

The Birds of the Russian Altai
- A Birding Trip Report -

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Table of contents

1. <u>INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</u>	3
2. <u>GENERAL INFORMATION</u>	4
2.1 THE ALTAI MOUNTAIN RANGE	4
2.2 BIRDING CONDITIONS.....	5
3. <u>PREPARATION</u>	5
3.1 SPECIALIZED LITERATURE	5
3.2 TRIP REPORTS.....	6
3.3 IDENTIFICATION GUIDES	6
3.4 SOUND RECORDINGS	7
4. <u>ITINERARY</u>	7
5. <u>DESCRIPTION OF VISITED SITES</u>	9
6. <u>TRIP REPORT</u>	12
7. <u>COMMENTED SPECIES LIST</u>	36
8. <u>SPECIES DAY BY DAY</u>	46

1. INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Altai Mountain Range is a poorly known and rarely visited birding spot, though the presence of Eurasian, Asian and Siberian species contribute to its attractiveness for birders. In the mountain region, many species reach their eastern- or westernmost distribution area, what results in a rich avifauna.

As an ornithologically nearly unexplored area, the Altai Mountains hold many surprises and unexpected observations, what makes a stay constantly thrilling and exciting.

On the 5th of August 2014 a group of about 20 students of biology and landscape ecology from the Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Oldenburg, Germany, left native terrain to spend two weeks in the Russian Altai.

The excursion was part of the study module “Methods applied to the Field Studies in Organismic Biology”, amongst others, with the aim of exploring the local fauna and flora of the Altai Mountain Range by using standardized methods.

The field trip was conducted by two academics, Prof. Dr. Dirk Carl Albach and Prof. Dr. Gabriele Gerlach. The former is the group leader of the study group “Biodiversity and Evolution of Plants” and the latter is the group leader of the study group “Biodiversity and Evolution of Animals”. Additionally, Prof. Dr. Dirk Carl Albach is the director of the Botanical Garden Oldenburg and fosters cooperation with the South-Siberian Botanical Garden (SSBG), a facility run by the Altai State University, both situated at Barnaul. He also visited the Altai Mountains in 2013 for exploring possible spots for the upcoming excursion.

In preparation for the journey a weekly tutorial was organized, for which all students prepared lectures on special topics. The presentations were topically wide spread and helped to get an idea of what to expect on the field trip. Along with being part of the module’s marking, the tutorial was also supposed to act as an inspiration for the projects that all of the students had to plan and conduct in the Altai and evaluate back in Germany. Participants of the excursion were bachelor- and master students with a whole lot of different interests and focuses, which produced a wide spectrum of data acquisition and projects.

During the trip, we visited several interesting places like Seminsky Pass, Chuya Steppe and South Chuya Ridge. We spent some days west of Aktash, where we installed our tents for several nights. We camped wild without exception.

We were able to record 131 bird species.

The main intention to write this trip report was to enrich the small pool of publications and yet existing trip reports to facilitate future preparations for ornithological tours to this area.

The report can be seen as a snapshot, only giving information on the basis of relatively restricted time. Birding circumstances and the species composition might differ much from season to seasons.

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Dirk Carl Albach and Prof. Dr. Gabriele Gerlach for the assistance during the excursion, Simon Pfanzelt and Andreas Bally for helpful information on localities just like coordinates and spot height. Further I would like to thank Dirk Albach, Andreas Bally and Lara Freiberg for the supply of several images.

Special thanks goes to the whole team of the Altay State University and the South-Siberian Botanical Garden: First to Shmakov Alexandr Ivanovich (director of the Botanical Garden), who did everything to make us feel fine during our stay. Smirnov Sergey Vladimirovich (reader of the Department of Botany) and Kosachev Petr Alexeevich (teacher of the Botanical Faculty in the Altay State University and scientific member of the Herbarium in the SSBG) accompanied us during the whole trip and supported us in all kind of matters. The rest of the team consisted of skilled drivers, great cooks and unconventional lumberjacks, who all made the trip a unique experience!

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1 The Altai Mountain Range

The Altai is, in contrast to its larger Asian companions like the Himalaya or Tien-Shan, a rather unknown mountain range to large parts of the European population and quite unexplored. Its diversified and contrasting landscape is characterizing and its history and natural beauty make it an insider tip for backpackers and nature lovers.

The Altai Mountain Range is situated in Southern Siberia, marking the border region of Russia, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan. The Mountain Range is split in three parts consisting of the Russian-, the Mongolian- and the Gobi-Altai, of which we only visited the Russian parts, which comprise the Altai Republic and the Region Altai (Altai Krai).

Travelling to the Russian Altai by plane usually includes a stopover in Moscow and continues to Novosibirsk or Barnaul.

To reach the heart of the Altai Mountains it is necessary to travel the R256 (Chuyskiy Trakt) from Novosibirsk or Barnaul in direction to south-east. This main route was named R256 (on Russian traffic signs "P256") in the year 2010 and was formerly called M52, which is the usual expression in older trip reports, what might cause confusion.

This road is the only route directly leading from the Russian Altai to Mongolia and gives the impression of a giant vein passing its way through hundreds of valleys, through forests and steppes, usually in close neighborhood to Chuya River, which seem to be inseparable.

Aside of Chuyskiy Trakt roads are hardly passable without suitable vehicles and, even if available, support the impression of participating an expedition rather than an excursion.

The area is generally characterized by a low developed infrastructure, what shows that tourism only plays a subordinated role for the region and its native people, who mainly live on agriculture, ranching or small business and sometimes even follow a nomadic lifestyle.

Before leaving for the Altai Mountains a refreshment of English language skills is useless, for even the basics will meet complete incomprehension in most cases.

Due to differences in altitude and the varying geographical situations along Chuyskiy Trakt, temperatures and weather differed quiet much. Around Aktash the days usually were warm (up to 25°C) and nights cold (around 0°C) and relatively dry. At steppe areas, just like Chuya Steppe, temperatures reached 30°C at daytime and the lack of shady places was often underestimated.

Especially at Seminsky Pass (where we only spent one night) it became very humid at night and the vegetation around our tents was fully drenched when waking up at sunrise.

Rainfall was only recognized at Barnaul and once west of Aktash, although short and nearly unnoticeable drizzle appeared here and there.

Generally, a wide spectrum of clothes should be brought along, for the high variety of temperatures which can be found just along small hikes in horizontal and vertical direction may be surprising. Though the Altai is influenced much by continental climate, surprising weather changes are no exception. Water-, and windproof tents and especially jackets and trousers should always be within reach just like headgear and insect repellent.

2.2 Birding conditions

Please keep in mind, that this trip was not a pure birding tour (though most of the participating non-birders most likely won't share this estimation).

Due to the size of the group and the split on four cars, spontaneous stops at the roadside could only seldom be made. The presence of hundreds of wheatears on the ground, raptors and falcons in the air or on power lines and glimpses of this and that along the way made me nearly jump out of the driving car sometimes.

I'm sure, that a pure birding team would be able to spot some more species. In return, we had advantages in reaching isolated spots due to suitable vehicles and knowledge of the places and so we were surprised of the diversity of the avifauna we were able to determine, especially in the light of the species that were mentioned in other trip records, but missed by us just like White-winged Scoter, Altai Snowcock, Siberian Rubythroat, Meadow- and Godlewski's Bunting, Dark-sided Flycatcher and so on.

The time of our trip was situated in an interesting season, where migration doubtlessly started yet but a whole lot of breeding birds were still around and sometimes still fed their chicks (second brood or late first brood).

Against our expectations, most of the visited places were full of birds and so birding was pure fun.

3. PREPARATION

While we generally prepared during the tutorials, most of us also took care of their hobbyhorse well in advance.

To prepare for birds, I was first using the internet for collecting some information on possible species and worthwhile birding spots. Here you'll find some useful literature and trip reports.

3.1 Specialized literature

- ERNST, S. (1992). Zur Vogelwelt des östlichen Altai. *Mitteilungen Zoologisches Museum Berlin*, 68: 3-57.
- ERNST, S. (1996). Zweiter Beitrag zur Vogelwelt des östlichen Altai. *Mitteilungen Zoologisches Museum Berlin*, 72: 123-180.
- ERNST, S. UND HERING, J. (2000). Dritter Beitrag zur Vogelwelt des östlichen Altai. *Faunistische Abhandlungen – Staatliches Museum für Tierkunde Dresden*, 22, 9: 118-177

- ERNST, S. (2007). Vierter Beitrag zur Vogelwelt des östlichen und des zentralen Altai. *Acta ornitholoecologica*, Jena, 6.2/3: 67-113.

3.2 Trip Reports

- ANTHES et al. (2000): *Birds in Western Siberia.*
Especially helpful for description of sites, commented species list and sum up of numbers of each species seen each day.

<http://bio.wits.ac.za/Craig/Raptors/Amur%20&%20falcon%20references/Anthes%20et%20al%20-%20Birds%20of%20Western%20Siberia%20-%20Report.pdf>

- Russian Altai (Hintikka, Lindholm)
With summary of numbers of each species/each day, too!

http://www.tarsiger.com/images/pirpa/pirpa_Altai2010/Altai%20retkis_3.pdf

- Altai (Mikael Malmaeus)
Coordinates, maps, pictures and an easy spelling style make this trip report worth looking at. See also hint to picture links!

http://www.club300.se/Files/TravelReports/Altai2007_MM.pdf

- Russia: Altai Mountains (Sander Bot)
Especially helpful for coordinates, species list and detailed information on birding conditions.

http://www.cloudbirders.com/tripreport/repository/BOT_Russia_0607_2013.pdf

- Other trip reports and links that might be helpful:

http://www.surfbirds.com/trip_report.php?id=1877

https://www.flickr.com/photos/altay_birder/sets/72157623347930367/

3.3 Field Guides

These field guides might be helpful for preparation and identification in the field. Especially the first two were essential: “A Field Guide to the Birds of China” covered all species seen and the “Svensson” is useful for brilliant illustrations of most of the species seen.

- MACKINNON, J. and PHILLIPPS, K. (2000). *A Field Guide to the Birds of China*. Oxford University Press. New York.
- SVENSSON, L., GRANT, P. J., MULLARNEY, K., ZETTERSTRÖM, D. (1999). *Der neue Kosmos Vogelführer*. Kosmos, Stuttgart.
- ARLOTT, N. (2007). *Birds of Europe, Russia, China, and Japan: Passerines: Tyrant Flycatchers to Buntings*. Princeton University Press.
- ARLOTT, N. (2009). *Birds of Europe, Russia, China, and Japan: Non-Passerines: Loons to Woodpeckers*. Princeton University Press.

- FLINT, V.E., Y.V. KOSTIN, R.F. BOEHME & A.A. KUZNETSOV (1989). *A Field Guide to Birds of Russia and Adjacent Territories* (A Field Guide to Birds of the USSR: Including Eastern Europe and Central Asia). Princeton University Press.
- SCHWEIZER M., AYE R. AND ROTH T. (2012). *Birds of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan*. Princeton University Press.

3.3 Sound recordings

- SCHULZE A., DINGLER K.-H. (2003): *Die Vogelstimmen Europas, Nordafrikas und Vorderasiens*. Ample Edition.
- ZÖCKLER, K. (2007): *Birdsounds of Northern Siberia MP3-CD*. BirdSounds.nl.

4. ITINERARY

In general, we travelled the R256 from Barnaul to the south-east and had particular stops along the road. Sometimes their locations were easy to reach and find, sometimes only detectable with good knowledge of the places.

Tab. 1 shows the places we visited during our trip. Additionally, the maps show the route we travelled. The numbers mark the spots on which we had mentionable observation time.

In **Fig. 1** the spots/settlements “A” (→ **Barnaul**) and “B” (→ **Ortolyk/Kosh-Agach**) mark the outermost localities which we reached on the main route R256.

