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ATOL 6156

KAZAKHSTAN – May 2007

237 Bird Species recorded

Checklist starts on Page 9

Leaders Steve Bird and Svetlana Annakova

Day 1 Sunday 6th May

We began our journey from London Heathrow, to Amsterdam and then a night flight to Almaty where we arrived early the next day.

Day 2 Monday 7th May

After our early arrival in Kazakhstan's capital, Almaty, we made our way slowly through immigration, collected our luggage and then met up with our local guide Svetlana. After a quick breakfast we drove out of town through a low fog, and started seeing our first birds of the tour which included, **Common Mynas**, **House Sparrows**, **European Rollers** lining the telegraph wires and a group of 500 plus very smart **Rosy Starlings**. Our next impromptu stop was for a **Common Starling** of the race *poltaratskyi* that looks a lot like a Spotless. Also here were **Calandra** and **Crested Larks** on the road, a male **Red-headed Bunting**, **Tree Sparrows**, **Rooks** and a couple of **European Hoopoes**. As we continued through the flat grassland type habitat we saw **Hobby**, **Common Kestrel** and a **Long-legged Buzzard**. Next along was a group of **European Bee-eaters** sat on some wires and some **Barn Swallows**. We then arrived at the first of many attractive looking lakes which were scattered amongst this stark, barren grassy habitat. Birds were everywhere and included several singing **Red-headed Buntings**, while the open water held, **Great Crested Grebes**, **Mallard**, lots of attractive **Garganey** and countless **Red-crested Pochard**, plus **Dalmatian Pelican**, **Black** and **White-winged Terns**. Scanning along the shoreline with our scopes we found **Black-winged Stilt**, **Avocet**, **Northern Lapwing**, **Caspian Gulls**, **Little Ringed Plover** and **Temminck's Stint**. Many of these species were soon to become a common sight on any and every lake that we looked at. Along the road our first **Oriental Turtle Dove** began to train our thoughts on the differences between this and its European cousin, while a **Yellow Souslik**, a small marmot look alike, stared at us from beside his burrow. In a small patch of trees we got to scope a pair of **Shikras** while several **Hume's Leaf Warblers** sang and were briefly seen by a few of us flitting through the canopy. A stop was then made for two **White-tailed Eagles** flying together low over the endless plains. The next pond we stopped at held about twenty breeding plumaged **Black-necked Grebes**, plus nesting **Black Terns**, good numbers of **Great Reed Warblers**, and we also saw two **Hobby's** and some **Common Terns**. As we continued on, both **Calandra Lark** and **Red-headed Buntings** became abundant, and then we got out to look at a **Horsefield's Tortoise** which almost got run over by the bus. New species on the next pond included a lone **Ferruginous Duck**, several **Common Shelduck** and a **White Wagtail**. Climbing onto a small hill to overlook our next ponds we found several **Caspian Reed Warblers**, a **Common Cuckoo** was heard and then seen, and Svetlana spotted the first of two **Little Bitterns** climbing their way up the reed stems. A **Black-crowned Night Heron** perched in a distant Tamarisk and a closer family of **Siberian Stonechats** were seen. As the weather warmed up and the Tien Shan Mountains became clearer, we added a **Western Marsh Harrier** and some flying **Brown-necked Ravens**. A **Common Kingfisher** sat low in the reeds and we noted several species of unidentified butterfly and what looked like a **Black-**

tailed Skimmer dragonfly. I lost count of how many ponds we had looked at now, but the next one held a group of breeding plumaged **Black-tailed Godwits**, some **Greenshank** and a its smaller relative the **Marsh Sandpiper**. We then had our picnic lunch where we could view a colony of **Dalmatian Pelicans**, and where we later saw a fairly close **Great White Pelican**. Eventually leaving this Lake District we noted a flock of **Western Jackdaws** of the distinctive race with their paler neck collar, before driving a fair distance on a long, straight and bumpy road, until we came to a tree! the only tree for miles! Here we spotted **Pied Wheatears**, **Isabelline Wheatear**, **Ortolan Bunting**, **Spotted Flycatcher**, **Greenish Warbler**, a distant **Lesser Grey Shrike** and both **Little Ringed Plover** and **Shikra** flew around. Our next stop at a small well, found us a group of **Oriental Turtle Doves**, several **Collared Doves** and a single **European Turtle Dove**. By the water we found a nice male **Citrine Wagtail**, **Grey Wagtails** and a **White Wagtail**. Several **Temminck's Stint** were noted and just as we were about to leave we saw a couple of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** fly in. Moving on to our desert camp we had a last look at a 'well' where we found a fantastic selection of wagtails including **White**, **Masked** and *ocularis*, and amongst the yellow wagtail races were *thunbergi*, *flavissima* look alike, and a **White-headed**. A **Greater Sandplover** flew in as did some smart looking **Rock Doves**, and two brief **Desert Finches**, **Tawny Pipit**, and **Greater Short-toed Lark**. We then drove back to our camp which consisted of comfortable round yurts, a dining tent and shower tent. With a great evening meal cooked for us this saw the end to a great first day.

