. One bird over the hills near KEN on June 16. Two birds on the plateau north of KEN on June 17.
37. **Booted Eagle** – *Aquila pennata*
Russia. Three birds (all of the dark morph) were seen at the CTP on June 10. One bird (dark morph) from a distance at the KS on June 20. One bird (dark morph) at MPU on June 21.
Mongolia. One bird (dark phase) at CKR on June 14.
38. **Golden Eagle** – *Aquila chrysaetos*
Russia. One bird was seen over the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11, at one moment in one view with an adult Eastern Imperial Eagle, offering a good opportunity for comparison. Two birds were seen en route between CTP and Aktash. One immature bird seen from a fairly close distance near the Shavla mountain top on June 21.
Mongolia. One bird in the gorge at the north-eastern end LTS on June 13.
39. **Greater Spotted Eagle** – *Aquila clanga*
Russia. 1 bird seen from a distance from the DP, in the direction of Pavlovsk, on June 7. One of the prime birds of the trip was the *fulvescens*-type Greater Spotted Eagle that soared low over the road at FW on June 8; this bird was well photographed. One bird was seen at FW on June 26; this was a normally coloured individual, so a different bird from the one seen in this area on June 26.
40. **Steppe Eagle** – *Aquila nipalensis*
Russia. Surprisingly scarce! One 2CY bird in the CS on June 12. One bird from a distance at the KS on June 20.
41. **Eastern Imperial Eagle** – *Aquila heliaca*
Russia. Fairly regular in the AM. On June 10 an adult between CH and CTP and an adult soaring over the camp site just west of CTP. One bird in the CS on June 12. One adult along the road between Aktash and BB on June 21. A high numbers of 13 birds was observed along the road between BB and SP (about 80 miles) on June 22! Most birds were spotted flying while driving at the latter date; birds of all age classes were seen, older adults (at least five birds) and one 2CY bird, plus other age classes, including two 4-5CY birds.
42. **Lesser Kestrel** – *Falco naumanni*
Russia. At least six birds were seen en route between CTP and Aktash on June 11. Two birds at the KS on June 20. At least ten birds en route between BB and SP on June 22, including a small roadside colony of at least four breeding pairs in a low rock cliff, which allowed great views. Interestingly, at least two males at this latter colony were 2CY birds.
Mongolia. At least five birds at a small colony in piles of boulders between KEN and CKR on June 17. At least three birds at LAN on June 18.

43. **Common Kestrel** – *Falco tinnunculus*
Russia. Regularly seen in small numbers, both in the lowlands and in the AM. Maximum three birds west of BA on June 7.
44. **Eurasian Hobby** – *Falco subbuteo*
Russia and Mongolia. Fairly common, from the Siberian lowlands near BA up to the high plateaus of Mongolia.
Russia. A territorial pair was present and very vocal near HB on June 6-8. Two territorial pairs were also vocal at FW on June 8. Even in the centre of larger cities, like an adult hunting at a busy, traffic-loaded crossroad in Byisk on June 9. The species was also observed in the higher parts of the AM, with no or only scarce growth of trees, on June 11.
Mongolia. One bird hunting in the treeless landscape along LAN on June 18.
45. **Red-footed Falcon** – *Falco vespertinus*
Russia. One adult male flying by at FW on June 24.
46. **Merlin** – *Falco columbarius*
Russia. One female sitting in a tree at the edge of a small spruce forest (presumable nest site) in the KS on June 20. The bird was not seen well enough to say anything reasonable about the subspecies concerned.
47. **Spotted Crane** – *Porzana porzana*
Russia. One calling bird at FW on June 26.
48. **Corncrake** – *Crex crex*
Russia. Fairly common on the right habitat around Barnaul, namely at FW and FS on June 6-8 and on June 24-26. At least three singing birds at CK on June 25. No birds were seen, but the typical call was heard commonly.
49. **Common Coot** – *Fulica atra*
Russia. One bird seen from the vehicle in small lakes along the road through the CS just west of KA on June 12. At least 10 birds at LAN on June 18.
50. **Demoiselle Crane** – *Grus virgo*
Russia and Mongolia. Fairly common in the AM (Russia) and in Mongolia. On the way south, the first birds were seen between CH and CTP on June 10. From then on, birds were seen in small numbers every day until June 21.
51. **Black-winged Stilt** – *Himantopus himantopus*
Mongolia. Six birds at LAN on June 18.
52. **Pied Avocet** – *Recurvirostra avosetta*
Mongolia. At KEN on about 70 birds on June 15 and about 100 birds on June 16-17. Two birds at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17. Two birds at LAN on June 18.
53. **Little Ringed Plover** – *Charadrius dubius*
Fairly common, in natural habitat of river banks and along lakeshores, both in Russia and in Mongolia. Absent from the higher parts of the AM.
54. **Kentish Plover** – *Charadrius alexandrinus*
Mongolia. Common at KEN on June 15 and June 16 (>20 birds at the very least).
55. **Greater Sand Plover** – *Charadrius leschenaultia*
Mongolia. KEN: four birds on June 15 and eight birds at June 16. One bird at a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17.
56. **Northern Lapwing** – *Vanellus vanellus*
Russia. Regular in small numbers in wet meadows around BA, for example at least eight territorial birds near CO on June 7.
Mongolia. One bird at LTS on June 13. >10 birds at LAN on June 14. KEN: one bird on June 15 and 20 birds at June 16. Ten birds at LAN on June 18.
57. **Little Stint** – *Calidris minuta*
Mongolia. One bird at KEN on June 15.
58. **Common Snipe** – *Gallinago gallinago*
Russia. Common in the right habitat around BA, with >10 courting males at FS at June 6. Several courting birds in wet meadows near CO on June 7, at least 1 territorial bird at FW on June 8. One bird courting at CO and three birds at CK on June 25.
Mongolia. One bird in courtship flight at LAN on June 18.
59. **Asian Dowitcher** – *Limnodromus semipalmatus*
Mongolia. One bird in breeding plumage, allowing great close up views, at LAN on June 18.
60. **Eurasian Curlew** – *Numenius arquata*
Mongolia. Four birds at KEN on June 16.