We spent most of our time in the surrounding of Aktash where we had a look at several sites. These are shown in an extra map (**Fig. 2**).

The arrows don't mark the localities on the spot, but act as orientation. For exact localities, see the coordinates of each spot mentioned below in the section “Description of visited sites”, where all places and their birdlife are briefly described.

Tab. 1. Visited sites.

Day	Visited Sites
06.08.14	Arrival at Barnaul, South-Siberian Botanical Garden
07.08.14	Barnaul → Seminsky Pass
08.08.14	Seminsky Pass → Aktash
09.08.14	Surrounding of Aktash
10.08.14	Surrounding of Aktash, Lake Cheybek Khol
11.08.14	Surrounding of Aktash, high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountains, mercury mine)
12.08.14	Aktash → Kurai Steppe, Chuya Steppe → south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley)
13.08.14	South-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley)
14.08.14	South-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) → Chuya Steppe → Campsite at Chuya River
15.08.14	Campsite at Chuya River → Aktash
16.08.14	Surrounding of Aktash
17.08.14	Aktash → Barnaul
18.08.14	Barnaul
19.08.14	Barnaul and departure

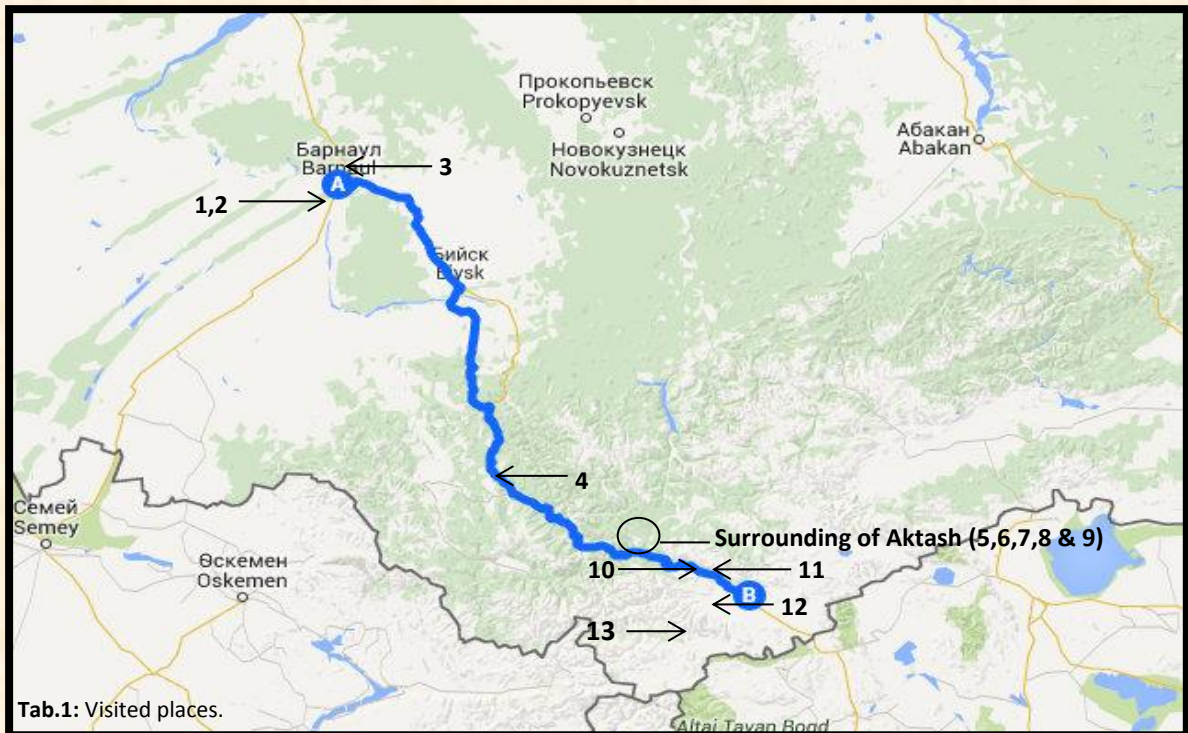


Fig. 1: Route: 1- Pine forest near Barnaul, 2 – South-Siberian Botanical Garden (SSBG), 3 – Ruderal area just outside of Barnaul, 4 – Seminsky Pass, 5,6,7,8 & 9 – see Fig. 2, 10 – Kurai Steppe, 11 – Campsite at Chuya River, 12 – Chuya Steppe, 13 – South-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (google maps)

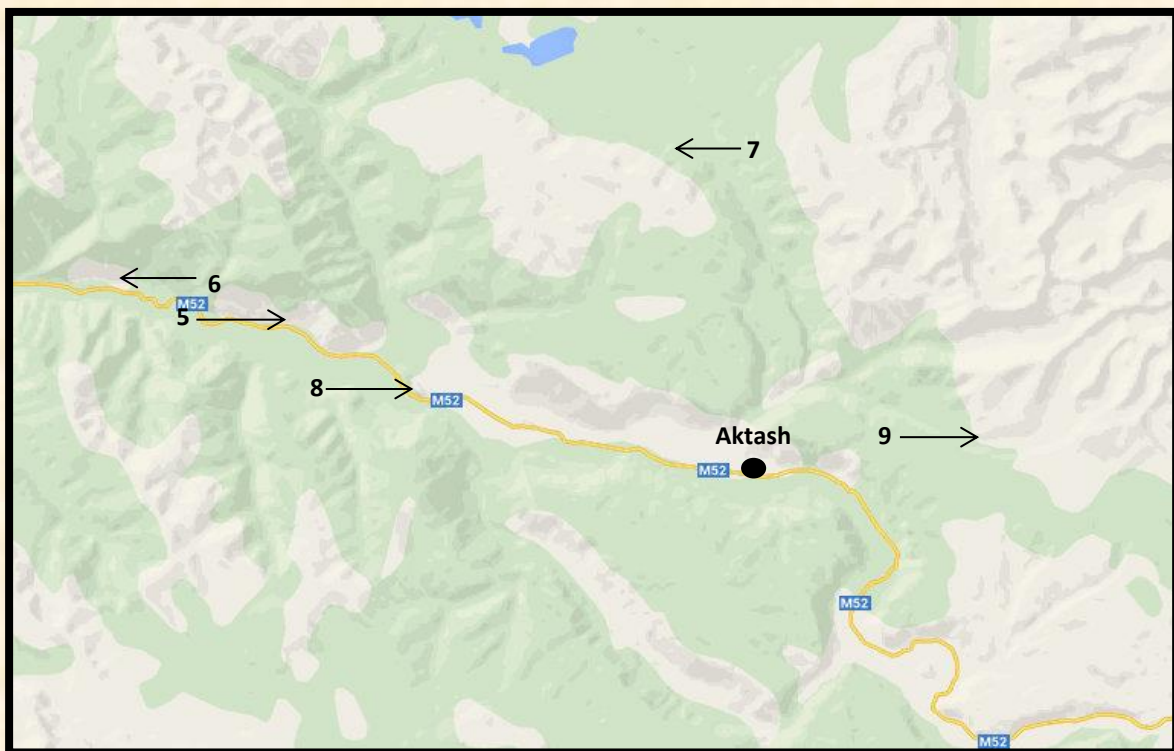


Fig. 2: Surrounding of Aktash: 5 – Campsite west of Aktash, 6 – Dry slope west of Aktash (west of campsite), 7 – Lake Cheybek Khol, 8 – Dry slope west of Aktash (east of campsite), 9 – High mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountains, mercury mine) (google maps)

5. DESCRIPTION OF VISITED SITES

In the following, I want to give a brief description of the visited sites. The numeration is identical to the one used in the maps and the trip report.

The given altitudes are related to the given coordinates, but we often had walks quite far away from these starting points in both horizontal and vertical direction.

1) Pine forest near Barnaul - 155 m - 53.288975°N, 83.725908°E

The first possibility to see some birds was the surrounding of a hotel, where a part of the group spent the first night. Situated in a monotonous pine forest nearly only the scrub at the edges attracted some birds. All in all, bird activity was low.

Black Woodpecker, Wood Warbler, European Reed Warbler.

2) South-Siberian Botanical Garden (SSBG) - 150 m - 53.09324°N, 83.24175°E

The South-Siberian Botanical Garden is situated inside of a mixed forest just at the edge of Barnaul. It presents a wide spectrum of habitats, just like dense woods, scrubby and grassy areas, forest edges, buildings and other artificial structures. This leads to a great variety of bird species. Most species are known from European terrain and are typical for low-altitude habitats in South Siberia. The areas of the Botanical Garden seem to attract numerous early migrants.

Black Stork, “Steppe Buzzard”, Ural Owl, numerous Tree Pipits, Lesser Whitethroat, European Reed Warbler, Siberian Chiffchaff, Greenish Warbler, many Tits.

3) Ruderal area just outside of Barnaul - 150 m - 53.37983°N, 83.99500°E

This place marked the first (unintended) stop outside of Barnaul, while travelling the R256. The landscape consisted of ruderal and agricultural areas.

Hen Harrier, Common Sandpiper, Western Yellow Wagtail, European Goldfinch, Linnet.

4) Seminsky Pass – 1,870 m - 51.04931°N, 85.65447°E

The higher altitudes lead to a very interesting avifauna and we were able to observe our first mountainous species. We spent only one night at Seminsky Pass but made another stop on our way back from the mountains. Grassland and *Pinus sibirica* forests, sometimes interspersed with rocky areas. Observations of pikas *Ochotona spec.*

Many Hume`s Leaf Warblers, Siberian Jay, Eversmann`s Redstart, Mistle Thrush, Oriental Turtle Dove, Black-throated Thrush, Pine Grosbeak.

The following sites (5,6,7,8 & 9) are all situated in the surrounding of Aktash, where we spent most of the time during our excursion. These sights are summarized as “**Surrounding of Aktash (5,6,7,8 & 9)**” in **Fig. 1** and can be studied in detail in **Fig. 2**.

5) Campsite west of Aktash - 1,085 m - 50.349263°N, 87.412538°E

An area between Chuya River and the main road R256 marked our campsite for several nights. A mixed forest, many open and grassy areas and the short distance to Chuya River made this place quiet interesting. Especially migrants seem to pass this area in high numbers.

Many Tree Pipits, Common Chaffinches, Song Thrushes, Spotted Flycatchers, Common Redstarts, Spotted Nutcrackers, Hume's Leaf Warblers and Tits.

Demoiselle Crane, Hazel Grouse, Olive-backed Pipit, Black-throated Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Dusky Warbler, Taiga Flycatcher, Common Rosefinch.

6) Dry slope west of Aktash (west of campsite) – 1,120 m - 50.361967°N, 87.341812°E

This place was only visited once. Typical dry slope with rocky areas and some pine forests in the surrounding.

Lesser Kestrel, Asian Imperial Eagle, Booted Eagle, Fork-tailed Swift, Pied Wheatear, Red-billed Chough, Ortolan Bunting.

7) Lake Cheybek Khol - 1,830 m - 50.40616°N, 87.60004°E

Scrubby and marshy lake shores, surrounded by pine forests, made this spot interesting.

Ducks, Great Cormorant, Booted Eagle, Wood Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint, Fork-tailed Swift, Citrine Wagtail, Siberian Stonechat, Dusky Warbler.

8) Dry slope west of Aktash (east of campsite) – 1,180 m - 50.329606°N, 87.469410°E

Another typical dry slope, but more rocky areas and adjacent steppe vegetation.

Eurasian Hobby, Hill Pigeon, Eurasian Hoopoe, Pied Wheatear, Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, numerous Ortolan Buntings, Rock Bunting.