Day 3 Tuesday 8th May

Waking up in the desert to the sound of larks singing all around us, we had a pre-breakfast walk in search of **MacQueen's Bustard**. It was rather misty and we could not see as far as we would have liked. A few **Ortolan Buntings** flew around and Steve H picked up a **Wood Sandpiper** flying over calling. The mist had hampered our search so we returned for breakfast before setting off on our 4x4 bus for a morning searching the endless grassy steppe. Our first stop beside the 'well' proved to be well timed and we watched many **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** flying around and eventually coming down and landing in a group where we had excellent views. Beside the water was a **Collared Pratincole**, **Black-winged Stilt**, **Temminck's Stint** and **Green Sandpiper** plus a single breeding plumaged **Curlew Sandpiper**. Three **Mongolian Finches** flew in with one remaining visible for a short time allowing just a few people a brief view in the scope before flying off. We then had three **Demoiselle Cranes** fly overhead, after which we decided to continue our morning drive. A stop was made for a couple of **Greater Sandplovers** and just as we were about to leave from watching these a **MacQueen's Bustard** was seen flying low across the grassland allowing fabulous views. Our search continued and we found **Northern Wheatear** and a few more **Greater Sandplover** amongst the ever present selection of **Calandra** and **Greater Short-toed Larks**. A female **Montagu's Harrier** flew past us and in an area of taller scrub we saw a very smart **Steppe Shrike**. Several **Common Swifts** drifted past and Svetlana spotted a **Common Quail** which we got out and managed to all see flying off. Over the next hour we saw another five **MacQueen's Bustards** including a pair with the female being followed by a couple of chicks. Finally just as we were about to turn around and head back for lunch a last scan had Jean spot a very close female **Caspian Plover** which had just come off a nest beside the road. After enjoying fabulous views of this bird we returned to camp for lunch. A short break after was followed by a re-visit to the 'well' where we all got superb views of a breeding plumaged **Red-throated Pipit**, which Steve B had found a little earlier. This represents a rare bird for Kazakhstan. We then set off on a long bumpy drive where we saw lots of **Long-legged Buzzards**, a **Lesser Grey Shrike**, and along the very poorly repaired road several **Bimaculated Larks** and up to 9 **White-winged Larks**. Eventually we arrived at our site where the weather had come in cold and was beginning to rain. A brief walk to a section of rock and it wasn't long before we were all watching an **Eastern Rock Nuthatch** posing from the top of a rock and allowing excellent views. A **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush** was then found before we returned to the vehicles and set off on the bumpy journey back towards camp. Our finale to the day was 24 **European Rollers** sat together on a telegraph wire – amazing!

Day 4 Wednesday 9th May

Today we had an early breakfast and once again were serenaded by the sounds of numerous larks singing, after which we loaded the bus and set off on our long day through the desert and back to Almaty. We made many roadside stops in the perfect morning light and got superb views of **Turkestan Shrikes, Lesser Whitethroats, Siberian Stonechat** and some **Bimaculated Larks**. A pair of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** and a **Brown-necked Raven** flew over and then we got fantastic close views of an **Asian Desert Warbler** and the first of many **Syke's Warblers**. Beside some ponds we saw **Yellow Wagtails** of the black-headed *feldegg* race, brief views of **Reed Buntings, Caspian Reed Warblers, Common Cuckoos, 4 Shikras**, a **Hobby** and a **Short-toed Eagle**. Several other lakes held **Ferruginous Ducks** and we got to see our first pair of **Azure Tits** flitting around in the lakeside willows. Our next stop produced a **Turkestan Tit**, plus **Siberian Chiffchaff** and a **White-winged Woodpecker** which was scoped by all. A **Citrine Wagtail** showed well sat on a post, and then we continued onto our picnic ground where we not only had our picnic lunch we also saw a few good birds. More **Turkestan Tits** showed well, as did several **White-winged Woodpeckers, Spotted Flycatchers, Common Redstart** and up to 6 **Yellow-eyed Stock Doves** including two that perched beside a nest hole. A quick search nearby found us an **Azure Tit**, and a **Booted Eagle** that flew overhead. We then drove on to our next site which produced superb views of nesting Sexual Sparrows, plus **Turkestan Shrike, Pied Wheatear** and **Lesser Whitethroats**. It was time to move on as we had a long drive to get to Almaty. Passing through endless and vast steppe grassland we eventually arrived in time to settle in to our hotel and have dinner.

