

Almaty region, Kazakhstan

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My son and I visited Almaty for one week in the winter of 2020. We were curious about what the region would have to offer at this time of year, focusing on exploring the Ile-Alatau National Park as well as the rural areas located in the foothills of the Tien-Shan mountains surrounding the city. There was snow but not so much as to cause any problems such as closed roads. Temperatures were well below zero at night, and most often below zero also during the daytime, although twice we experienced rainfall.

The purpose of this report is to give you a feeling for how to get around these areas and what birds you may encounter there during a winter visit.

Travel and airport

We flew with Turkish Airlines Copenhagen - Istanbul - Almaty. The airport is surprisingly small, and it didn't take long before we were in the arrival hall where there is a row of ATMs (to the left), some of which offer the choice of English language, and where our airbnb host was kindly waiting for us. The airport is close to the city center, there is frequent bus traffic just as you step out of the terminal and of course there are lots of local taxi drivers hoping for a customer. The distance to the city is quite short.

For us as Swedes entry formalities were a breeze - our passports were briefly looked at and stamped. No papers to fill in, no questions asked, no sheet of loose paper to carry in the passport as we had been warned by previous travellers. At customs where many passengers needed to x-ray their luggage we were just waved through.

Money

Many places accept credit cards. However, this is definitely not true everywhere, and in some places that claimed to take cards my foreign card did not work, so cash is a necessity. Fortunately, ATMs are easy to find, also with English language option (although some charge a transaction fee for withdrawals).

Wifi / SIM

We had Wifi at our airbnb, but otherwise we found it in only two restaurants - it was not something to be counted on. Thankfully, the crucial apps, such as maps.me and 2GIS (see below) work well in offline mode.

It is possible for foreigners to acquire a local SIM card, but given the short duration of our stay we decided not to as this is not as easy as in some countries. You can't pick it up at the airport, but need to search out the right offices downtown, do some paperwork with your complete Kazakhstan address, show your passport, register the SIM to your particular phone, and then top it up in a Russian-language machine with exact change (something you rarely have in the beginning of a trip). A step by step guide can be found [here](#).

Public transport and taxi

We travelled a lot by bus, which we found convenient and which took us to most of the locations we wanted to visit. There is also a subway system (Metro), which we didn't use.

The easiest way to pay for public transport is to have an **Onay** card (cost of the card is 400T which includes the first trip; you then need to put money on the card, 80T for each trip). If you can get hold of one, that is. Our airbnb host kindly helped us with this; we had planned on buying them at the airport, but the machine where they are bought had run out of cards - whether that is a frequent occurrence we cannot say. It was also easier said than done to put extra money on the card, it wasn't obvious which machines to use and

then the interface does not support English, but thankfully we got help both at the Tourist information (where they used an app to top up the cards) and then later from an employee in the subway.

The card needs to be held up to a reader when you board a bus (note that every time you get on a new bus that's a new trip even if you go straight from one to the other). Checks are VERY frequent so don't try a free ride. If you don't have a card you can also pay cash 140T for each trip, but this is a bit messy with the driver. There also seems to be an app, at least if you are fine with navigating an interface in Russian, but we didn't try it since we had our cards.

2-GIS is the indispensable app for public transport in Almaty (and many other cities in the former Soviet Union). You can not only get very precise instructions for how to get to a place - and find a convenient shortcut to Yandex Taxi if you decide to opt for a taxi instead - but also search for things like "bus route 12" to see the entire route. Since buses are not running on schedule, the app works as well offline as online, except for the shortcut to Yandex. Note that the transport times indicated in 2-GIS are the times for walking plus travelling - waiting times are *not* shown as they are unknown. Usually 2-GIS is fine with you writing an address in Latin characters, but of course things are smoother if you know the name of your destination in Cyrillic script (I've added Russian names below).

I can also recommend **Yandex taxi**, it was very convenient to use although the app didn't want to accept our credit cards, limiting us to ordering taxis in the vicinity that we could pay for with cash at the end of the ride. Tipping is not expected although of course appreciated.

Maps and place names

We used mostly **Maps.me** which works great offline and also has trails in nature very well covered. Also 2-GIS was very useful even when not using public transport.