9) High mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountains, mercury mine) – 2,250 m – 50.31639°N, 87.73123°E

The area from the timberline up to the mountain top (at about 2900 m) was birded. Detritus, alpine meadows and industrial buildings (abandoned mercury mine) were visited.

Numerous Water Pipits.

Cinereous Vulture, Fork-tailed Swift, Eurasian Hoopoe, Altai Accentor, Black-throated Accentor, Pied Wheatear, Gldenstdt's Redstart, Twite, Pine Bunting.

10) Kurai Steppe – 1,609 m - 50.25016°N, 87.87348°E

Only a quick stop at the roadside, but the place seemed interesting. Steppe area with typical steppe vegetation.

Steppe Eagle.

11) Campsite at Chuya River - 1,730 m - 50.15683°N, 88.30047°E

Beautiful spot at Chuya River with typical pine vegetation and some open areas. Few birds.

Common Merganser, Pine Bunting.

12) Chuya Steppe - 49.946016°N, 88.605797°E

Large steppe area around Kosh-Agash. We had quiet much observation time in this area, which produced many interesting species. The lakes close to R256 should be visited, just like the woods and scrub at the waterside of Chuya River. Observation of Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica* and marmots *Marmota* spec.

Ruddy Shelduck, Black Stork, Steppe Eagle, Saker Falcon, Common Tern, Little Owl, Citrine Wagtail, Tawny Pipit, Booted Warbler, Horned Lark, Red-billed Chough.

13) South eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) – 2,820 m – 49.80973°N, 88.06884°E

Maybe the most beautiful campsite we visited. A valley characterized by steppe-like short grass vegetation, streams, ponds, marshy & rocky areas and high peaks in the surrounding. Very high bird activity. Observations of Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* and marmots *Marmota* spec.

Ruddy Shelduck, Bearded Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Golden Eagle, Asian Imperial Eagle, Citrine Wagtail, Blyth's Pipit, Horned Lark, Gldenstdt's Redstart, Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, Brown Accentor, Altai Accentor, Red-billed Chough, Alpine Chough, Plain Mountain Finch, Brandt's Mountain Finch, White-winged Snowfinch, Twite.

6. TRIP REPORT

05.08.14 - Arrival at Moscow

We arrived at Moscow at about 7 p.m. and had four hours stopover at the airport, which was used for napping and refreshing.

Some of us also changed money, but the rate of the currency seemed quite bad, so most of us waited until Barnaul.

Day 1 – 06.08.2014 – Barnaul



Pine forest near Barnaul (1), © Lara Freiberg



South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2), typical habitat for Tree Pipit, Common Redstart and Siberian Chiffchaff © Lara Freiberg

Arrival at Barnaul was at about 6:25 a.m. After we all got our baggage (without problems), we left the airport where Petr and some drivers awaited us. We stashed our bags and equipment into the luggage spaces of three small, battered-looking busses, without realizing that two of them would be our main means of transportation for the next two weeks. We left the airport area and drove through suburbs of Barnaul till we arrived at a hotel in the middle of a monotonous pine forest (1). The ride only produced the first **Black Kite** and a **Rook**. At the hotel we had first chances to see some birds. **Willow Tits** seemed to be the most common species, while we only could hear a single **Coal Tit**. Other birds in the surroundings were two **European Reed Warblers**, a **Wood Warbler**, two **Black Woodpeckers**, a **Great-Spotted Woodpecker** and a **Hooded Crow**. **Black Kites** were common, here and there appearing over the treetops. Two **Crossbills** were flying past, most likely Red Crossbills, but they were just seen in flight and recorded as *Loxia* spec. Spontaneously, we had breakfast at the hotel...and so we enjoyed one of the seldom meals where water displayed the only clear drink on the table.

About half of the group decided to rest at the hotel for the first night, while the others were transferred to the South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2) for the first time camping. Arriving there, we were welcomed by several workers of the Botanical Garden and the Altay State University, among them Alexandr, director of the Botanical Garden, who was later affectionately called “mommy”, due to his caring skills. Alex marked a lawn for our tents and while installing them, some new birds could be located in between, just like **Great Tit**, **Grey Wagtail**, **Common Chaffinch** and **Barn Swallow**. While looking at several **Black Kites** over the camping area, suddenly a **Black Stork** soared over...unfortunately too short to be seen by everyone.



South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2) © Lara Freiberg



Tents at South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2) © Lara Freiberg

Best friend at this time was the insect repellent, which was highly necessary due to the numerous mosquitoes, which were about to settle down at every naked part of the body. But even thick clothes did not really make them blench. A flood on the river Ob this spring boosted the number of bothersome insects.

For all stresses and strains with the suckers, we took our time to explore the surroundings of the Botanical Garden area, what produced some nice species. **Siberian Chiffchaffs** (subsp. *tristis*) were numerous and the differences between the European birds, both vocal and visual, could be studied carefully. Although only one singing **Greenish Warbler** was noticed, it gave excellent views. For a change, a **Common Buzzard** (subsp. *vulpinus*) enriched the birdlife in the sky among the omnipresent Black Kites.

To our surprise the Botanical Garden was full of birds. The avifauna was dominated by typical Eurasian species just like **Willow-, Great- & Coal Tits** and **Common Redstarts**. **Lesser Whitethroats** were seen and heard several times, while only a single **Garden Warbler** could be spotted, just like another two **European Reed Warblers**. **Tree Pipits** were startled out of the grassy areas and checked for an olive back, but no success till then.



Tree Pipit, South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2), 06.08.2014
© Maximilian Fader



Willow Tit, stop between Seminsky Pass & Aktash,
08.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

The rest of the day was spent with relaxing, roaming, buying even more insect repellents, some food & cold beer at the nearby supermarket to spend the evening. Later, Alex dished up some food, this time enriched with enough vodka for everyone. We sat under a mosquito-banned pavilion and enjoyed our-

selves for some time. Just before sunset I made another short walk to the garden areas...it was nearly empty of birds, but I found the only **Eurasian Jay** of the trip.

When I returned to the group, everyone stood around the table in the pavilion surrounding Dirk, Petr and a map of the Altai Mountain Range. The plan for the next days was modified and everything sounded very auspicious: Seminsky Pass, Aktash and Chuya Steppe were part of it, to only name a few spots.

Around sunset, binoculars and maps were finally laid aside and relaxing continued. We all felt quite refreshed from flight and journey, then Alex suggested to finally wash away all stresses from the day in the banja (sauna). This completed the day and became even more special with the appendant beer, dried fish & freshly picked birch rods, which all was provided by our care-taking Russian companions. The screams of unexperienced German students, while jumping into the nearby pond after having a sauna, were heard throughout the night.

Day 2 – 07.08.2014 – Barnaul → Seminsky Pass

After a long night, not concerning sleeping and resting, Mona and I made it outside the Botanical Garden to explore the pine forest outside of the area. Just after sunrise we were able to see and hear the first birds.

The three **tits** were dominant again, while **Tree Pipits**, **Common Redstarts** and **Siberian Chiffchaffs** were only seen in low numbers. Walking further along a grassy path, which served as aisle for a power line, Mona spotted an **Ural Owl** which was sitting at the edge of the forest close to the path we were on. I was able to see the bird when it moved and flew into the forest...straightly towards a second individual! Both of them changed position for a few times to end up high in a pine, giving best views.

We saw other birds as well, including a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk**, a **Lesser Whitethroat**, a **Spotted Flycatcher** and two **Eurasian Nuthatches** (subsp. *sibirica*).



Ural Owl, outside South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2), Barnaul, 07.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Eurasian Nuthatch, subsp. *sibirica*, South-Siberian Botanical Garden (2), Barnaul, 07.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

On the way back to the Botanical Garden we managed to hear a **Greenish Warbler** and see our first Eurasian **Tree Sparrows** and **Eurasian Magpies** of the trip.

When we arrived at the Botanical Garden we slowly started packing our stuff and had breakfast. At about 9:30 a.m. our fellow students, who were sleeping at the hotel for the first night, also arrived at our campsite. We shuffled together our package, which then was stashed into two small and a bigger bus. The latter was an old, converted military truck. There was another big truck belonging to our caravan carrying our food and some Russians, which were going to accompany and cater for us for the following days. We left Barnaul for the R256 to get to Seminsky Pass, which should be the sleeping place for the next night.

About 45 minutes after starting our road trip, the motor of the big person-carrying truck gave out and we had to stop at the roadside (3). There was a lot of oil leaking and after some minutes of waiting in the bus, it was obvious that fixing needed time. So a few were resting in the truck for compensating what they've missed last night, others went outside. The botanists looked for their plants and me and some fellows had an eye on the birds, though the landscape did not look too interesting. Nevertheless, we found a **Northern Harrier**, two **European Goldfinches**, two **Linnets** and three **Western Yellow Wagtails** (no identification of subspecies possible). To our surprise, a **Common Sandpiper** flew around and landed on a dry path where it spent some time.



First experiences with the „big truck“, around Barnaul, 07.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Ruderal area (3), just outside of Barnaul, 07.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

After about an hour we continued our ride to Seminsky Pass and had some more stops at the roadside...some of them unintended, the others for toilet and meals. These stops only produced a few birds just like **White Wagtails**, **Carrion Crows** and hundreds of **Black Kites**.

Just before sunset we arrived at our campsite at Seminsky Pass (4). While installing our tents we could observe a **Common Whitethroat** and several **Spotted Nutcrackers**.

It was much colder than around Barnaul and the grass and herbs, which were the underlayment of our tents, were fully drenched. It was like arriving at reality, recognizing that not every day will end up inside of a banja. While we were still occupied with our accommodations, our Russian companions installed a tent, big enough that about 30 people could take a seat under it. In next to no time, a fire was sparked, a delicious dinner was cooked and some vodka was served, so everybody could warm up from the inside.



Campsite at Seminsky Pass (4), 08.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Campsite at Seminsky Pass (4), on the left the rocky habitat of several pikas, *Ochotona spec.*, 07.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

Most of us became tired quiet early and for the own sleeping bag was only a few steps away, we left the group one by one.

Day 3 – 08.08.2014 – Seminsky Pass → Aktash

Surprisingly, many of us managed to get up very early this morning. At sunrise some groups were formed, but I slumbered a bit longer than the others and didn't even notice Jennifer, who tried to wake me. So I had to go off alone, later.

Due to a difference of altitude of more than 1,500 m and a vegetation comparable to low mountain ranges in Europe, there were a whole lot of different birds to expect.

Spotted Nutcrackers were the welcome birds this morning, even flying around in groups of about 15 individuals. Other birds I rapidly saw were several **Common Rosefinches** and a handful of **Lesser Whitethroats**.

Walking further, harsh blackbird-like calls revealed the presence of **Black-throated Thrushes**. After some moments, three birds flew up high in a tree top and could be studied carefully before they flew off. This should be the only observation of an adult male during the whole trip.



Pika, *Ochotona spec.*, Seminsky Pass (4), 08.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Black Redstart, subsp. *phoenicuroides*, juvenile, west of Aktash (8), 16.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

Birdlife was getting active now and the usual suspects were around, just like **Willow-** and **Coal Tits** and some **Siberian Chiffchaffs**. Among them, some more leaf warblers could be picked out. After studying them carefully and waiting for them to call, they turned out to be **Hume`s Leaf Warblers**.

An **Oriental Turtle Dove** (subsp. *meena*) was startled on the path just like some **Tree Pipits**. On the way back to the campsite, a group of passerines with significant calls flew over me. The birds sat down on some trees and I could get them in the scope: About a dozen **Pine Grosbeaks**. They were observed for two minutes or so before flying off and disappearing between the trees.