61. **Black-tailed Godwit** – *Limosa limosa*
Mongolia. Two birds at LAN on June 18.
62. **Green Sandpiper** – *Tringa ochropus*
Mongolia. One bird at KEN on June 16. Two birds at CK on June 25.
63. **Common Sandpiper** – *Actitis hypoleucos*
Russia. One bird at CH on June 10. One bird at MPU on June 20. Two birds at BB on June 22.
 Two birds at CK on June 25.
64. **Spotted Redshank** – *Tringa erythropus*
Mongolia. Two birds at KEN on June 16.
65. **Wood Sandpiper** – *Tringa glareola*
Mongolia. One bird at LAN on June 18..
66. **Marsh Sandpiper** – *Tringa stagnatilis*
Russia. Two birds at CK on June 25.
Mongolia. At least two birds and one nest, containing four eggs (accidentally found and quickly left alone), at LAN on June 18.
67. **Common Redshank** – *Tringa tetanus*
Russia and Mongolia. Regular breeding bird in the right habitat (wet meadows and the edge of marshes).
Russia. For example at least three alarming birds near CO on June 7 and June 25. Several birds in the wetlands in the CS around KA on June 12.
Mongolia. At least 10 birds at KEN on June 15. > 30 birds at LAN on June 18, alarming strongly.
68. **Little Gull** – *Larus minutus*
Mongolia. One adult in breeding plumage at KEN on June 15.
69. **Common Gull** – *Larus canus*
Russia. One adult at FS on June 6. One adult at DP on June 7. One seen along a river in the AM on June 9. One adult at FW on June 26.
70. **Black-headed Gull** – *Larus ridibundus*
Russia. Regular in small numbers around BA. 3 birds at FS on June 6.
Mongolia. > 100 birds at KEN on June 15.
71. **Pallas's Gull** – *Larus ichthyæetus*
Mongolia. Nine birds at LAN on June 18, both adults and immatures (2 CY birds).
72. **Heuglin's Meeuw** – **Heuglin's Gull** – *Larus heuglini*
Russia. A few birds were seen in the wetland to the east of Barnaul, at FS and FW, on June 6 and 7, as well as on June 24 and June 26. Some birds seen in the CS around KA on June 12.
Mongolia. Small numbers at LAN on June 14. At least four birds at KEN on June 15.
73. **Black Tern** – *Chlidonias niger*
Russia. About 20 birds at a breeding site at FS, mixed with White-winged Black Terns on June 6 and on June 24. About 20 birds at FW on June 26, along with White-winged Black Terns.
Mongolia. At least 20 birds, in a mixed flock with White-winged Black Terns on June 15 and 16.
74. **White-winged Black Tern** – *Chlidonias leucopterus*
Russia. About 60 birds at a breeding site at FS, mixed with Black Terns on June 6 and on June 24. A lone bird over a small pond in the AM between CH and the CTP on June 10 must have been a migrant. About 20 birds at FW on June 26, along with Black Terns.
Mongolia. At least 80 birds, in a mixed flock with White-winged Black Terns on June 15 and 16. At least 20 birds at LAN on June 18.
75. **Common Tern** – *Sterna hirundo*
Russia and Mongolia. Fairly common wherever habitat present, on pakes, ponds and along river in the Siberian lowland near BA all the way to lakes on the plateaus of Mongolia.
Russia. For example rather common in the CS on June 12.
Mongolia. Common at LAN on June 18; at least 100 birds, forming a colony of at least 45 nests in a small wetland on the north-eastern shore of LAN. The nests were on small sandbars in a little lake. 34 breeding birds were watched well; of these, 29 had a bill pattern that apparently matched that of birds in western Europe (red with black tip); five birds had obviously dark bills, in a few birds almost blackish. Some birds also exhibited a clearly darker, greyer underside than typical European birds. These features point out that this part of the range is in the overlap zone between the nominate subspecies *hirundo* and the eastern subspecies *longipennis*.