Housing

We stayed at an Airbnb on the outskirts of the city (Shirokaya Schel/ Широкая Щель direction), this worked great.

Electricity

Kazakhstan has standard European sockets, 220 Volts.

Food

There are small convenience stores almost everywhere where people are moving around. Restaurants serve anything from local specialities to any kind of foreign cuisine you can think of - have your pick. Most meals are centered on meat, but it is possible to get vegetarian fare as well. There are several good sites on the internet recommending various restaurants in Almaty - our own favorites were Tyubeteyka (Тюбетейка, at three different locations, we tried two of them) and Shashlik Dvor (Шашлычный двор on Kabanbai Batyr Str 40). Note that normally a 10% tipping surcharge is added to your bill.

Weather and climate

During our stay it was warmer than normal for January. Nights were quite cold, down to -10 degrees centigrade, but during the day temperatures came close to zero, even twice above zero. We had snow one

day and rain two days, but limited quantities, so no issues. All roads were open during our stay, also high up in the mountains.

The city itself is generally covered in smog, but we spent most of our time in the mountains east and south of Almaty so only experienced this at a distance.

Managing the language

Although most signage is bilingual in Kazakh and Russian (both currently using Cyrillic script, although the plan is to soon switch to Latin script for Kazakh), Russian is the lingua franca in Kazakhstan. If you know Russian things are easy for you. If you don't, it's a bit more difficult, but some people do speak some English, and even when they don't, people are generally very friendly so will do their best to help anyway.

Google Translate and **Yandex Translate** both support offline mode (if you download the language in advance), and they will take you far, doing a good job of translating in both directions.

Note that transliterations to Latin script can vary, and apps like Google Maps or maps.me can be sensitive to getting the "right" transliteration. To be on the safe side it can thus often be better to copy and paste the Cyrillic name to get the hoped-for result.

Preparations

We didn't find anything in terms of winter birding in the Almaty region, so our preparations focused on getting to know promising areas in the vicinity of Almaty, and which bus routes, if any, went there. This page on Dennis Kin's excellent site **Walking Almaty** was particularly helpful (although note that there is a typo: it should say bus 107 when it says 108):

<http://www.walkingalmaty.com/12-bus-routes-to-the-mountains.html>.

Of course **Birds of Central Asia** by Ayé, Schweizer, and Roth, as well as **Collins bird guide** accompanied us on our trip.

<https://www.xeno-canto.org/> is an invaluable source of bird sounds; for offline listening we use the app **Bird Call Xeno** and download sounds.

Once in Almaty, we got invaluable help from birdingpal **Chris Brodie** (<http://birdingpal.org/>). We are forever indebted to him and to his driver **Pavel / Павел**, who both went out of their way to help us <3.

Places visited

Almaty has a sheltered location with the Tien Shan mountains to the south and east. We spent most of our time in the Tien Shan foothills with often stunning views over the city - when the smog did not cover it all. We of course visited the "classic" mountain locations in **Ile-Alatau National Park** to the south, but also a number of interesting rural or semi-rural locations to the east and south, as recommended by Walking Almaty. As soon as the terrain starts to get a bit difficult, the city gives way to countryside and here we found large areas with mostly summer cottages (dachas), a farming village, and even an area with castle-like modern mansions, presumably built by the nouveaux-riches (Kazakhstan has a lot of oil money).

Clockwise, starting from the east:

Shirokaya Schel (Широкая Щель) and Kensai (Кенсай) Cemetery - January 19-20



This pleasant area is serviced by bus 60. We lived in the very beginning of it (near Kensai Cemetery), and on day 2 took the bus to the end of the line which holds a mixture of (often quite dilapidated) summer cottages (dachas) and some year-round houses and also has some running water in the form of a narrow stream in the valley bottom. After getting off the bus we first followed the road straight ahead, continuing beyond the end of the inhabited area, but then turned back to walk up a very steep road north to a ridge which we followed for a long time back west, towards the city. This provided stunning views of Almaty (below) and



also, surprisingly, produced four Black-throated Accentors in a garden. Lower down we encountered a flock of Bohemian Waxwings. We also saw many raptors on this day: a Golden Eagle, two Common (Steppe) Buzzards, and a Sparrowhawk chasing - and almost catching - a Blackbird. Pheasants ('mongolicus') were common in these areas, although quite shy - the Kensai cemetery was covered in footprints although only one seen.