Day 5 Thursday 10th May

This morning after an early breakfast we set off towards the desert. Along the way we stopped to get a look at the local race of **Common Woodpigeon** with its pinkish neck collar, and as we walked back to the vehicle a **White-crowned Penduline Tit** was heard calling and then found building its hanging nest. We all had superb views of both the male and female. Moving on we stopped again and found another two penduline tits, before continuing on to a small rocky gorge. It was a little windy here but we did find a **Chukar** sat on the cliff top, nearby a male **Blue Rock Thrush** was spotted, along with **Pied Wheatear, Eurasian Sparrowhawk** and lots of **Black-veined White** butterflies. Moving on to another gorge we were soon watching a gorgeous **White-capped Bunting**, as well as **Hume's Leaf Warblers, a Rock Bunting** and a **Golden Eagle** that flew over. Another stop for a flock of **Jackdaws** found us another **Rock Bunting** and we also got to see a **Himalayan Griffon Vulture**. Further on at our picnic site we got superb views of several **Grey-necked Buntings**, two tame **Rock Sparrows** and an **Isabelline Wheatear** going to and fro from its nest in a burrow. After a wonderful lunch break we moved on to another site overlooking a river in a deep gorge. Here we saw **Common Sandpipers, a Black-eared Kite** sat on the cliff, and then two **Isabelline Shrikes** and a superb **Barred Warbler** which gave us prolonged views right out in the open. Yet another brief stop produced **Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush, Hume's Leaf Warbler, Grey-necked Bunting** and a low flying **Long-legged Buzzard**. As we made our way across the barren open desert we saw several **Lesser Kestrels** and a few **Common Kestrels**, with a stop later for a second year **Steppe Eagle**. Our final site of the day was a 'well', and along the approach track we saw a **Shore Lark**, before walking to a small hill which overlooked a couple of wet and muddy pools. Here we settled ourselves down for a long wait to see what would come in. The highlight was a constant stream of **Mongolian Finches** with an estimate of over fifty seen, including some stunning males. We also got **Linnet, Isabelline Wheatear** and some **Indian House Sparrows**. As we made our way back towards our hotel we spotted both **Shore Lark** and **Greater Short-toed Lark**.

Day 6 Friday 11th May

Some of us took a look around the hotel in the morning before breakfast and saw a few things such as **Blackbird, Greenfinch** and **House Martins**. After breakfast we loaded the bus and set off, through the town where we made a brief stop and found another **Greenfinch** and a **Grey-headed Goldfinch** which promptly disappeared before most could get onto it. A couple of **Laughing Doves** were found and two **Oriental Turtle Doves**. As we drove out of town and passed huge arable fields Dave spotted two **Demoiselle Cranes** which we got out and had wonderful scope views of. Also