- 76. Pallas's Sandgrouse** – *Syrrhaptes paradoxus*
Mongolia. Apparently fairly common at KEN, but irregular to see: two birds on June 15, about 90 birds (flocks of 3, ca. 30, ca. 40 and 17) on June 16 no less than 111 birds (in several groups of up to 55 birds) on June 17. The birds were observed shortly in the morning and the evening, when coming to drink at the lake from the surrounding hilly landscape. Usually the birds kept a considerable distance, but several flocks came flying over close by. Due to their subdued calls and swift flight, these could only be spotted when they were already overflying us! Good views, but always too short and too fast when close by.
- 77. Hill Pigeon** – *Columba rupestris*
Russia. Three birds flying by during a roadside stop in the higher (treeless) parts of the AM between the CTP and Aktash on June 11.
Mongolia. Nine birds flying past in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13. Two birds were seen in the centre of OL on June 14. One bird at CKR on June 14. One bird in the village near KEN on June 15. Two birds in the little village near CKR on June 17. The birds seen in urban areas (in and near cities and towns) may have shown features that point to hybridisation, but this could not be thoroughly checked (birds seen flying by or from the vehicle).
- 78. European Turtle Dove** – *Streptopelia turtur*
Russia. One bird near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 10.
- 79. Oriental Turtle Dove** – *Streptopelia orientalis*
Russia. Fairly common around BA on June 6-8, notable at the HB. Four birds at CO and two birds at CK on June 25. One bird at MPU on June 21. Two birds at the camping place at the SP on June 22.
- 80. Stock Dove** – *Columba oenas*
Four birds en route between Byisk and BA on June 23. Four birds at CK on June 25.
- 81. Oriental Cuckoo** – *Cuculus saturatus*
Russia. One bird calling near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11.
- 82. Common Cuckoo** – *Cuculus canorus*
Russia. Very common in Siberia.
- 83. Little Owl** – *Athene noctua*
Mongolia. One bird en route between CKR and SN on June 15. One bird on a rocky outcrop along SN on June 15. According to the literature (Van Nieuwenhuysse D., Génot J.-C. & Johnson D.H. *The Little Owl: Conservation, Ecology and Behaviour of Athene noctua*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, the birds here should belong to the subspecies *plumipes*. The birds looked considerably paler than the birds in western Europe.
- 84. Ural Owl** – *Strix uralensis*
Russia. Stunning views of a bird first flying by and hunting at a forest clearing at the camping site at the SP on June 22!
- 85. European Nightjar** – *Caprimulgus europaeus*
Russia. One singing in the evening near the hunting lodge at CH on June 9. One bird seen flying in the headlights of the car at BB on June 21.
Mongolia. One bird heard calling in the evening at CKR on June 15.
- 86. Common Swift** – *Apus apus*
Russia. Small number of birds over Byisk on June 9. The species was not noticed over BA on June 6-8, but was common on June 24.
Mongolia. Very common at KEN on June 15-17: hundreds of birds mixed in with equal numbers of Fork-tailed Swifts, allowing for good comparison between the two species.
- 87. Fork-tailed Swift** – *Apus pacificus*
Russia. On June 10, at least 40 birds were observed migrating westwards through the CTP. At least fove birds flying over during a roadside stop between CTP and Aktash on June 11. At least ten birds in the CS on June 12. One bird at MPU on June 20. > 30 birds at BB on June 21.
Mongolia. Very common at KEN on June 15-17: hundreds of birds mixed in with equal numbers of Common Swifts, allowing for good comparison between the two species.
- 88. Common Kingfisher** – *Alcedo atthis*
Russia. Three different birds, including a courting pair at OK on June 7. Two territorial birds at FW on June 8. One bird at FW on June 24 and on June 26.
- 89. Eurasian Hoopoe** – *Upupa epops*
Russia. Two birds seen along the road in the higher parts of the AM on June 11. At least three birds in the CS on June 12. One bird between BB and SP on June 22.
Mongolia. Regular sightings (3-5 birds per day).