We all got together at the campsite and tried to have a calm breakfast, what failed due to the discovery of some **Pikas** *Ochotona* spec. in the surrounding rocks. We were all standing next to the tables, in one hand coffee or bread, the other was used to look through the binocular or to show others where the small mammals were situated. Even the late risers, just like our mammal expert Lara, made it out of the sleeping bag to enjoy them, even though through a small pair of eyes.

After breakfast most of the students went into the field again and so some more birds could be spotted. Among them were an adult **Bluethroat**, a **Northern Harrier**, two **Siberian Stonechats** and two **Grey Wagtails**.



Northern Harrier, Seminsky Pass (4), 08.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Eversmann`s Redstart, Seminsky Pass (4), 08.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

The only three **Northern Bullfinches** of the trip were seen, also the first **Black Redstart** (subsp. *phoenicuroides*) could be spotted. Time passed quickly and we unfortunately needed to head back for the campsite. I was walking around with Janna, having a déjà-vu, for **Pine Grosbeaks** were here and there flying around, giving their best to be heard and their worst to be seen. Suddenly a colorful bird was in front of us, sitting in the vegetation just next to the path. It was resting motionless on a trunk and was covered by several branches. A few moments later, the bird flew off and could be identified as a male **Eversmann`s Redstart!** While we observed this stunning bird, the female also appeared, but seemed to be much more elusive. We could enjoy these beauties only for some moments, after they flew off into the forest. But what a finish!

We went back to the camp where we exchanged observations. Dirk told me, that he has seen some **Grey-headed Chickadees**. Unfortunately we had to leave the place soon, some of the fellow students had even already packed their stuff and I had to hurry up. We then continued our ride...this time the terminal stop should be Aktash, where we planned to install our tents for three nights.

We had a few stops along the road, not worth mentioning and only producing the common species in low numbers. From out of the car several falcons could be seen, most of them were left unidentified, but one individual was safely classified as a male **Lesser Kestrel**.

Wheatears were common along the road, same here...no identification from out of the dirty bus-windows. We could see several Long-tailed Ground Squirrels *Spermophilus undulates* at the roadside.



Long-tailed Ground Squirrels *Spermophilus undulates*, west of Aktash (8), 10.08.2014 © Maximilian Fader

It was getting late and to our surprise we arrived at Aktash without even arriving there... about 15 kilometers ahead of the settlement, we left the R256 and found ourselves on Chuya River, where a clearance on its waterside marked our campsite for the next three nights (5).

Us students thought, that we would camp on a declared camping site with sanitary arrangements. We then learned that the camping site we should be on hasn't been available no more, so we avoided to this very spot. All in all it was pictorial to be on a place like this. Chuya River, with its strong current, first seemed unpassable and only useable for brushing teeth and washing clothes. Some meters behind the campsite there was a cove, where the current was much tranquillized. This became our "shower site" for the next days and we all got to like the circumstance to wash oneself in a cold river surrounded by mountains and woods.

Again, mosquitoes were annoying and seemed to contend with their colleagues from Barnaul for the best bites. For toilet affairs, we had some spades lying around next to the campsite and the adjacent forest contributed enough camouflage. Due to spades seem only hardly available for the majority of the Russian weekend campers (or seem to be impractical for backpackers, due to weight problems), one should always keep the eyes on the ground and the nose inside the jacket, while roaming through the "latrine forest". No...it wasn't that bad...but better is!



Campsite west of Aktash (5), 09.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Campsite west of Aktash (5), Chuya River, 09.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

We spent the last light of the day to install our tents and to have dinner. Later we all sat around the campfire and talked about our projects, before leaving for the sleeping bag.

Day 4 – 09.08.2014 – Surrounding of Aktash

The day started at 5:30 a.m., when some of us wanted to explore the latrine forest next to the campsite.

There were a lot of birds around and birding was pure fun! The commonest species this morning were **Spotted Nutcrackers**, **Willow Tits** and **Hume`s Leaf Warblers**, whose calls were omnipresent. While flushing several **Song Thrushes** and **Tree Pipits** from the ground, a leaf warbler with harsh “tack” calls appeared in some scrub and came out to be the first **Dusky Warbler** of the trip. Other interesting birds were a **Common Rosefinch**, one juvenile **Bluethroat** and a **Northern Raven**.

We were lucky to hear at least 2 **Demoiselle Cranes**, unfortunately we had no chances to see them for they seemed to be on the other side of the river, which was covered by several trees.



Campsite west of Aktash (5), 09.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Dry slope west of Aktash (west of campsite) (6), 09.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

After breakfast, several groups were formed, each heading into a different direction for searching suitable places for their projects.

Together with some fellow students, I was driven some kilometers back the R256 to a rocky slope with short and grassy vegetation (6). Janna and I were up to look for raptors, while Monas aim were Wheatears and Gabi & Lara tried to find Ground Squirrels. The driver let us descend and drove back to the camp. We had about four hours to see if the place is suitable for our projects. First birds just after arriving were several **Northern Wheatears**, among them also four **Pied Wheatears**. A **Siberian Stonechat** was also around, just like two **Ortolan Buntings**, which were sitting motionless on a rock to catch some sun.

We split up and Janna and I were walking up the slope for having a better view. First, there was nearly no activity, just two **Black Kites** were soaring over and some **Common Kestrels** were constantly looking for their prey. Out of nowhere a male **Lesser Kestrel** appeared in front of us and could be observed for a few minutes. Also, at least two **Fork-tailed Swifts** were flying along the slope and were observed chasing insects.

While it was getting warmer, more raptors were around. We were able to observe the dark and the pale phase of **Booted Eagle**, a **Peregrine Falcon** and, as highlight, a juvenile **Asian Imperial Eagle**. The bird appeared only about 50 meters behind of us and was chased by the Black Kites. - 19 -



Northern Wheatear & Ortolan Bunting, near Aktash (8),
16.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Booted Eagle, pale phase, Lake Cheybek Khol (7),
10.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

The only two **House Martins** of the trip flew by, just like an **European Gold Finch**. As a great finish, two **Red-billed Choughs** were flying along a rock wall and came very close a few times.

Lara and Gabi were quiet satisfied with their detection of some Ground Squirrels and so we slowly headed back to the road.

The car picked us up again and we drove back to the campsite where we relaxed and had dinner.

Just before dusk, while walking through the latrine forest for giving its name a bit more sense, the usual species could be observed in dim light. Next to a few **Song Thrushes**, a female **Black-throated Thrush** was sitting on the ground.

Walking back to the tents, a pigeon-sized bird was running away from me. I could see it through my binoculars only for a couple of seconds, but the thing was clear: a **Hazel Grouse**! I ran to the camp to inform the others and some of them gave the grouse another try. We recovered the bird, but we weren't able to see it properly. While we were walking through the forest, **Black-throated Thrushes** were getting more active, but it was too dark to see one.

Day 5 – 10.08.2014 – Surrounding of Aktash & Lake Cheybek Khol

The day did not start too early, with awaking just before breakfast. While brushing teeth on Chuya River a **Common Rosefinch** was constantly singing. We packed our stuff to spend some hours at a mountain lake near Aktash – Lake Cheybek Khol (7).



Lake Cheybek Khol (7), view from north, 10.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Lake Cheybek Khol (7), view from east with scrubby and marshy waterside, 10.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

When arriving at the lake and getting out of the car, a few **Hume`s Leaf Warblers** and a lot of **Spotted Nutcrackers** were seen and heard at the surrounding forests. It was cold and foggy, but the discovery of interesting plants and animals brightened the morning.

The bushes on the north eastern waterside of the lake were a perfect habitat for several elusive **Dusky Warblers**, which could be observed best from the small hills next to the lake. Among them, some **Siberian Chiffchaffs** could be spotted, just like two juvenile **Bluethroats**.

On the lake surface, the first water birds of the trip could be seen. Two adult **Tufted Ducks** were swimming around with three chicks, just as two **Mallards** and a **Gadwall**. A **Great Cormorant** was flying by.

While it was getting warmer, we focused on the raptors and had nice observations of two **Booted Eagles**, chasing each other. Several **Black Kites** and a **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** were spotted. While scanning the sky, at least one **Fork-tailed Swift** was discovered, too.

Focusing again on the lake, a couple of strange looking and odd sounding Wagtails was discovered, landing in the swampy vegetation at the waterside. A view through the scope showed us our first **Citrine Wagtails**. Just next to it, on a small sandbank a sleeping wader was discovered, which came out to be a **Green Sandpiper**. Other birds around were a **Northern Pintail**, a **Common Teal**, five **Siberian Stonechats** and two **Grey Wagtails**. Just before leaving the place, another view on the sandbank was honored with a **Temminck`s Stint**, which seemed to have appeared unseen.

We headed back for the camp where I used the time to make a small walk through the latrine forest. The usual species could be observed, but also a big surprise was seen among the **Spotted Flycatchers** which were around: a female **Taiga Flycatcher** was chasing insects and could be observed for a few minutes.

After having a bite, the groups from yesterday were reformed to work on their projects. Today we were driven to another rocky slope, this time in direction to Aktash, about five minutes away from the camp **(8)**.

Arriving there and just before leaving the car for the promising site, a **Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush** was seen from out of the bus. It was sitting on a small rock about five meters away and did not move...what a great observation!



Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush, near Aktash **(8)**, 16.08.2014,
© Maximilian Fader



Pied Wheatear, near Aktash **(8)**, 16.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

A lot of birds were around, most commonly **Northern Wheatears**, among them also five **Pied Wheatears**. Five **Black Redstarts**, a **Siberian Stonechat** and a female **Bluethroat** were seen, just like four **Ortolan Buntings**.

The good species kept on coming. A **Eurasian Hoopoe** was flushed from the ground, but the bird only flew a few meters and could be studied carefully. While scanning the steep faces in the surrounding, at first three **Hill Pigeons** could be discovered, flying around together. A few minutes later, a single bird was observed much closer. The first **Eurasian Hobby** of the trip was around, chasing a Black Kite.

Again, many Ground Squirrels could be observed and their behavior could be studied. Gabi, Lara and now also Oliver and Janna, who accompanied the Ground Squirrel-Team, had a lot to do and discuss.



Dry slope west of Aktash (east of campsite) (8), 10.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



Oliver & Janna discussing their project concerning Ground Squirrels, dry slope west of Aktash (east of campsite) (8), 10.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

We went back to the camp quite late and I tried to recover the **Hazel Grouse**...with success! This time I could observe two birds much better and longer than the day before. Just like then, some **Black-throated Thrushes** could be heard just after sunset and one could even be observed in dim light.

Day 6 – 11.08.2014 – Surrounding of Aktash & high mountains near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountains, mercury mine)

Today we explored the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry. We left the camp after breakfast and first made our way to Aktash. We drove through the village and then further up the mountains. On the way up, several **Siberian Stonechats** could be seen from out of the car, just as many more passerines. But due to the rattling car, no identification was possible. On a quick stop, Mona was able to observe some **Long-tailed Rosefinches**.

Our bus had some problems with the steep terrain and broke down several times. A lot of water was necessary to cool down the motor, but we finally made it to an elevation of about 2,400 m (9).

The aim was to walk up to about 2,900 meters to a radar station. When we began the upsurge a **Booted Eagle** was flying above us. Hardly any birds were seen the next half an hour, except for a **Common Kestrel** and some **Water Pipits**.



High Mountains east of Aktash (9), abandoned mercury mine in the right part of the image, 11.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



High mountains east of Aktash (mercury mine) (9), the scree is home to Altai Accentor and Gldenstdt`s Redstart, 11.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

We were quiet close to the radar station when we stopped at a scree slope. There, Mona and I rested for some time, while the others continued the walk to the top. After some minutes we heard the calls of some birds, which we could not classify. We decided to walk into the scree to find the causers of these sounds. After a few minutes we could find the birds flying over us, but due to bad light conditions, identification was not possible. Most likely it was a group of Mountain Finches. But nevertheless, the walk through the detritus was worth a visit, for our first **Cinereous Vulture** was suddenly soaring over us for a few minutes, here and there attacked by a **Northern Harrier**.