here were a couple of **Lesser Grey Shrikes**. Moving on we arrived at our 'well', and what perfect timing. Keeping concealed beside a bush we waited just five minutes before seeing **Desert Finch** and **Spanish Sparrow**, and then our target species of two fabulous **Pallas's Sandgrouse** which flew in and amazingly landed in front of us allowing the best views imaginable. They stayed for 10 minutes allowing us lots of time to study all their intricate plumage. Small groups of **Black-bellied Sandgrouse** also flew in and then we heard and tried to track down a **Rufous Bush-Robin**. We eventually got good to reasonable views of at least one of the two birds that were singing from thick bushes. Continuing on we saw a male **Montagu's Harrier** shortly followed by a nesting pair of **Desert Wheatears**. From here we drove quite a distance to the gorges that we had a look at yesterday. Settling ourselves down by the first one we almost immediately spotted an adult **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, which gave fabulous views as it cruised around the near hillside, eventually going into a gorge where it was preparing a nest. A couple of **Hume's Lesser Whitethroats** were seen, while three **Himalayan Griffon Vultures** flew overhead and Dave found us a perched **Chukar**, much appreciated by Roy. We then drove a short distance to a picnic site where we set up under some trees. All around us were hundreds of **Black-veined White** butterflies and we also saw **Orange Tip**, a **Glider** species and several others. In the trees a **Great Tit** and **Hume's Leaf Warbler** were calling and we saw a **Shikra**, another **Eastern Imperial** and what looked like a **Golden Eagle**. It was a bit of a drive to our next site where we watched a colony of **Plain Sand Martin's**, nesting in some sand banks as well as **European Bee-eaters** and a couple of **Rollers**. With a long drive back to Almaty we set off and drove through a few villages until we stopped to look at a close **White-winged Woodpecker** and in so doing we also found **Azure Tit** and a **Grey-crowned Goldfinch**. We continued our journey through endless open countryside until we reached the city where we battled through the traffic until we arrived at our hotel.

Day 7 Saturday 12^h May

After an early morning breakfast we loaded our amazing 4x4 bus and set off towards the Tien Shan Mountains. Once out of the city we wound our way into gorgeous scenery backed by stunning views of the snow-capped peaks. Our first stop beside a small stream soon produced a **Brown Dipper** which gave excellent views perched on a rock, doing what Dippers do best – 'Dip'! Roger also spotted a **White-throated Dipper**, before we made our way higher into the mountains. On some of the large boulders that lined the stream we found three **Blue Whistling Thrushes** and then two more **White-throated Dippers** of the race *leucogaster* with a completely white belly. The occasional **Mistle Thrush** was seen before we got to a section of lightly forested hillside where we were soon watching a pair of **Songar Tits** excavating a nest hole in a broken off tree stump. Nearby we walked a little and soon found a pair of **Blue-capped Redstarts**, several **Red-fronted Serins**, **Goldcrest**, **Hume's Leaf Warblers** and would you believe it another pair of **Songar Tits** going in and out of a nest hole. Further along the bumpy road we reached the Great Almaty Lake and from several different vantage points we scanned for the much sought after **Ibisbill**. **Ruddy Shelducks** and a **Common Sandpiper** were all we found plus three **White-winged Grosbeaks** in a bush. Returning back to the bus Dave announced that he had found an **Ibisbill** some 300 miles away! Amazingly he had, and we all strained with different scopes and eye-pieces to see as much as we could of this enigmatic bird. Vowing to return we then drove the short distance to the observatory where we were to spend the next two nights. We unpacked and had lunch, followed by a short siesta which some of us ignored and went birding around the vicinity of the buildings. It was a beautiful sunny day and very quiet, but myself, Roy and Dave got to see an **Eversmann's Redstart** sat on top of a spruce tree, found again by sharp-eyed Dave, who had now earned himself a few free beers for the night. With siesta time over we all met beside the bus and then drove to a hillside where we set about searching for a few specialities of this area. First up was a beautiful **White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroat** singing in all its glory from the top of a bush. There were lots of **Hume's Leaf Warblers** around then a couple of us got scope views of a fantastic **White-browed (Severtzov's) Tit-Warbler**, before it took off and flew across the hillside. We tried in vain to relocate it but had to concede defeat, and instead watched **Black-throated Accentor** and more **rubythroats**. A little further along in a small gully we spotted a male **Red-mantled Rosefinch**, as well as two more **Black-throated Accentors** and a **Pika**, and we could hear **Sulphur-bellied**

Warbler but it never showed before the rain started and we retreated to the bus. Well it was too early to return to our rooms so most of us decided to brave the very light rain and walk back. It was very quiet, but what a difference a single bird can make, and after hearing a high pitched call coming from a low bush we were all stunned and delighted to see a **White-browed (Severtzov's) Tit-Warbler** come out and show itself on top of a bush just a short distance away. We followed the bird and got the most amazing close views of the stunning skulker as it constantly came to the top of the bushes and sat right out in the open – Woo Hoo! On a high after this sighting we returned to our rooms, and later enjoyed a very nice dinner.