- 90. Wryneck** – *Jynx torquilla*
Russia. One bird seen well at FW on June 8. One bird at CO and one bird at CK on June 25.
- 91. Great Spotted Woodpecker** – *Dendrocopos major*
Russia. Regular in small numbers around BA. One bird at CH on June 10.
- 92. White-backed Woodpecker** – *Dendrocopos leucotus*
Russia. Three birds (two and one) at two different spots at FW on June 24, including a female giving exceptional views while drying up and preening in a dead tree after a heavy rainshower.
- 93. Mongolian Lark** – *Melanocorypha mongolica*
Mongolia. Common in the grassy areas along KEN on June 15-17. One bird between OL and LTS on June 19.
- 94. Eurasian Skylark** – *Alauda arvensis*
Russia. Some singing birds in arable land between DP and CO on June 7. Common in the CS on June 12. Some of the birds, of the subspecies *dulcivox*, were obviously paler than birds in Western Europe, but others were more resembling the colours of European birds. Interestingly, in the CS, both pale birds and birds resembling European types were seen; birds of both types were in adult plumage, so it was not merely a difference between worn adults and fresh-plumaged juveniles. Pictures were obtained of both types.
Mongolia. Fairly common in the grassy plains along KEN on June 15-17. One singing bird at LAN on June 18.
- 95. Lesser Short-toed Lark** – *Calandrella rufescens*
Mongolia. Common in the right habitat in Mongolia, particularly in grassy areas along lakeshores: LAN on June 14 and KEN on June 15-17 (very common!). The birds were very pale. The (sub)specific identity of 'lesser short-toed larks' from this area (and other areas) is debated in the literature. It is suggested that eastern forms of this species (various subspecies) are to be considered a separate species, '*Calandrella cheleensis*'. In the end, it is decided to follow Del Hoyo et al. (Del Hoyo J., Elliott A. & Christie D.A. eds. (2004). *Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 9. Cotingas to Pipits and Wagtails*. Lynx Editions. Barcelona), and to consider the birds we saw of the eastern subspecies *seebohmi* of Lesser Short-toed Lark *Calandrella rufescens*. An armchair tick when the split would materialize sometime in the future!
- 96. Horned Lark** – *Eremophila alpestris*
Russia and Mongolia. Very common from the CS (Russia) onwards into Mongolia; arguably one of the most common birds species in these parts. Subspecies *brandti* should occur.
- 97. Sand Martin** – *Riparia riparia*
Russia. Common to very common at wetland sites in and around BA. For example many tens of birds at FS on June 6 and a nice colony in a low natural river bank at CK on June 7 and June 25. On June 24, a colony of well over 100 birds had formed at a huge pile of sand at FW, where no colony had been present when visiting the site at the beginning of June.
Mongolia. Common at CKR on June 14 (a large colony was situated in the river bank near our camping site).
- 98. Barn Swallow** – *Hirundo rustica*
Russia and Mongolia. Regular around habitation.
- 99. House Martin** – *Delichon urbica*
Russia. At least two birds at CH on June 10.
- 100. Eurasian Crag Martin** – *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*
Mongolia. Two birds in the gorge at the north-eastern end LTS on June 13. One bird at LAN on June 18.
- 101. Richard's Pipit** – *Anthus richardi*
Russia. At least two birds at CO and two singing birds at CK on June 25.
- 102. Tawny Pipit** – *Anthus campestris*
Russia. One singing bird between CH and CTP in the AM on June 10.
Mongolia. Several territories at the camping place near OL on June 13 and June 14.
- 103. Blyth's Pipit** – *Anthus godlewskii*
Four territorial birds along the shores on KEN on June 16. Two singing birds at LAN on June 18.
- 104. Olive-backed Pipit** – *Anthus hodgsoni*
Russia. One singing bird near the camping spot at the SP on June 23.
- 105. Tree Pipit** – *Anthus trivialis*
Russia. Common to very common in the right habitat (and the right habitat is fairly common in itself, so this species was seen with great regularity).

- 106. Water Pipit** – *Anthus spinoletta*
Russia. At least two birds at the Shavla mountain top on June 21.
Mongolia. Common at the edge of LTS and in the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13.
- 107. Citrine Wagtail** - *Motacilla citreola*
Russia. Fairly common in the right (wetland) habitat in both lowland Siberia and the AM.
Mongolia. Common among rivers and lakes.
- 108. Yellow Wagtail** – *Motacilla flava*
Russia. Birds of the *beema*-type were very common in both wet and dry meadows in river valleys and wetlands all around Barnaul (CO, OK,...).
Mongolia. At LAN on June 18, at least three males of the *leucocephala*-type were seen.
- 109. Grey Wagtail** – *Motacilla cinerea*
Russia. Fairly common in the right habitat in the AM.
- 110. White Wagtail** – *Motacilla alba*
Russia and Mongolia. Very common lowland Siberia, around Barnaul and Byisk, being replaced by Masked Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata* from the AM southwards Mongolia. Masked Wagtail was only seen from the AM southwards towards and into Mongolia. The species was first noticed on our way south in Gorno-Altai (Russia) on June 9, the switch between both subspecies being quite sudden and seemingly without much overlap or any noticeable interbreeding. The switch was equally sudden north of Gorno-Altai on June 23.
- 111. Brown Accentor** – *Prunella fulvescens*
Mongolia. Two singing birds in the outskirts of TS on June 12. At least 7 birds on the northern shore of LTS and the adjacent gorge on June 13.
- 112. Black-throated Accentor** – *Prunella atrogularis*
Russia. One singing bird near the camping spot at the SP on June 22 and June 23.
- 113. Siberian Rubythroat** – *Luscinia calliope*
Russia. 2 singing males at FS on June 6. One singing near the HB on June 9. One singing near the hunting lodge at CH on June 9 and June 10 (morning). Two singing birds at MPU on June 21.
- 114. Bluethroat** – *Luscinia svecica*
Russia. One bird seen briefly (and only in flight so no information on subspecies) at MPU on June 20. One bird at MPU on June 21, at another spot than the day before; again, this bird was only seen in flight, so nothing on subspecies. One white-throated bird was seen at FW on June 26.
- 115. Red-flanked Bluetail** – *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Russia. At least four singing birds at MPU on June 21, including an adult male seen very well through the telescope, singing in the top of a tall spruce! Two singing birds near the camping spot at the SP on June 22 and June 23.
- 116. Eversmann's Redstart** – *Phoenicurus erythronotus*
Russia. Two birds (male and female) at MPU on June 20.
- 117. Black Redstart** – *Phoenicurus ochruros*
Russia. One male of the eastern subspecies *phoenicuroides* near the hotel on June 11. One female at the same location of June 11, on June 12. One singing bird in Aktash on June 20.
Mongolia. Two birds (one male, one female) seen in OL on June 14. One bird (female) between KEN and CKR on June 17.
- 118. Common Redstart** – *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*
Russia. Common in woodland anywhere in Russia. One June 25, fledged juveniles were observed at CO. One June 26, fledged juveniles were seen in a small park in the centre of BA.
- 119. Siberian Stonechat** – *Saxicola maura*
Russia. Very common in the right habitat all around Barnaul (DP, OK,...). Also some sightings in the AM (for example at MPU on June 20), but in much smaller numbers.
- 120. Isabelline Wheatear** – *Oenanthe isabellina*
Russia and Mongolia. Common from the AM (Russia), where the species appeared quite suddenly on route southwards on June 10. It was common from thereon, in the CS and in Mongolia.
- 121. Northern Wheatear** – *Oenanthe oenanthe*
Russia. Fairly common in the AM and the CS.
Mongolia. Fairly common.
- 122. Pied Wheatear** – *Oenanthe pleschanka*
Russia. Fairly common in the AM and the CS.