Kolsay (Кольсай) village - January 22



Kolsay village in the eastern foothills was founded as the collective farm Jubilee (Yubileinoe / Юбилейное), and on some maps is still called that. It is serviced by bus 107. However, in order to save valuable time in the morning we decided to take a taxi there (getting off at the end station of the bus). Kolsay is a charming rural village with free-roaming cows (even in the cemetery), sheep and goats. We found our first Yellowhammers here, and also the trip's only Wood-Pigeons. After visiting the village we decided to skip

the bus and instead walk its entire route, past beautiful nature as well as through a residential area for what we must assume to be the most wealthy people of Almaty, towards Dostyk Bridge (Достык Мост). This is the end station for the 107 and is serviced by a lot of other buses as well, such as the 12 (towards Medeu) and the buses which go to Butakovka (29P) and Butakovka Turnoff (29). We hoped to take the 29P to Butakovka - apparently a popular picnic spot in the summer - but in the end gave up, and instead just took a bus to Butakovka Turnoff and from there walked some distance in nature towards Butakovka, along the Butakovka River (a tributary to Malaya Almatinka River). Here we saw a young Golden Eagle, but otherwise nothing special. The 29P did eventually come, but well over an hour after we started waiting for it.

Medeu (Медеу) - January 23

There are two main access routes to Ile-Alatau National Park (Иле-Алатауский Парк). The easterly one (Mountain Road, Улица Горная) follows the Malaya (small) Almatinka River and goes to Medeu, the site of a famous skating rink at 1,700 meters, and on to the ski resort Shymbulak (Чимбулак/Шымбулак) at 2,200 meters. The bus 12 (which has frequent departures) will take you as far as Medeu. If you want to continue up there is a cable car which can take you to Shymbulak, departing from the next-to-last stop of the bus.



We took the bus to Medeu where we took a walk up through a stunningly beautiful birch forest passing above and to the east of the skating rink (not sure, but I think the path was signposted Gorelnik/Горельник). That walk yielded many **Azure Tits**, a single male Red-mantled Rosefinch, as well as the trip's only Great Spotted Woodpecker and Eurasian Treecreeper.

We also walked downhill along the Malaya Almatinka River for a few bus-stops. On this short stretch we got extended views of a **Solitary Snipe** feeding in the river, and found at least 5 **Brown Dippers**. On a steep mountain side we also encountered a **Blue Whistling-Thrush**.



Kamenskoye Plato (Каменское Плато) - January 23



This is the area reached at the end of bus route 5 (which begins along the same route as the 12 to Medeu, but then turns off in a more westerly direction). We walked up from the bus stop (which again we reached by taxi early in the morning) and entered a quite steep area with dachas (summer cottages) which was not only a very pleasant place but also proved productive from a birding perspective, this since a lot of fruit -

especially pears - was left on many trees, something which attracted thrushes (at least five Black-throated Thrushes, also one Fieldfare and two Mistle Thrushes) and several flocks of Bohemian Waxwings. Apparently it is not common to see Waxwings in Almaty in winter, but this was a good year for them. Up on the ridge we also saw a pair of Long-tailed Rosefinches.

Road towards Big Almaty Lake and Cosmostation (January 21 and 24)

The second main access road to Ile-Alatau National Park follows the Bolshaya (big) Almatinka River and goes to Big Almaty Lake (Russian: Большое Алматинское Озеро, БАО), to the Tien-Shan Astronomical Observatory (next to this there is a border control where you will need to show your passport to the guards) and to the Cosmostation, a research facility at 3,400 meters at the end of the road (or rather, the road technically continues but is closed off since it is too close to the border with Kyrgyzstan).

We visited this area twice. First time we were extremely lucky as Chris Brodie offered us his car and driver for the trip, and we were able to go all the way to the Cosmostation. The road was covered in snow all the way, but with winter tires and careful driving it worked well since it had been a while since the last big snowfall. At this time of year the only birds that high up were Carrion Crows but the landscape was stunningly beautiful (in summer it is the place to search for Himalayan Snowcock).