We decided to spent more time at the scree slope and don`t even walk to the mountain top, for we wanted to walk back slowly through the scree and then bird the timberline. On our way down, we stopped several times to scan the surrounding with the scope for the distances were too far for the binoculars. Suddenly a shining red-orange appeared... a male **Gldenstdt`s Redstart**... what a surprise! We could observe this stunning bird for about 15 minutes after we continued the descent. On our way down, we were lucky to spot our first **Altai Accentor**.

Some **Black Redstarts** were spotted, just like another **Gldenstdt`s Redstart**, this time an immature individual.

On the further way down we were able to see two **Red-billed Choughs**, 15 **Twites**, a **Pied Wheatear** and dozens of **Water Pipits**.



Cinereous Vulture, high mountains east of Aktash (mercury mine) (9), 10.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Gldenstdt`s Redstart, South Chuya Ridge (13), 14.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

When arriving at the busses, Mona and I still had enough time to have a look at the timberline and so we headed some more meters down the track. On an area with scrub, some low bushes and trees, a group of buntings was discovered. After having a look at most of the individuals we identified them as pure **Pine Buntings**. Here we also could find a **Eurasian Hoopoe** and a juvenile **Bluethroat**.

All fellow students slowly appeared at the meeting point. Some of us wanted to make another stop at the forest on the way back and so one bus was filled with the still motivated people. We drove about ten minutes down the mountain to a place that looked interesting to us. Leaving the car we could see **Willow- & Coal Tits**, just like **Spotted Nutcrackers**. A **Hume`s Leaf Warbler** was calling, too. All in all, it was very calm and the activity was low, but then Dirk discovered a small passerine in a dense bush. First, nobody else saw it and after waiting some time we decided to get closer. The bird started moving slowly and we could see wagging branches, then it flew off and landed about 20 meters away in another bush. There, it came to rest coverless and calm and we could observe the first and only **Black-throated Accentor** of the trip.



Mountain meadow at the high mountains east of Aktash (mercury mine) (9), home to numerous Water Pipits, 11.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg



On the way back down from (9) to Aktash, habitat of Black-throated Accentor, 11.08.2014, © Lara Freiberg

A view in the sky brought a **Fork-tailed Swift** and two **Common Swifts**.

We drove back to the camp, having a short stop at Aktash, where we found ourselves inside of a shop with a lot of chocolate, softdrinks and ice cream and everybody bought something for improving the following evenings.

Day 7 – 12.08.2014 – Aktash → Kurai Steppe, Chuya Steppe → South-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley)

Today we continued our ride. Nobody except our Russian companions had an impression of what to expect for the upcoming day. We just knew that our aim was to reach high mountain areas near Chuya Steppe, quite close to the Mongolian border. But first there was some time to check the latrine forest in the morning and it was worth a visit!

There were a lot of birds around and many migrants seemed to have arrived overnight. The majority consisted of **Willow Tits**, **Common Chaffinches**, **Tree Pipits** and **Song Thrushes**. **Common Redstarts** were observed in good numbers, just like **Grey Wagtails** and **Hume`s Leaf Warblers**. After

many suspicions, the first two safely identified **Olive-backed Pipits** were observed. Other interesting birds were two **Garden Warblers**, a juvenile **Bluethroat** and three **Demoiselle Cranes**, which were flying around on the other side of Chuya River. Three **Common Sandpipers** were seen along Chuya River and a **Black Woodpecker** was heard, too.



Spotted Flycatcher, near Aktash (5), 10.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Olive-backed Pipit, near Aktash (5), 12.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

After everything was packed we started the ride in direction of Chuya Steppe. We first stopped at Aktash for buying some food, beer and wine for Andreas, to celebrate his birthday the day after.

Our first stop was settled just next to R256 at Kurai Steppe (10), a typical steppe area with typical steppe vegetation. There, our first adult **Steppe Eagle** could be seen, just like several suspicious Wheatears...but they were too far away for a safe identification. Though we only visited this place once and only for a quick stop, I think it might be worth a visit.

The next stop was situated at Chuya River (11), where we had lunch and some time to explore the surrounding forests, which only produced a family of **Pine Buntings**, including a magnificent male.



Chuya Steppe (between 12-13), 12.08.2014, © Dirk Albach



Chuya Steppe (between 12-13), 12.08.2014, © Dirk Albach

We continued our ride. The landscape became greyish-brown, the vegetation lower and the earth drier. We left R256 to turn right, first entering the settlement Ortolyk, crossing Chuya River and then enter Chuya Steppe (12). Chuya River gave the impression of losing more and more power the farther it meandered into Chuya Steppe, where it only seemed to have an effect on the close parts of its water-side. Some kilometers further along R256 we would have reached Kosh-Agach, which means “the last tree”...a view in its direction and the Mongolian border left no doubts on that. The first bridge above

Chuya River produced some **terns**, which really seemed to be out of place. Out from the dirty bus windows an identification was not possible and like so often, a stop couldn't be made spontaneously. We drove all the way through Chuya Steppe in direction to the high mountains of South Chuya Ridge, which we recognized at the horizon. Nearly no stops were made and from the windows we were only able to see numerous wheatears, falcons and a few **Horned Larks**. Dirk was able to spot the only **Asian Short-toed Lark** during a quick stop.



Caravan at Chuya Steppe (between **12-13**), 12.08.2014, © Andreas Bally



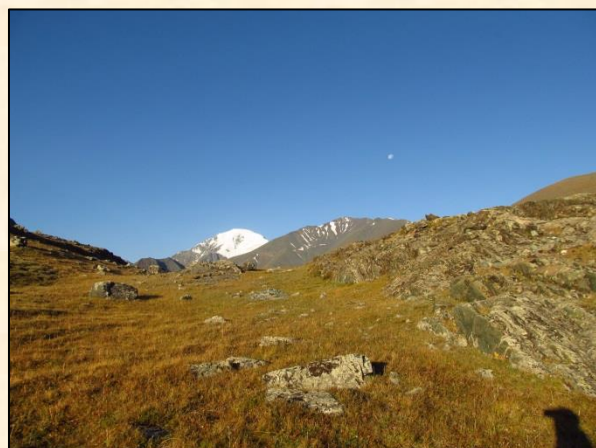
Challenging our luck on the way up to the high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (**13**), 12.08.2014, © Andreas Bally

We continued driving over non-confiding, steep descents and through streams, what an experience! On a lake on the right-hand side we saw four different-sized waders flying off, but no identification was possible.

We arrived at the high mountains (**13**), really a magnificent place! The valley was characterized by a flat plain, which was laced with streams and ponds. We installed our tents and used the last daylight to explore the close surrounding, just like the rocky areas behind our tent village. We were able to find numerous **White Wagtails** and **Water Pipits**. Additionally, Mona was able to spot a **Rock Sparrow**. Surprise of the evening was a **Brown Accentor**, which was constantly calling and chasing insects. Two Eagles could be observed on far distance, most likely **Golden Eagles**. These were the last observations of the day.



Tents at high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (**13**), 13.08.2014 © Lara Freiberg



High mountains of South Chuya Ridge (**13**), 13.08.2014 © Lara Freiberg

It became freezing cold and a harsh wind was blowing, so our Russian companions parked all available cars around the pavilion to produce some shelter. Even then we moved together close around the tables and enjoyed the warming dinner and the vodka which became more delicious each day.

Dirk then gave us a brief description of what could be done the following day. The plan sounded great as we had the possibility to walk through a tributary valley up to a glacier at an elevation of 3,000 m on the one, or to explore the surrounding valley and hills on the other hand.



Water Pipit, high mountains east of Aktash (mercury mine) (9), 11.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Horned Lark, South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) (13), 13.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

Day 8 – 13.04.2014 – South-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley)

We got up just after sunrise. I was awaked by a very fine “srisri”-call, which reminded me of a **Goldcrest**. Getting out of the tent, I met Dirk and Mona near the stream, observing the first eight **Ruddy Shelducks** of the trip. Dirk told me, that he has seen a **Goldcrest** just behind our tents...exactly the place where I heard the bird. I went back to the tents and began to climb up the rocks behind them, to search for the bird. But it seemed to have disappeared without a trace.

There were a lot of **Northern Wheatears** around, just like two **Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrushes**. Where there were **Black Redstarts**, I also managed to find two **Güldenstädt`s Redstarts**...great to see them again! A **Common Redshank** was calling and flying downstream to find a suitable place for resting. Walking further I scared off a mammal, which I first thought to be a Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, for they were quiet common in the surrounding. I then had a view through my binoculars and the animal came out to be a Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus*...a nice surprise!

A few minutes later, I could hear some harsh calls, which reminded me of everything and nothing and I tried hard to find the bird. Then, a passerine flew out of the marshy grass and came to rest on a rock, not far away from me. Everything made sense now, the bird turned out to be a **Blyth`s Pipit**. After a few moments the bird returned to the marshy grass and could be observed for several minutes. Between some **White Wagtails**, a family of **Citrine Wagtails** could be found. Other birds seen, including three **Red-billed Choughs**, a **Brown Accentor** and two **Horned Larks**.

I returned to the camp, where Petr told us that only the forward run up to the glacier would take three hours. So only few of us joined the trip.



Blyth's Pipit, high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (13), 13.04.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Red-billed Chough, near Aktash (6), 09.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

At about 9 a.m. we started walking up to the glacier. On the first few meters a lot of birds were around just like **Northern Wheatears**, **Black Redstarts**, **White- and Citrine Wagtails**, **Horned Larks** and **Water Pipits**. Reaching higher altitudes, we were able to see more and more Accentors. The calls of **Brown Accentors** and **Altai Accentors** were omnipresent and we were able to see dozens of individuals of both species. **Güldenstädt's Redstarts** were seen several times, including at least two gorgeous males. Mona spotted a **Lesser Whitethroat** in the middle of a steep rock face and while searching for it again, we found a **Siberian Stonechat**.

Accentors, Wheatears and Pipits were all around. On the next stop a **Eurasian Crag Martin** enriched the species list and several **Red-billed Choughs** were calling and flying around. Additionally, Matthias told us, that he just saw a **Ptarmigan** in some scree on the other side of the stream. But though we scoped the whole area we didn't manage to recover the bird.

A few minutes later, Mona and I discovered a strange-looking finch, which we could not classify. The bird was sitting motionless on a rock and was quiet far away from us. We had to wait for about ten minutes till another bird appeared and began to feed it. The birds were **Brandt's Mountain Finches** and the adult left no doubts. Additionally, four **Plain Mountain Finches** were discovered in some scree on the other side of the stream.



While a part of the group climbed the glacier, the others walked through ice-cold streams and then also made their way up...



...to a place holding a wonderful view.
South Chuya Ridge (13), left picture © Lara Freiberg, right picture © Andreas Bally

The first **Northern Goshawk** of the trip was flying “downstream” through the valley, while dozens of small passerines, formed to a flock, began to fly up and down at the mountain tops. A view through the scope only suggested Mountain Finches and some snowfinches, but the distances were too far.

We thought, that we`d have to walk straight for another half an hour or so to arrive at the glacier, till Petr turned to the right hand side. The aim wasn`t even the glacier we had in view all the time, but another one at the end of a really steep and slippery scree slope. I knew that this was going to be hard work with backpack, camera, scope and binoculars. Walking became really exhausting and every step needed to be planed carefully...of course, then birdlife turned wild! Around us, dozens of birds were flying, sitting down for a moment and flying again...what a flurry. Distances were far, but sometimes, while stopping and somehow trying to install the tripod on the steep and bumpy ground, we were able to identify some birds. Mostly **Altai Accentors** and **Brandt`s Mountain Finches** were around, both of them very numerous. Getting higher meant it was getting calmer concerning bird activity. Reaching the glacier, scope was laid aside and we enjoyed ourselves for about an hour with several improvised activities before going back.