Mongolia. Common.

- 123. Desert Wheatear** – *Oenanthe deserti*
Russia. One bird in the CS on June 12.
Mongolia. Regular sightings of birds along the road. One male in the outskirts of the town of TS on June 12.
- 124. Rock Thrush** – *Monticola saxatilis*
Russia. One male at the CTP on June 10. One bird along the road between KA and Aktash on June 20. One bird between BB and SP on June 22.
Mongolia. One male in the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13.
- 125. White's Thrush** – *Zoothera aurea*
Russia. One bird singing near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11.
- 126. Mistle Thrush** – *Turdus viscivorus*
Russia. Rather common in the right habitats in the AM.
- 127. Black-throated Thrush** – *Turdus atrogularis*
Russia. A colony of at least ten birds on the north side of the SP on June 10. Several sightings at MPU on June 20. Common in the woods near the camping spot at the SP on June 22 and on June 23.
- 128. Song Thrush** – *Turdus philomelos*
Russia. Two birds near the HB on June 6. One singing bird at HB on June 8. One singing near the hunting lodge at CH on June 9. One bird along the road between KA and Aktash on June 20. Several birds at MPU on June 21. At least two birds in the pass towards the Shavla mountain top on June 21.
- 129. Fieldfare** – *Turdus pilaris*
Russia. Fairly common around BA. One bird north of the SP on June 23.
- 130. Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler** – *Locustella certhiola*
Russia. At least three singing birds near the camping spot at the SP on June 22 and June 23, allowing great close up views, with patience. Common (>10 singing birds) at FW on June 24 and June 26. Interestingly, not a single bird was present at the latter site during the first visits on June 6-8.
- 131. Lanceolated Warbler** – *Locustella lanceolata*
Russia. One singing bird was heard and seen well near the entrance of the HB on June 8.
- 132. Grasshopper Warbler** – *Locustella naevia*
Russia. Two singing birds at FW on June 24.
- 133. Savi's Warbler** – *Locustella luscinioides*
Mongolia. At least four singing birds at LAN on June 18.
- 134. Paddyfield Warbler** – *Acrocephalus agricola*
Mongolia. At least 20 birds at LAN on June 18.
- 135. Blyth's Warbler** – *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
Russia. Common around BA, in any wet area with bushes. Very common at some places with >15 singing males along a distance of less than 1 km at DP on June 7. Common in the right habitat in the lower areas with lush meadows in the AM, for example at CH on June 10. One singing bird near BB on June 21. One singing bird near the camping spot at the SP on June 22.
- 136. Sedge Warbler** – *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*
Russia. One singing bird at OK on June 7. Common (> ten singing birds) at FW on June 24 and June 26.
- 137. Booted Warbler** – *Hippolais caligata*
Russia. Common at FW on June 8, June 24 and June 26. One singing bird in the CS on June 12.
- 138. Great Reed Warbler** – *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*
Mongolia. At least two singing birds at LAN on June 18.
- 139. Icterine Warbler** – *Hippolais icterina*
Russia. One singing bird at OK on June 7. One singing bird at FW on June 8.
- 140. Barred Warbler** – *Sylvia nisoria*
Russia. At least two territories at FW on June 6 and June 8. A male and a female showing very well at FW in June 26.
Mongolia. Two birds at the spot of the Mongolian Ground Jay in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13. One male in scrub along the shore of SN on June 15.