Thanks to the car we could also visit the lake (above), now almost completely covered with ice. As expected, no Ibisbills to be seen, only a few Mallards in some open water next to the lake proper. Just by the lake, however, we found a pair of **White-browed Tit-Warblers** and some Coal Tits. Note that you cannot walk freely by the lake, it seemed very sensitive to be here and the guards only allowed us to stay in certain places.

A few days later (January 24) we went back to (the beginning of) this road on our own. This time we took a taxi to the best birding spot of the first day, located at 12 km from the lake - you will recognize it by there being a large parking space between the road and the river to the left, and to the right there being a playground for children. After spending a few hours there (same as on our first day) we then walked uphill for some distance, and finished off by walking downhill to the GES-2 hydropower station which is the final stop for bus 28 (and 15 km from the lake). This bus appears to leave quite seldom, but we were lucky,

finding a bus waiting when we arrived. The local people were quite friendly, BTW, so it wouldn't have been a problem to hitch a ride back to town if we had so wished.



Anyway, this spot offered a lot, on both our first and second visits, allowing good views of, among others, **Fire-fronted Serins**, Meadow Buntings (first day only), White-browed Tit-Warblers, **Long-tailed and Red-mantled Rosefinches**, Eversmann's Redstarts, Azure Tits, Black-throated Accentor, Brown and White-throated Dipper, Yellow-billed Choughs, Long-legged Buzzards, **Bearded Vultures/Lammergeiers** (here and a bit higher up the road several times offering excellent views), Cinereous Vultures, and a Hen Harrier (the latter two first day only).

A bit higher up we also encountered Eurasian Nutcrackers and Golden Eagles, as well as further flocks of Fire-fronted Serins, to mention the more interesting species.

Steppe lakelands north of Almaty, with Almaty wastewater canal

On our last day we went out with birdingpal Chris and his driver Pavel, this time going west for a while on the road towards Bishkek before turning north by the Kaskelen (Каскелен) river (towards Nursultan). First, we visited an abandoned quarry by the river, and passed through Shamalgan (Шамалган) before coming to "Thrush Lane", as Chris called it, which really delivered - at least some 50 Black-throated Thrushes! We then arrived at the beginning of the long canal dug for Almaty's treated wastewater (before this point the water flows underground). Since that water is a bit warmer, the canal does not freeze and of course attracts large numbers of birds, such as Little Grebes and the ubiquitous Mallards, and White-tailed Eagles to hunt them. We also saw a Smew, a Great Egret, a Moorhen, and - most surprisingly - a swimming Water Rail in the canal. The canal splits in two and finally ends in a lake (see photo below) which also does not freeze and on our visit held huge amounts of ducks - mostly Mallards, but also Common Shelducks, Gadwalls, Wigeons, Common Pochards, Tufted Ducks, a pair of Red-crested Pochards, as well as one each of Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Shoveler, Ferruginous Duck, and Common Merganser. There were also some forty Mute Swans and fifteen Whooper Swans. Note that this is a trip you probably should not attempt without local knowledge - even we got stuck in a snow drift and had to spend quite some time to free the car.



Apart from the White-tailed Eagles, we also saw many other raptors on this day, notably several excellent sightings of Hen Harriers and Eastern Buzzards, as well as a Merlin. Near the canal we encountered a flock of some fifteen Grey Partridges and driving past farmland we encountered, among other birds, Corn Buntings, Crested Larks, Yellowhammers, and a single Reed Bunting.

Bird list (order follows Clements, version 2019)

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*) About 40 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal north of Almaty:



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Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) 2 in the wastewater canal and about 15 in the lake at the end of it.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) One in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal. Astonishingly, this individual took to swimming like a submarine for a long time, with the neck stretched out and only the upper part of the head and the top of the back visible above the water line, making it look like a muskrat at a distance.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) At least 4 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Northern Shoveler (*Spatula clypeata*) At least one in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Gadwall (*Mareca strepera*) At least 12 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Mareca penelope*) At least 7 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) Seen twice (a flying pair) on the outskirts of Almaty city; 8 by Big Almaty Lake; and hundreds in the wastewater canal and in the lake at the end of it.

Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) One pair in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) At least 6 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Ferruginous Duck (*Aythya nyroca*) One female in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) At least 5 in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Smew (*Mergellus albellus*) One female flying along the wastewater canal.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) One female in the lake at the end of the wastewater canal.