A few minutes later, we arrived at the place where several Mountain Finches and Accentors have been around on the way up. This time the activity was much lower. Only four **Brandt`s Mountain Finches** were observed, till another bird arrived in the scope...a **White-winged Snowfinch**. The bird stayed for a few minutes, before we lost sight of it.



Collecting plants on the way up to the glacier, south-eastern South Chuya Ridge (13), 13.08.2014, © Dirk Albach



T-Shirt meets glacier, south-eastern South Chuya Ridge (13), 13.08.2014, © Dirk Albach

The walk back was much faster and we didn`t spend too much time for birding, for we all were knackered and the light conditions became worse. Arriving at the rocks behind our tents again, an **Ortolan Bunting** was flushed.

I directly went into the tent and felt asleep. I was awaked some hours later for dinner and felt quite refreshed from the hike. The persons, who did not join the trip, spent a whole day in the surrounding and also climbed some hills. Though this group consisted of non-birders some pictures were taken during their hike, showing great species just like **Steppe Eagle**, **Brown Accentor**, **Altai Accentor**, **Alpine Chough** and **White-winged Snowfinch**. Matthias, who left the glacier-party a bit earlier, told us, that he recovered the Ptarmigan on his way back and was able to identify it as a **Rock Ptarmigan**.

After dinner we celebrated Andreas´ birthday and enjoyed ourselves.

Day 9 – 14.08.2014 – South eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge →Chuya Steppe → Campsite at Chuya River

Though the night was really long for most of us, nearly everybody made it outside at sunrise. Even Lara was gone before I woke up at all. Before even leaving the tent, I could hear the Goldcrest again. Jumping out I was able to locate the bird quickly, but only managed to get brief views. A real creature of habit!

I met Mona and we walked around together, finding the usual species just like **Horned Larks**, **Güldenstädt's Redstarts**, **Brown- and Altai Accentors**. A view in the sky was worth a try and we were requited with **Golden- and Asian Imperial Eagles**. We separated, for I wanted to bird the rocks behind the camp and Mona wanted to walk along the stream. While walking away, the **Common Redshank** once again flew downstream and was calling persistently.

There was just little activity. Five **Twites** were flying around with some **White Wagtails**. Three **Ruddy Shelducks** were observed on the stream.

Another view along the hill slopes was awarded with about 15 **Red-billed Choughs** and two **Alpine Choughs**.



Birding the slopes at South Chuya Ridge (13), 14.08.2014, © Andreas Bally



Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus*, South Chuya Ridge (13), © Andreas Bally

An immature **Steppe Eagle** appeared in the scope and could be studied carefully, till suddenly another, much huger raptor appeared: An adult **Bearded Vulture** was now soaring together with the **Steppe Eagle**. A few moments later, another Bearded Vulture appeared, this time an immature bird. I ran down to the camp to tell everyone about the discovery and fortunately the birds were still in the sky and could be seen by several people.

These were the last birds we saw on the “High Plateau”. Then we packed our stuff and headed for Chuya Steppe. From the busses we saw a **Golden Eagle**, which was flying very close to the road.



Bearded Vulture, high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (13), 14.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Altai Accentor, high mountains east of Aktash (mercury mine) (9), 11.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

We stopped in the middle of the steppe, for some people spotted a **Eurasian Hoopoe** out of the first bus of our caravan and wanted to get better views of it. But when we left the bus there was quite a hurry, for an owl was seen! I could find the pale bird through the binoculars but needed the scope for getting better views. While running back to the car, the bird changed position for several times and when I came back to the spot, I only managed to get it in the scope for a few seconds. The bird was a **Little Owl**. It then flew around the hill and could not be relocated again. A **Steppe Eagle**, an **Upland Buzzard** and our first and only **Saker Falcon** of the trip were around, too.

We continued our ride and stopped again a few minutes later, for we found a place where some people could work on their projects. We left the car and spread into different directions. There were not many passerines around but we managed to find several **Northern-** and our first safely identified **Isabelline Wheatear**.

A flock of about 75 **Red-billed Choughs** was seen above us and a **Gyps spec.** was seen far away, too far for identification.



Steppe Eagle, Chuya Steppe (between 12-13), 14.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Upland Buzzard, Chuya Steppe (between 12-13), 14.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

We decided to drive to the place where we had lunch on 12.08.14 (11) for spending the night. No birding was done the rest of the day and we relaxed.

Day 10 – 15.08.2014 – Chuya Steppe → Aktash

Today we had the possibilities of driving back to Chuya Steppe for a few hours or resting at the campsite. Few of us decided to leave for the steppe and so we left after breakfast.

The first stop was situated at some steppe lakes on the roadside (50.05893°N, 88.43682°E). While leaving the car, at least three **Sand Martins** flew around our bus. **Citrine Wagtails** and **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** were around, just like an **Upland Buzzard**.

The lake and the waters around it produced ten **Ruddy Shelducks**, two **Eurasian Coots** and five **Grey Herons**.

Matthias spotted a small mammal on the slope next to us; it was a Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*, which was hard-working enlarging its den. For our mammal experts stayed back at the campsite, the lucky birders later had to teach them to have missed the mammal highlight of the trip.



Siberian Jerboa *Allactaga sibirica*, Chuya Steppe (12), 15.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Booted Warbler, Chuya Steppe (12), 15.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

The next stop was the bridge where we were able to spot some **terns** on 12.08.14. We were excited to get there, for the surrounding looked very interesting and seemed to attract a lot of birds. Just arrived, the terns could be seen again, we counted eight birds and identified them as **Common Terns**. Till then, I associated this species with colony breeding on short grass next to the sea or on man-made floats in the middle of a lake. A surreal experience seeing these birds in the middle of a steppe.

We were able to see **Citrine-**, and **White Wagtails** feeding on the riverbanks, just like two **Little Ringed Plovers**.

The surrounding vegetation seemed to be promising for passerines...and yes it was! A juvenile **Blue-throat** acted very elusive, while three **Eurasian Hoopoes** could be observed quiet well.

A uniform brown bird attracted our attention. It was hidden in a *Salix* and only gave brief views. The bird then flew on a broken tree at the river side and while scurrying through it, we could hear some harsh “tack”-calls. We could observe our first **Booted Warbler** for about half a minute, before it disappeared in some scrub.

A migrating **Black Stork** was the last bird we paid attention to. While walking back to the busses, some **Barn Swallows** were chasing insects.



The green belt along Chuya River, Chuya Steppe (12),
15.08.2014, © Dirk Albach



Salty areas at Chuya Steppe, close to Chuya River (12),
15.08.2014, © Dirk Albach

We drove back to the steppe area, where we started this day. There, Dirk and Simon wanted to have a close look at the botany of a very dry and salty spot. In the meanwhile, we walked down to Chuya River. On our way we flushed some **Horned Larks**, among them at least two juvenile birds, still fed by their parents. Another pale passerine which we startled was left unidentified...but we had a strong suspicion of what it was.

When we arrived at Chuya River, we spotted dozens of water birds. They came out to be a group of twenty **Goosanders** and at least nine **Mallards** were present, too. On the other side of the river, a **Siberian Stonechat** was singing.

Walking back to the road, we managed to flush the unidentified pale bird again. Fortunately, it came to rest on a power line and we could identify it unhurriedly. It was a **Tawny Pipit** and it could be observed for a few minutes, after disappearing in the grassy areas again.



Black Stork, Chuya Steppe (12), 15.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Tawny Pipit, Chuya Steppe (12), 15.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

Just before leaving the site and heading back for the campsite, two **Red-billed Choughs** and an **Upland Buzzard** were seen.

Back at the campsite (11) we packed our stuff and made it to our beloved one near Aktash (5), where we should spend two more nights.

We arrived when the light was dim, yet...but we gave the latrine forest another chance (in birding affairs). The dominant species consisted of all kind of tits (among them also three **long-tailed** individ-

uals), **Spotted Flycatchers** and **Tree Pipits**. To our surprise we saw our first **Grey Woodpecker** of the trip!

Walking further, I found a passerine which seemed to be very elusive and I somehow did not manage to get it into my binoculars properly. Chasing the bird for some more minutes, the identification as **Red-flanked Bluetail** was possible. Just then, Janna joined me and she also had a brief view of the bird.

We spent the evening around the campfire and went off to bed quite early, cause most of us needed to collect data for their projects the next day.

Day 11 – 16.08.2014 – Surrounding of Aktash

Today I got up very early, for I needed to collect some more data for my project on Pied Wheatears. The perfect place was the dry slope east of the campsite **(8)**. The others were still asleep and I decided to walk alone along Chuya River.

The first half of the walk was not very spectacular, for only the usual species were seen, just like **Grey Wagtails**, **White Wagtails** and a single **Bluethroat**.

I flushed a few **Ortolan Buntings**, which then crossed the road and disappeared in the grassy areas. Walking further, more and more **Ortolan Buntings** flew off the ground and here and there males were singing...on the road, on the crash barrier and on low bushes. Small flocks of up to ten birds were flying around, calling and chasing each other...what a show!

When I arrived at the dry slope I started to take measurements of my sample area and began to collect data for the project. After some time has passed, suddenly all the ground squirrels, which were constantly around, started calling for alarm and disappeared in the ground, just like most of the birds turned wild. I tried to find out, what the disturbance was...but it took me another ten minutes till I discovered a **Northern Goshawk** with its prey, a ground squirrel, in its claws. The bird was enjoying the meal for more than an hour and even some fellow students, who arrived at the spot just after breakfast, had the possibility to see it.

After some time I was driven back to the campsite for lunch and then back to the slope...it was the most productive day I've had! Back again, Mona and I once again had an eye on the Wheatears. A bird, which landed in the sample area, caught our attention and we were very lucky after we identified it as a **Rock Bunting**.



Northern Goshawk with Long-tailed Ground Squirrel, near Aktash **(8)**, 16.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader



Ortolan Bunting, near Aktash **(8)**, 16.08.2014, © Maximilian Fader

Other interesting birds were seven **Black Redstarts**, five **Pied Wheatears**, two **Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrushes**, a **Bluethroat**, four **European Goldfinches**, and a **Eurasian Hobby**.

It started to rain and we waited for the bus to pick us up. Arriving at the campsite, we prepared for dinner and I also prepared for my presentation, which I wasn't able to hold during the tutorials in Germany and so became the evening entertainment for my fellow students. After that, we celebrated our last evening in the surrounding of Aktash, though the day has been exhausting for most of us.

Day 12 – 17.08.2014 – Aktash → Barnaul

Today was our last day in the Altai Mountain Range, for we left Aktash early in the morning to arrive at South-Siberian Botanical Garden in the evening. First, we wanted to spend another night at Seminsky Pass, but due to the condition of our vehicles we decided to play safe.

We started in the morning and had some stops for toilet and gas. At Seminsky Pass, we left the R256 to have meal **(4)**.

Till everything was prepared, we had the possibility of birding the surrounding and so Janna and I left the group and rambled around.

Bird activity was quiet low; the only mentionable individuals were three **Mistle Thrushes**. When we continued our walk we were rewarded with our first **Siberian Jays**, which showed quiet well for several minutes. The three birds were very active and seemed to be curious.

The meal was ready and while walking back to the fellow students, an adult **Steppe Eagle** soared over the forest.

We continued our road trip and arrived at Barnaul, when it was dark yet. We then installed our tents for the last time and started with the delicious dinner. For we left our Russian companions in blank confusion when we all entered the sauna together on our first evening, this time sexes were separated. After we all spent enough time in the banja, we slowly returned to the table to regain all the liquid we left at the sauna and so, for many of us, the longest night of the trip began.