141. Lesser Whitethroat – *Sylvia curruca*

Russia. Fairly common around BA and in the AM. Not all birds were seen, of course; most were only heard. At least some of the birds that were seen well showed a brownish cast to the upperparts, which should point towards the Central Asian race *halimodendri* or birds of the form *blythi* of the nominate race *curruca*. In the Altai region and the area of western Mongolia that we visited, the race *halimodendri* should occur according to the standard literature on *Sylvia* warblers (Shirihai, Gargallo & Helbig, *Sylvia Warblers*. Helm, 2001). The area around Barnaul should be within the range of the nominate race *curruca*, however. Siberian populations of *curruca*, north of the Altai mountains, are said to belong to the form *blythi*, which is not considered a valid subspecies by Shirihai et al., and which is said not to be safely separable from *curruca* (as far as separation between *curruca* and *halimodendri* should be considered easy in the field... - not!). We did not pay enough specific attention to the Lesser Whitethroats we observed to say much more than that at least some birds looked like having a brownish cast to the upperparts, hereby referring to the relevant literature.

Mongolia. Regular in low numbers. See remark about subspecies under Russia.

142. Common Whitethroat – *Sylvia communis*

Russia. Common around BA; very common at FW. Lower numbers in the lower lying areas of the AM, for example between CH and CTP on June 10. One bird near the camping spot at the SP on June 22. The birds were of the race *volgensis*, which is similar to the European nominate race *communis*, but looks paler and with a more greyish cast on the mantle (not so warm brown as in nominate). The song of the birds was slightly but audibly different from (Western) European birds: it sounded less harsh and dry, and more sweeter and a more melodious. The typical cracking sound in the song of western European birds was not heard.

143. Garden Warbler – *Sylvia borin*

Russia. One singing bird at the HB on June 8.

144. (Siberian) Chiffchaff – *Phylloscopus (collybita) tristis*

Russia. Fairly common in especially marshy habitats around BA. Also in drier habitats like around the HB on June 6-8. Common in the AM. The song and call are markedly different. It would seem to be a very righteous move if this subspecies could be lifted to species level some day, as the voice is so obviously different from (Common) Chiffchaff.

145. Greenish Warbler – *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Russia and Mongolia. Fairly common in the right habitat, especially in the AM and in riverine woodland in Mongolia. Noticeably common around the SP on June 22.

146. Yellow-browed Warbler – *Phylloscopus inornatus*

Russia. At least two birds at MPU on June 20. At least three birds at MPU on June 21. Most birds were identified by voice. On June 21, one bird was seen briefly; it is clear that visual identification of this species from Hume's Warbler in the spring is much more difficult compared to the autumn, when birds are wearing a freshly moulted plumage. Voice is by far the most reliable feature in spring and in the breeding season!

147. Hume's Warbler – *Phylloscopus humei*

Russia. Common in the AM.

148. Dusky Warbler – *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Russia. One bird singing near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11. At least four singing birds at MPU on June 20. At least six singing birds at MPU on June 21.

149. Dark-sided Flycatcher – *Muscicapa sibirica*

Russia. One bird at dusk at the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 10. Due to the bad light conditions at the time of observation, we did not realise that we were looking at a bird of this species right away. The next morning, on June 11, we could confirm for sure that it was this species. At least four birds were seen well at this spot on June 11. The birds used the tops of tall spruce trees as singing posts. The song can be described as squeaky.

150. Spotted Flycatcher – *Muscicapa striata*

Russia. Common to very common in every habitat with trees in Russia.

151. Pied Flycatcher – *Ficedula hypoleuca*

Russia. Common in woodland in Russia, notably in drier woodland, like the pine forest around BA. In the immediate vicinity of the HB, at least 5 territorial males were observed in close proximity. The birds were of the race *sibirica*, in which the males have a paler, greyish cast in their upperparts.

152. Taiga Flycatcher – *Ficedula albicilla*

Russia. One bird singing from the treetops near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11.

153. Bearded Reedling – *Panurus biarmicus*

Mongolia. At least 30 birds at LAN on June 18, including birds actively collecting food that was carried to presumed nesting sites.

154. Azure Tit – *Cyanistes cyanus*

Mongolia. Two birds collecting food at CKR on June 14 and June 15.

155. Great Tit – *Parus major*

Russia. Fairly common around BA.

156. Willow Tit – *Poecile Montana*

Russia. At least five birds at HB on June 8. Several birds were heard at MPU on June 21. One bird near the camping spot at the SP on June 22. Two birds at CO on June 25. Two birds at FW on June 26. The subspecies *uralensis* occurs here, which is colder and greyer on the upperside than the birds in continental Western Europe.

157. Siberian Tit – *Poecile cincta*

Russia. At least two birds were observed very well at very close range on June 10 around the hotel at the top of the SP. At least two birds seen along the road at MPU on June 20. At least four birds near the camping spot at the SP on June 22 and June 23.

158. Eurasian Nuthatch – *Sitta europaea*

Russia. At least five birds at HB on June 8. One bird at CH on June 10. At least one bird around the hotel at the top of the SP on June 10. Two birds near the camping spot at the SP on June 22. The subspecies *asiatica* occurs here, which is clearly different the birds in continental Western Europe, being smaller, with all pure white underparts and a pale forehead and an obvious whitish supercillium

159. Penduline Tit – *Remiz pendulinus*

Russia. At least three birds + an almost finished nest at FW on June 8. At least four birds at FW on June 24. Several birds heard at FW on June 26.