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus mongolicus*) Encountered frequently in the foothills of the mountains and on our steppe lakelands tour.

Gray Partridge (*Perdix perdix robusta*) A flock of about 15 near the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) More than 25 in total in the wastewater canal.

Feral pigeon (*Columba livia var. domestica*) Common, in the city and even more in farmland north of Almaty.

Common Wood-Pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) A flock of about 8 in Kolsay village.

Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) A flock of about 30 in the city (by the Green Market) and about 10 near a farm by the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) One flying across and then swimming in the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) One swimming in the wastewater canal.

Solitary Snipe (*Gallinago solitaria*) One feeding in the Malaya Almatinka River just south of the skating rink in Medeu.

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) One in the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Bearded Vulture / Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*) Probably 5 on our first day along the road to Big Almaty Lake (3 from our favorite birding spot after 3 km, and then 2 higher up) and at the very least 3 on our second day there (we had several encounters at different places along the road).

Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*) 2 at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) One in Shirokaya Schel; two along the road to Big Almaty Lake the first day and one on the second day; one by the Butakovka Turnoff. By Medeu skating rink there were two Kazakhs showing off their Golden Eagles (one each) to tourists.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) One at our favorite birding spot 3 km along the road to Big Almaty Lake, and at least three, likely four, north of Almaty, in the Steppe lakelands.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) One in Shirokaya Schel and one north of Almaty (seen from the car).

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). Common along the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Common (Steppe) Buzzard (*Buteo buteo vulpinus*) Two in Shirokaya Schel and three quite far down along the road to Big Almaty Lake (second day there).

Eastern Buzzard (*Buteo japonicus*) At least two, probably more, in the steppe lakelands north of Almaty

Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus rufinus*) One in Shirokaya Schel, 2 the first day and at least one the second day at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake; and at least 3 in the steppe lakelands north of Almaty.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Picoides major*) One male in the birch forest just above Medeu.

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) 2 each day at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake, plus one further down on the second day. Also one in the steppe lakelands north of Almaty, near the wastewater canal.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) One in the steppe lakelands north of Almaty.

Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica bactriana*) Very common everywhere.

Eurasian Nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*) At least 7 during our first day in Ile-Alatau NP, along the road towards Big Almaty Lake (half way up and higher). Second day there (when we stayed lower), only heard once.

Yellow-billed Chough (*Pyrrhocorax graculus forsythi*) At least 4 at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake the first day and at least 3 the second day. Also at least 10 more the second day after walking some distance up the river.

Eurasian Jackdaw (*Corvus monedula soemmerringi*) A species we paid little attention to but observed on at least one day in a park at the outskirts of the city, and also on our trip north of Almaty (they were particularly common in an abandoned quarry by the Kaskelen River).

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus frugilegus*) A species which seemed common in the city parks, like Panfilov Park. We also noticed them twice when going north, from the car.

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone orientalis*) Very common, especially in nature.

Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix sharpi*) Common near human habitation. Absent in “undisturbed” nature.

Coal Tit (*Parus ater ater*) At least 3 near Big Almaty Lake.

Azure Tit (*Cyanistes cyanus*) Encountered 5 days out of 7, usually in rather small numbers. Best place was the birch forest above Medeu, but also found at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake as well as above and below this spot, when walking from Kolsay village to Dostyk Most, in Kamenskoye Plato. We also saw one north of Almaty on our last day.

Great Tit (*Parus major*) Common everywhere.

Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*) A flock of 5 or 6 seen near a farm close to the wastewater canal.

White-browed Tit-Warbler (*Leptopoecile sophiae sophiae*) Seen (at least 2 individuals) on both visits to our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake, also at least 2 seen by Big Almaty Lake.

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) Two seen (in different places) in Shirokaya Schel (outside of the inhabited area) plus a flock of 4-5 below our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake.

Eurasian Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) One in the birch forest just above Medeu.

Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes tianschanicus*). One outside of Kolsay village, two at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake and one more a short distance higher up (by some picnic tables).

White-throated Dipper (*Cinclus cinclus leucogaster*) One at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake (both days).

Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii tenuirostris*) One at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake (on our first visit only), one in Big Almaty Lake, two along Bolshaya Almatinka River on our second day there (maybe 1-2 km up the road from GES-2 - one of which is seen in the photograph below); and one - surprisingly - in the Bolshaya Almatinka River just south of Al-Farabi Avenue, i.e., where the river is completely controlled and encased in concrete and with people all around. This one was diving and also got a fish which it beat to death on the concrete.



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Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis tristis*) Common near human habitation. A special spectacle was to walk along central Abay Avenue (Проспект Абая) at sunset - lots of Mynas were sitting (invisibly) in the evergreens being extraordinarily noisy and completely dominating the soundscape, despite the intense traffic and all the people walking there.

Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*) In total 3 in Kamenskoye Plato and surroundings, plus one near the beginning of the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Eurasian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*) Common everywhere.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*) One seen in Kamenskoye Plato dacha area.

Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*) One or most likely a few east of Shirokaya Schel dacha area; 5 in Kamenskoye Plato; one along Malaya Almatinka River below Medeu; a flock of 5 maybe 4 km up on the road to Big Almaty Lake; and lots (more than 50) along "Thrush Lane" north of Almaty.

European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) One in Shirokaya Schel; one outside of Kolsay village; and 2 along "Thrush Lane" north of Almaty.

Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus temminckii*) One seen a kilometer or so below Medeu.

Eversmann's / Rufous-backed Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythronotus*) 2-3 the first day at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake. On our second day there we also had three, at different spots along the river (one male above our favorite spot, one female at our favorite spot, and one male far below). Also one female outside of Kolsay village and one male below Medeu.

Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulus*) One flock of maybe 20 in Shirokaya Schel on our first day, and several flocks in and around Kamenskoye Plato dacha area (in total at least 75).

Black-throated Accentor (*Prunella atrogularis*) Four by a dacha on the ridge in Shirokaya Schel; at least one at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake (both days); and one by Big Almaty Lake.

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) A few seen in a tree by a farm near the wastewater canal north of Almaty. These are apparently very common in the city, but we hardly spent any time there in daylight so didn't notice.

Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis transcasicus*) A few seen in a tree by a farm near the wastewater canal.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) Common in Shirokaya Schel and Kamenskoye Plato, as well as on our last day when we observed at least 50 in the farmlands north of Almaty.

Common Chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*) Common in Shirokaya Schel and around Kolsay village, also north of Almaty (especially around "Thrush Lane").

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) Common in Shirokaya Schel, around Kolsay village, and in Kamenskoye Plato (with more than 20 in total); also north of Almaty (especially around "Thrush Lane").

Red-mantled Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rhodochlamys*) 2 on our first day and 2 on our second day at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake; also on male in the birch forest above Medeu.

Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Carpodacus sibiricus sibiricus*) At least 3 at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake (first day) and one pair in Kamenskoye plato (high up on the ridge, in the garden of a dacha).

European Greenfinch (*Chloris chloris turkestanicus*) One by Kensai cemetery; about 8 near “Thrush lane” north of Almaty.

‘Eastern’ Goldfinch (*Carduelis carduelis parapanisi*) Observed all days but our arrival day, both in rural areas and in nature (common in Ile-Alatau NP). We only saw the Central Asian variety.

Fire-fronted / Red-fronted Serin (*Serinus pusillus*) Saw many flocks both days along the road towards Big Almaty Lake. In total at least 30 the first day and more the second day.

Eurasian Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*) Seen both above (at least 3) and below (at least 15) our favorite birding on the road to Big Almaty Lake on our second day there.

Corn Bunting (*Emberiza calandra buturlini*) Several flocks seen in farmed areas north of Almaty.

Meadow Bunting (*Emberiza cioides tarbagataica*) At least 2 seen on our first day at our favorite birding spot after 3 km on the road to Big Almaty Lake.

Yellowhammer (*Emberiza citrinella erythrogenys*) Two seen (separately) in Kolsay village, and in total 6 near farms close to the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Common Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) One seen near a farm close to the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

Mammal list

Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris exalbidus*) Quite common, both near human habitation and in nature. A very cute subspecies!

Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethicus*) One seen briefly in the wastewater canal north of Almaty.

By sofia.brostrom@gmail.com - please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions or comments!