Day 13 – 18.08.2014 – Barnaul

Today we had another full day at Barnaul and it was spent at the Botanical Garden and Barnaul City.

In the morning we had a few halfhearted tries of exploring the Botanical Garden once more and were rewarded with **Long-tailed Tits** and a **Greenish Warbler**. The common species, just like **Tree Pipit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and **Siberian Chiffchaff** were all around.

Just before leaving for Barnaul City we managed to spot some raptors in the sky. Among few migrating **Common Buzzards** and **Black Kites** we also saw two **European Honey Buzzards**.

We visited the Altai State University and had lunch at the canteen. In the city, **House Sparrows** were omnipresent; **Rooks** and **Carrion Crows** could be observed in low numbers. Above the city, at least five **Common Swifts** were seen.

All in all, we had a really lazy day and we definitely enjoyed the easy way of wasting the hours. This phenomenon was present till we all went to our sleeping bags.

Day 14 – 19.08.2014 – Barnaul & department

The last day started early for we had to catch the plane around midday. The morning was characterized by packing suitcases, searching for all kind of stuff to put it in suitcases, drag suitcases and then stash them for the last time into the luggage of the busses.

We were able to sit down for a while and had a calm breakfast. To my surprise, we managed to find two species, which we couldn't record during the entire excursion: A **Fieldfare** and two **Redwings** were roosting high up in a pine for some moments.

After breakfast we said goodbye to our Russian companions and eventually left the Botanical Garden for the airport.

7. COMMENTED SPECIES LIST

In the following all 131 species, which were recorded during the trip, are mentioned and a short comment on their distribution and abundance is added.

Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*

A maximum of eight individuals was seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at an elevation of 2,850 m, where the birds spent most of the time at ponds and streams. It seemed to be common around steppe lakes and Chuya River at Chuya Steppe. Mostly small groups, which seemed to be relatively shy.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Only seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, where a single female was accompanied Mallards.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Seemed to be the commonest duck in the region. Two individuals were seen at Lake Cheybek Khol. Several individuals on Chuya River at Chuya Steppe.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

One individual was seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, accompanied with a Green-winged Teal.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

A single bird was seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, accompanied with a Northern Pintail.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Two adults were seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, always being close to their three young chicks. The observation of this family proofs breeding in the region.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

21 birds could be observed on Chuya River at Chuya Steppe and another flock of about 20 birds at the campsite at Chuya River. The birds breed in the region what suggests, that our observations arise from family bounds.

Hazel Grouse *Tetrastes bonasia*

Observed and heard west of Aktash in a mixed forest. Seemed to be active only at dusk, where two individuals were seen on close distance.

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*

Matthias spotted one individual in some scree at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) on a rocky slope at about 2,950 m.

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*

A migrating bird at Chuya Steppe near Ortolyk and an overflying individual at South-Siberian Botanical Garden were the only records of this species.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Few individuals were recorded at Lake Cheybek Khol and along Chuya River at Chuya Steppe.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Only seen at Chuya River and lakes at Chuya Steppe, where it seemed to be common.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Two birds were observed over the South-Siberian Botanical Garden, migrating with Common Buzzards *B. b. vulpinus*.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Commonest raptor in the region. It was common to abundant in most habitats from 150 - 2,800 m.

Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*

Two individuals were observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Vulture spec. *Gyps spec.*

An unidentified vulture was observed on far distance at Chuya Steppe. Most likely a Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, though Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* could not be fully excluded.

Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*

A single bird was observed at the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range).

Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Single individuals were seen near Barnaul, Seminsky Pass and the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range).

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Single individuals were observed around South-Siberian Botanical Garden. One bird was seen at lake Cheybek Khol.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

An individual was observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at about 2,850 m. Two more birds west of Aktash.

Common (Steppe) Buzzard *Buteo buteo vulpinus*

Common around the South-Siberian Botanical Garden and along R256. Singles at Seminsky Pass, Chuya Steppe and west of Aktash.

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

A few individuals were seen at Chuya Steppe.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

Seemed to be common at Chuya Steppe and at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where several individuals could be observed (only juveniles and immatures!). A single adult was seen at Seminsky Pass, another at Kurai Steppe.

Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*

Single birds were seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley). A juvenile was seen west of Aktash, flying along on a dry slope.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Few individuals at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where single birds could be observed regularly.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*

Common in the region. Regularly, single birds were observed in different habitats and at altitudes from 1,750 up to 2,700 meters. Both, the pale phase and the dark phase were observed.

Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni*

Only observed west of Aktash on dry slopes, where single males were safely identified. Many female individuals were left unidentified for the similarity with Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*.

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Common to very common in suitable habitats such as dry slopes, steppe and mountain meadows. Often gregarious.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*

One individual was observed twice west of Aktash in a steppe-like landscape.

Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*

Two birds observed at Chuya Steppe were the only records of this species.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

This species was only observed twice: west of Aktash, above a rocky, dry slope.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Three birds were seen on steppe lakes along R256 at Chuya Steppe west of Ortolyk.

Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*

Some small, roosting groups along the R256 west of Aktash. Single birds could be observed along Chuya River, too, especially west of Aktash.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

One individual was seen on a stream at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) and two other birds were seen on Chuya River at Chuya Steppe, where they roosted and fed on the muddy riverbanks.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

This species was common all along Chuya River. Single birds were seen on streams at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

One individual was seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, another was heard twice along a stream at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Twice a single bird was seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where it flew along streams and ponds filling up the valley with its calls.

Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*

A single bird was seen at Lake Cheybek Khol, where it fed on a sandbank.

Gull spec. *Larus spec.*

A few gulls were seen above South-Siberian Botanical Garden, but were left unidentified due to far distances. Most likely they belonged to *L. mongolicus* or *L. chachinnans*.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

Eight Common Terns were seen on Chuya River at Chuya Steppe.

Feral Pigeon *Columba livia f. domestica*

This species was common at Barnaul City and could be observed in low numbers around Aktash. Seemed to be adapted to human settlements.

Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris*

Only four individuals were seen flying along a dry slope west of Aktash.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

One individual was seen at Seminsky Pass. The bird belonged to the subspecies *S. o. meena*.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*

A Little Owl could be observed at Chuya Steppe, sitting on some rocks next to abandoned, wooden huts, which may mark the breeding sites.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*

This species could be observed once, when two individuals roosted at a forest edge of a pine forest, just outside of South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Common Swift *Apus apus*

This species seemed to be common at Barnaul City. In the Altai Mountains two individuals could be observed while chasing insects east of Aktash at the Kurai Mountain Range, together with Pacific Swifts.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*

Seemed to be common around Aktash, where it could be observed regularly, mostly along dry slopes.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Could be observed several times around Aktash and seemed to be common at Chuya Steppe, where it was seen regularly.

Great-spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

This species was common around the South-Siberian Botanical Garden. In the Altai Mountains the only record consists of a calling individual west of Aktash.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*

Two individuals were seen in a pine forest near Barnaul, another was heard west of Aktash.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus*

Only one individual could be observed on two days west of Aktash in a mixed forest.

Shrike spec. *Lanius spec.*

An unidentified shrike was seen from the driving bus, sitting on a fence post next to the road. Due to short observation time, the bird was left unidentified.

Siberian Jay *Perisoreus infaustus*

Three birds were seen at Seminsky Pass and displayed the only records of this species.

Eurasian Jay *Garullus glandarius*

The only Eurasian Jay of the trip was observed at the South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Patchily observed at the roadside along R256, mostly near human settlements. Seven individuals were seen at Chuya Steppe on Chuya River.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Common to abundant in mountainous pine forests, for example around Aktash. The birds belonged to the race *N. c. macrorhynchos*.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

This species was observed often. A few individuals were seen west of Aktash and at the high mountains east Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range). The numbers increased at Chuya Steppe, where flocks of about 85 birds were seen. Also present at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

This species was only observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where two individuals perched along a steep slope.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*

Rooks were common in and around Barnaul, just as along R256.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Were common along R256 and common to abundant around Chuya Steppe.

Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*

Only seen in and around Barnaul, where it seemed to be regular.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

Few birds were seen west of Aktash, more frequent at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Asian Short-toed Lark *Calandrella cheleensis*

Dirk could spot a single individual at Chuya Steppe, before arriving at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*

Common at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) and Chuya Steppe. The birds most likely belonged to the subspecies *E. a. branti*.

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

Three individuals were seen on steppe lakes at Chuya Steppe. Several birds could be observed from the bus along R256 around Seminsky Pass.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

One individual was observed along a high cliff at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Was common around South-Siberian Botanical Garden. Seven individuals were seen at Chuya River and surrounding lakes at Chuya Steppe.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*

Only two individuals could be observed west of Aktash, migrating along a dry slope.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*

One of the most abundant passerines in the Altai Mountain Range. Inhabits all kinds of forests and woods and is present in a wide range of altitude. The birds belonged to the subspecies *P. o. uralensis*.

Grey-headed Chickadee *Parus cinctus*

Few individuals were observed at Seminsky Pass among the numerous Willow Tits.

Coal Tit *Pariparus ater*

Common to abundant, especially around South-Siberian Botanical Garden and Seminsky Pass. Seldom seen in mountain forests around Aktash.

Great Tit *Parus major*

Common to very common in all kind of woodlands.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*

A small group of this species was seen in both, a mixed forest west of Aktash and South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Seen in different kinds of woodland and forests, where it seemed to be common. The birds belonged to the subspecies *S. e. asiatica*.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

On two days a Goldcrest was seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at an elevation of about 2,850 m.

Common (Siberian) Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita tristis*

Quiet common in different habitats, such as mountain forests, the waterside of Chuya River and at South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*

Mona was able to see and hear a single bird at a pine forest around Barnaul.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

Fairly common at Lake Cheybek Khol, where several individuals were present at the scrubby waterside. One bird was seen west of Aktash at the edge of a mixed forest.

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*

Common to locally abundant in mountain forests. Numbers seem to increase in higher altitudes.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

Could only be seen around South-Siberian Botanical Garden, where we managed to see four individuals.

Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*

One individual was observed in some trees at the waterside of Chuya River at Chuya Steppe.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

Few individuals were seen around South-Siberian Botanical Garden. Two more birds west of Aktash at the waterside of Chuya River.

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

Only two birds were observed in some scrub west of Aktash near Chuya River. Another individual at South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Common in most kinds of wooded areas and along a wide range of altitudes. One individual at 2,900 m in some rocks at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley). The Western Siberian birds should belong to the subspecies *S. c. curruca/blythi*.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Rarely seen. Only two birds were observed. One at Seminsky Pass, the other at South-Siberian Botanical Garden. The birds in Western Siberia should belong to *S. c. volgensis*.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Common to locally ubiquitous in different kinds of forests, just like mixed forests around Aktash or at South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*

Fairly common in many types of habitats such as woods, watersides, scrub. Even on dry slopes. Mainly juveniles which did not give the possibility of identifying subspecies.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

Observed twice in a mixed forest west of Aktash.

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

A few individuals were seen in a mixed forest west of Aktash.

Eversmann's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronotus*

A couple was observed at Seminsky Pass.

Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Common to quite common in most kinds of woods, especially around Barnaul and west of Aktash.

Güldenstädt's Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus*

Common at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where up to eight individuals were observed at the same time. Two birds on scree at the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range).

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Fairly common in rocky areas and detritus up to 2,850 meters. Also observed on rocky, dry slopes in lower altitudes. All birds belonged to the subspecies *P. o. phoenicuroides*.

Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*

Regularly seen on dry slopes west of Aktash and at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

Common in suitable habitats such as semi-altitude meadows, watersides and rocky, dry slopes. One bird migrating at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at an elevation of 2,900 m chasing insects in some rocks.

Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*

Quite common on meadows with single rocks, dry slopes, steppe areas and mountain meadows. Countless individuals were seen along the roadside.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*

Fairly common and regularly seen on dry slopes with rocky areas, for example west of Aktash. Single birds at Chuya Steppe and at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*

Only one individual recorded: A bird at Chuya Steppe could be doubtlessly identified as this species.

Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis*

More often heard than seen. Seemed to be fairly common at Seminsky Pass, such as in mixed forests around Aktash.

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*

One individual was seen at South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*

Two individuals were observed at South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*

This species was common in forests around Aktash. Singles around South-Siberian Botanical Garden.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*

Three birds were observed at Seminsky Pass.

Altai Accentor *Prunella himalayana*

Common to abundant at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley). Abundance seemed to increase with rising altitude up to 2,950 meters. One individual at the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range).

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*

Common at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley). Gregarious, active, noisy and mobile. Rocky areas and mountain meadows.

Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*

One individual was seen a few kilometres east of Aktash at the Kurai Mountain Range.

Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

Three individuals were seen along R256 some kilometres outside of Barnaul next to a ruderal area. Due to short observation times, the identification of subspecies was not possible.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*

Seemed to be common along Chuya River at Chuya Steppe and at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley). Two individuals at Lake Cheybek Khol.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Common all along Chuya River.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Common to locally ubiquitous in suitable habitats just like riversides, for example of Chuya River and on high mountain streams. All birds belonged to the subspecies *M. a. personata*.

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

One individual was observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) on a wet, alpine meadow at about 2,850 m.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*

One individual was flushed at Chuya Steppe just next to R256 and could be observed on a power line for several minutes.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Common to abundant in suitable, grassy habitats. Flocks of numerous individuals roosted on the ground or in lower parts of mixed forests and were flushed constantly.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Only three safely identified individuals were seen west of Aktash.

Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta*

Common to abundant especially from 1,800 to 2,400 meters. Replaced Tree Pipit in higher altitudes.

Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*

Rarely seen west of Aktash.

Bunting spec. *Emberiza spec.*

Some overflying birds were left unidentified, due to the similarity of the call of Yellowhammer *E. citrinella* and Pine Bunting *E. leucocephalos*. Hybrids also possible in the region.

Pine Bunting *Emberiza leucocephalos*

Pine buntings were seen on a stop along R256 between Aktash and Chuya Steppe along Chuya River. A few individuals were observed on the way to the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range) at about 2,300 m in scrubby vegetation.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

One individual was seen west of Aktash on a dry slope.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*

This species was common to locally abundant west of Aktash. For example, more than 50 individuals were seen on a walk along R256 west of Aktash on a distance of 2.5 km. Some of the birds sang on the road and nearby scrub, stones and trees. One individual was seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at an altitude of about 2,850 m.

Common Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*

Common in most kinds of forests, for example around Barnaul or west of Aktash. Numbers seem to increase on days with migration activity.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Only one individual was observed west of Aktash accompanied with **Common Chaffinches**.

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*

Four individuals were observed on far distance in a detritus at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley) at an altitude of about 2,900 meters.

Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandtii*

This species was only observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), where it became fairly common to abundant at an altitude of about 2,900 m. The birds flew around in large, noisy groups.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

A few birds were observed at Seminsky Pass. The birds were quite mobile, always flying over the treetops and resting only for a short time.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Common at Seminsky Pass, where its calls were omnipresent. Few singing males on Chuya River west of Aktash.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus*

Mona was lucky to spot a single bird at the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range).

Crossbill spec. *Loxia spec.*

Two birds were heard at a pine forest near Barnaul and also seen in flight for a short time. Due to bad light conditions, the birds were left unidentified.

European Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*

Two birds were seen on a stop just outside of Barnaul. Five individual were seen west of Aktash, on a dry slope. The birds belonged to the subspecies *C. c. paropanisi* or *C. c. caniceps*.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*

About twenty birds were observed at the high mountains east of Aktash near Jarly-Amry (Kurai Mountain Range) at an altitude of about 2,800 m. Five more individuals were seen at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

Eurasian Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

A few individuals were seen on a stop just outside of Barnaul.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Three birds observed at Seminsky Pass remained the only individuals of this species seen on the trip.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Common at Barnaul. Single birds at Aktash. Seems to be restricted to human settlements.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Two individuals were seen around South-Siberian Botanical Garden. Seemed to be common at wooded areas at the edge of Chuya Steppe, where several birds could be observed. Couples or small groups.

Rock Sparrow *Petronia petronia*

One individual was observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley).

White-winged Snowfinch *Montifringilla nivalis*

Only one individual was observed at the south-eastern high mountains of South Chuya Ridge (south of Elangash Valley), accompanied with Brandt's Mountain Finches at an altitude of about 2,950 m.

8. SPECIES DAY BY DAY

The following tabulation gives an overview on the abundance of the observed species per day.

Species	06.08.14	07.08.14	08.08.14	09.08.14	10.08.14	11.08.14	12.08.14	13.08.14	14.08.14	15.08.14	16.08.14	17.08.14	18.08.14	19.08.14
Geese & Ducks														
Ruddy Shelduck								8	3	11				
Gadwall					1									
Mallard					2					9				
Northern Pintail					1									
Common Teal					1									
Tufted Duck					5									
Common Merganser										41				
Grouses														
Hazel Grouse				1	2									
Rock Ptarmigan								1						
Storks														
Black Stork	1									1				
Cormorants														
Great Cormorant					2					6				
Hérons														
Grey Heron										11				
Raptors														
European Honey Buzzard													2	
Black Kite	14	>100	>25	5	6	2	11	3	7	>50	2	>50	8	2
Bearded Vulture									2					
<i>Gyps spec.</i>									1					
Cinereous Vulture						1								
Northern Harrier		1	1			1								

Species	06.08.14	07.08.14	08.08.14	09.08.14	10.08.14	11.08.14	12.08.14	13.08.14	14.08.14	15.08.14	16.08.14	17.08.14	18.08.14	19.08.14
Eurasian Sparrowhawk		1			1								2	
Northern Goshawk								1			2			
Common (Steppe) Buzzard	1			1	1					1		2	4	
Upland Buzzard									1	2				
Steppe Eagle							1		5			1		
Imperial Eagle				1				1	1					
Golden Eagle							2	1	2					
Booted Eagle				2	2	2	1		1					
Falcons														
Lesser Kestrel			1	1										
Common Kestrel			1	4		1	2	4	5		3			
Eurasian Hobby					1						1			
Saker Falcon									1					
Peregrine Falcon				2										
Rails														
Eurasian Coot										3				
Cranes														
Demoiselle Crane				2			3							
Waders														
Little Ringed Plover									1	2				
Common Sandpiper		1		1			3		1		1			
Green Sandpiper					1			1						
Common Redshank								1	1					
Temminck's Stint					1									
Wader spec.							4							
Gulls & Terns														
<i>Larus spec.</i>	6	2											1	
Common Tern										8				
Pigeons & Doves														
Feral Pigeon	20					5							<50	
Hill Pigeon					4									
Oriental Turtle Dove			1											
Owls														
Little Owl									1					
Ural Owl		2												
Swifts														
Common Swift						2							5	
Fork-tailed Swift				3	2	1								
Hoopoes														
Eurasian Hoopoe					1	1	2		1	3				
Woodpeckers														
Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	1				1							1	1
Black Woodpecker	2						1							
Grey-headed Woodpecker										1	1			
Shrikes														
<i>Lanius spec.</i>												1		
Crows														
Siberian Jay												3		
Eurasian Jay	1													
Eurasian Magpie		2					5			3		7	3	
Spotted Nutcracker			>50	>50	>25	>15	29		2	3	10			
Red-billed Chough				2		2		11	>85	2				
Alpine Chough									2					
Rook	1	8	2	2								>50	6	

Species	06.08.14	07.08.14	08.08.14	09.08.14	10.08.14	11.08.14	12.08.14	13.08.14	14.08.14	15.08.14	16.08.14	17.08.14	18.08.14	19.08.14
Carrion Crow		>25		34		2	4		1	2	5	12	8	
Hooded Crow	3	1										3	2	1
Northern Raven				2	2		2				2			
Larks														
Asian Short-toed Lark							1							
Horned Lark							3	4	5	3				
Swallows & Martins														
Sand Martin		10								3				
Eurasian Crag Martin								1						
Barn Swallow	6	3								7			6	3
Common House Martin				2										
Tits														
Willow Tit	45	26	>50	>25	12	6	18		2	8	9	5	2	
Grey-headed Chickadee			>5											
Coal Tit	14	12	>25		1		2			3	1	1	2	
Great Tit	11	14	2	8	2	5	3			5	8		5	2
Long-tailed Tit										3			4	
Nuthatches														
Eurasian Nuthatch	1	2	2	2		1	2		1		2	1	2	1
Warblers														
Goldcrest								1	1					
Common (Siberian) Chiffchaff	10	3	4	1	3	1	3				2		2	
Wood Warbler	1													
Dusky Warbler				1	5									
Hume's Leaf Warbler			38	21	13	4	8		1		5			
Greenish Warbler	1	1											1	
Booted Warbler										1				
Eurasian Reed Warbler	4													
Garden Warbler	1						2							
Lesser Whitethroat	5	1	5	3	2	1	3	1		2	1		2	
Greater Whitethroat		1	1											
Flycatchers														
Spotted Flycatcher	2	1		3	4	7	1			7	4		2	
Bluethroat			1	1	3	1	1			1	2			
Red-flanked Bluetail										1				
Taiga Flycatcher					1	4								
Eversmann's Redstart			2											
Common Redstart	6	2	3	2	2	5	8				3		2	
Güldenstädt's Redstart						2		9	5					
Black Redstart			2		5	4		2	3		7			
Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush					2			3			2			
Siberian Stonechat			2	1	6	2		1		1				
Northern Wheatear				10	9	2	6	23	17	1	2			
Pied Wheatear				4	5	1					5	1		
Isabelline Wheatear									1					
Thrushes														
Black-throated Thrush			3	1	3					1	2			
Fieldfare														1
Redwing														2
Song Thrush				14	3	3	7			4	8		1	
Mistle Thrush												3		

Species	06.08.14	07.08.14	08.08.14	09.08.14	10.08.14	11.08.14	12.08.14	13.08.14	14.08.14	15.08.14	16.08.14	17.08.14	18.08.14	19.08.14
Accentors														
Altai Accentor						1		>50	1					
Brown Accentor							1	>25	5					
Black-throated Accentor						1								
Wagtails & Pipits														
Western Yellow Wagtail		3												
Citrine Wagtail					2			8	3	7				
Grey Wagtail	1		2	4	2	3	10		1	3	6			
White Wagtail		1			2	4		18	10	3	19		6	2
Blyth's Pipit								1						
Tawny Pipit										1				
Tree Pipit	6	4	5	7	8	14	22			16			3	1
Olive-backed Pipit							2							
Water Pipit				2		>50	8	>25	10					
Buntings														
Yellowhammer							3				1			
Pine Bunting						6	4							
Rock Bunting											1			
Ortolan Bunting				2	4			1			>50			
Finches														
Common Chaffinch	1	16	2	1	1	8	2			35	42	8	18	
Brambling						1								
Plain Mountain Finch								4						
Brandt's Mountain Finch								>50						
Pine Grosbeak			11											
Common Rosefinch			4	2	1									
Long-tailed Rosefinch						1								
<i>Loxia spec.</i>	2													
Eurasian Goldfinch		2		1							4			
Twite						20			5					
Linnet		2												
Northern Bullfinch			3											
Sparrows														
House Sparrow	15	8											>25	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow		2								8				
Rock Sparrow							1							
White-winged Snowfinch								1						