160. Golden Oriole – *Oriolus oriolus*

Russia. Common in wetland habitats with tall trees (poplars!) in the wide surroundings of BA. Also present in stands of deciduous trees in the pinewoods around HB on June 6-8. The species was also observed fairly high in the AM, in taiga-like treestands: one bird singing near the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 11.

161. Turkestan Shrike – *Lanius phoenicuroides*

Russia. A courting couple at the north side of the SP on June 10. The latter birds were courting only 500 meter from a spot were a courting pair of Red-backed Shrikes was observed.

162. Daurian Shrike – *Lanius isabellinus*

Mongolia. Regularly seen. For example, at least ten birds at the spot of the Mongolian Ground Jay in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13.

163. Brown Shrike – *Lanius cristatus*

Russia. One bird near the hotel on June 11.

164. Red-backed Shrike – *Lanius collurio*

Russia. At least five birds at CK on June 7, and at least four birds there on June 25. Two territories at FW on June 8. A courting couple at the north side of the SP on June 10. The latter birds were courting only 500 meter from a spot were a courting pair of Turkestan Shrikes were observed. Several sightings en route from the car between KA and Aktash on June 20. One female between BB and SP on June 22.

165. Eurasian Magpie – *Pica pica*

Russia and Mongolia. Common.

166. Mongolian Ground Jay – *Podoces hendersoni*

Mongolia. Stunning observation of a breeding pair in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13.

167. Nutcracker – *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Russia. Fairly common in the AM.

168. Red-billed Chough – *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

Russia. Common in the higher and drier parts of the AM. Several pairs were breeding in the buildings around the border posts on both sides at the Russian-Mongolian border.

Mongolia. Common at the Russian-Mongolian border. Some sightings elsewhere in Mongolia.

- 169. Western Jackdaw** – *Corvus monedula*
Russia. Four birds flying over in the CS on June 12. At least 20 birds at KA on June 20. All birds seen clearly belonged to the subspecies *soemmeringii*.
- 170. Rook** – *Corvus frugilegus*
Russia. Common in lowland Siberia. Unseen in the AM, only occurring up until between Byisk and Gorno-Altaiisk.
- 171. Carrion Crow** – *Corvus corone*
Russia and Mongolia. Only seen from the AM southwards towards and into Mongolia.
Russia. The species was first noticed on our way south in Gorno-Altaiisk on June 9, the switch between both subspecies being quite sudden and seemingly without much overlap or any noticeable interbreeding. See further under Hooded Crow. The distribution of the two species seems to be very similar to the situation of White Wagtail/Masked Wagtail. The switch was equally sudden north of Gorno-Altaiisk on June 23.
- 172. Hooded Crow** – *Corvus cornix*
Russia. Common in lowland Siberia, being replaced suddenly by Carrion Crow somewhere between Byisk and Gorno-Altaiisk. See further under Carrion Crow.
- 173. Common Raven** – *Corvus corax*
Russia and Mongolia. Regular in mountainous areas.
- 174. Common Starling** – *Sturnus vulgaris*
Mongolia. Several tens of birds on evening roost migration at CKR on June 14.
- 175. House Sparrow** – *Passer domesticus*
 Ondersoort *domesticus*: algemeen in de buurt van bebouwing.
 Ondersoort *bactrianus*: algemeen, ook ver van bebouwing.
 in ZO-Kazachstan: SOP, SM, TA en TO. Eigenlijk niet zo erg precies op deze soort gelet.
- 176. Eurasian Tree Sparrow** – *Passer montanus*
Russia. Very common in the countryside around BA.
- 177. Rock Sparrow** – *Petronia petronia*
Russia. Fairly common in the dry eastern parts of the AM, namely in the CS on June 12. The birds looked strikingly pale, compared to what European birders are used to from birds in southern Europe. They belonged to the subspecies *brevirostris*, which is more uniformly pale and less patterned than European birds.
Mongolia. Fairly common. See subspecies information under Russia.
- 178. White-winged Snowfinch** – *Montifringilla nivalis*
Mongolia. At least two birds allowing very close views at the Mongolian border on June 12.
- 179. Père David's Snowfinch** – *Montifringilla davidiana*
Mongolia. At least four birds on the plateau north of KEN on June 17. One bird near a small lake between KEN and CKR on June 17. One bird between OL and LTS on June 19.
- 180. Common Chaffinch** – *Fringilla coelebs*
- 181. Brambling** – *Fringilla montifringilla*
Russia. One male around the hotel at the top of the SP on June 10. One singing bird at MPU on June 21.
- 182. European Greenfinch** – *Carduelis chloris*
Russia. 2 birds at OK on June 7. One in Byisk on June 9.
- 183. European Goldfinch** – *Carduelis carduelis*
Russia. The subspecies *major* was common around BA. In the AM, a sudden switch is made to another subspecies, the grey-headed *subulata*, which is common there.
- 184. Common Linnet** – *Carduelis cannabina*
Russia. Fairly common in farmland around BA.
- 185. Twite** – *Carduelis flavirostris*
Mongolia. Seen in small numbers at the gorge at the north-eastern end of Lake Tsaganuur, subspecies *altaica*.
- 186. Common Crossbill** – *Loxia curvirostra*
Russia. One over at the HB on June 8. Common in the AM, for example >25 at the camping spot just west of the CTP on June 10.
- 187. Mongolian Finch** – *Bucanetes mongolicus*
Mongolia. Two birds at the spot of the Mongolian Ground Jay in the plains that were reached through the gorge at the north-eastern edge of LTS on June 13. Two birds outside of OL on June 14.

188. Common Rosefinch – *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Russia. Very common anywhere in Russia; for sure one of the most common bird species, with hardly a place where the typical song could not be heard, even in pure pinewood, for example around the HB on June 6-8.

Mongolia. Only one sighting: a singing bird in the gorge at the north-eastern end of LTS on June 13.

189. Great Rosefinch – *Carpodacus (rubicilla) kobdensis*

Mongolia. Two birds during a stop some 10 kilometer North-East of OL on June 14; it was a courting pair, the male still being in female-like 2CY plumage. The birds here belong to the subspecies *kobdensis*. Great Rosefinch originally had three subspecies: nominate *rubicilla*, *kobdensis* of the Russian and Mongolian Altai and adjoining parts of northern China, and *severtzovi* of southern Central-Asia into India and Nepal. According to the literature, *severtzovi* is currently considered to be a separate subspecies, called Spotted Great Rosefinch *Carpodacus severtzovi* (<http://www.worldbirdnames.org/updates-PSAS.html>). No information could be found on the specific status of the subspecies *kobdensis*, but since it occurs even further away from *rubicilla* than *severtzovi*, it could be possible that this subspecies is also to be split from *rubicilla*. Whether this would imply a lump with *severtzovi* or a separate species on its own could not be found out. Hey, after all, this is *only* a trip report ☺, but nevertheless, interesting stuff!

190. Long-tailed Rosefinch – *Uragus sibiricus*

Russia. One bird seen briefly in the rain at FW on June 6. At least eight birds (including at least four singing males) at FW on June 8. One male at FW on June 26.

Mongolia. Two birds at CKR on June 14.

191. (Northern) Eurasian Bullfinch – *Pyrrhula pyrrhula (pyrrhula)*

Russia. One heard at HB on June 8. One bird at FW on June 24. One bird at CO on June 25. All the birds were only heard, not seen. Interestingly, all the observations concerned birds with the typical ‘trumpeting call’, well known in North-Western Europe after the large influxes of Northern Bullfinches of 2005-2006 and 2006-2007.

192. Hawfinch – *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Russia. One in the little park next to the main square in Gorno-Altai. One bird at CO on June 25.

193. Pine Bunting – *Emberiza leucocephala*

Russia. One apparently pure male near the hotel on June 11. At least two birds were seen at the latter spot when we passed there again on June 21, including one recently fledged juvenile. At least three apparently pure birds singing at MPU on June 20. 1 pure singing male at CO on June 24.

194. Yellowhammer – *Emberiza citrinella*

xxx. Hybrids between Pine Bunting and Yellowhammer – *Emberiza leucocephala x Emberiza citrinella*

Russia. Common in most habitats. The vast majority of the buntings of the Pine Bunting/Yellowhammer-type that were seen, were birds with hybrid features between the two species. Not all birds could be thoroughly checked, as they were often just heard singing or flying over, but the ones that could be checked well showed mixed features in >95% of the cases. Some birds were very obvious in having mixed features between the two species, but others were more difficult. Several times, we were convinced of seeing a pure bird, but usually it turned out the bird in question had a non-pure character after all... Hybrid birds were very diverse in appearance.

195. Rock Bunting – *Emberiza cia*

Russia. Meerdere ex. in IA op 14/05.

196. Ortolan Bunting – *Emberiza hortulana*

Russia. 1 singing bird at CK on June 7. Common in the AM; sometimes very common, like around the hotel on June 11 (at least ten birds over a distance of barely 500 meter!).

197. Grey-necked Bunting – *Emberiza buchanani*

Mongolia. Two singing birds close to SN on June 15.

198. Yellow-breasted Bunting – *Emberiza aureola*

Russia. At least four birds at FW (including three singing males) on June 8. At least five territories at FW on June 24.

199. Common Reed Bunting – *Emberiza schoeniclus*

Russia. Fairly common (about ten birds) at FW on June 24 and June 26.

4. General impressions

This is definitely a part of the world that is very interesting for birders with a sense of adventure! On one hand, there are some truly spectacular and breathtaking species to be seen here. This includes some almost legendary Siberian species which are only known as appealing vagrants to European birders. Besides the special species, it is also very nice to be in places where birds are still plentiful. Coming from western Europe, with its dropping bird populations, it is great to be in a place where many species that are becoming rare in Europe are still common. Added to the species is the vastness of the landscape and the beautiful scenery; especially in the Altai Mountains and in Mongolia, the landscape is simply stunning! On the other hand, the many practical issues, with the administrative and the bureaucratic obstructions make travelling often not as easy as we would like it to be. Especially crossing borders can be a time-consuming thing in these parts... These practical issues are not the most remaining memory however. In the end, this was a great trip, and any birder with a sense of adventure should surely consider to venture over there!