Day 8 Sunday 13th May

This morning we awoke to find we were now in a picture postcard scene as everywhere was covered in 2 or 3 inches of snow. After breakfast we boarded our bus and set off up the winding road towards a higher observatory/weather station. We hadn't gone far when we spotted a few **Water Pipits** on the road as well as several **Plain Mountain-Finches**. Continuing on we eventually arrived at a little village, under a bright blue sky, and no wind. Just perfect! Scanning the snow covered boulders we found a **Pika**, a small cute looking rodent, after which we walked into the village and soon located **Red-billed** and **Yellow-billed Choughs**, and our first **Brown Accentor** soon followed by a gorgeous male **Guldenstadt's Redstart** which glowed in the morning light. We then found the female and as we were enjoying these, Dave had already scanned the hillside and let out a triumphant roar as he found two **Himalayan Snowcock** feeding on the snow covered bank just over 500 yards away. A lot of excitement ensued as zoom lenses were put on scopes and these highly prized birds enjoyed. We then walked to the end of the village so as to get a closer view, passing a close singing **Brown Accentor** and seeing an inquisitive **Stoat** along the way. We could now see all the details on the **snowcock** and were delighted with such good views of a bird normally just a dot on a distant hill. As we made our way back towards the bus we saw another male **Guldenstadt's Redstart** and then right beside the track in front of us was an **Altai Accentor**, which was shortly joined by another three, allowing fantastic close views. Well that meant we had cleaned up on our high altitude species so we then drove back to our lodgings stopping to look through a flock of between 100 and 200 **Plain Mountain Finches** which all took off as a **Merlin** dashed through. Back at base we had a celebratory cup of tea and some biscuits. With an hour before lunch we took a short walk and quickly found a superb male **Eversmann's Redstart** which everyone enjoyed very good views of. After lunch and a short break the bus drove most of the group down to the dam, while a few of the group had left earlier and walked. On the walk down a few species including a very brief **White-browed Tit-Warbler**, and **White-winged Grosbeak** were seen. Across the dam we walked a short distance and saw another male **Eversmann's Redstart**, before setting ourselves down and scanning the river delta at the back of the lake. After a long while we conceded that with all the Sunday walkers out, that the **Ibisbill** must have moved of up river because of this disturbance. We walked around a little more and watched a **White-winged Grosbeak** feeding out in the open and a **Merlin** flying around and perching briefly on a tree top. Slowly making our way back we then returned to the observatory.

Day 9 Monday 14th May

Having just about cleaned up on all the high altitude species, we had a later than normal breakfast. Afterwards we went out and drove to a small valley where we soon added an amazing **Sulphur-bellied Warbler**, to our lists. One particular bird came very close and allowed us to scrutinise all its features. Also here were **White-tailed (Himalayan) Rubythroats**, **Hume's Leaf Warblers** and then a superb **Lammergeier** which flew low in front of the hillside allowing plenty of time to enjoy this king of raptors. Further down we had **Water Pipits**, **Brown** and **Black-throated Accentors**, some close **White-winged Grosbeaks** gave us our best ever views, while a **Common Raven** flew past, a group of **Red-fronted Serins** flew over, and a **Stoat** gave us a real showing as we made squeaking noises to attract it. Returning back we found a showy **Greenish Warbler** and brief views of another pair of **White-browed Tit-Warblers**. Back at the observatory we had our lunch and then packed our bags ready to leave. Heading downhill we made a stop in suitable habitat for **Spotted Nutcracker**, but this was unsuccessful, although we did manage to hear them. At another site we

spent 45 minutes before we eventually got views of two **Spotted Nutcrackers** flying around the top of the hillside. A complete surprise was a **Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker** that flew in front of us and started digging chunks out of a tree. It remained on this tree right in front of us and was totally unconcerned by our close proximity. Reluctantly leaving this idyllic landscape we made our way down the mountain and to our hotel in Almaty. Several of us decided the birding must continue and although the hotel gardens did not look particularly attractive we would try all the same. We soon found **Tree Sparrows**, **Common Myna**, **Great Tit**, and then skulking under a bush we spotted a female **Black-throated Thrush**, which then flew up into a tree and gave fantastic views. To finish off we found a very showy **Common Grasshopper Warbler** reeling from an open bush.

Day 10 Tuesday 15th May

We had a very early start to get to the airport for our flight to Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan. On arrival we were met by our bus and driving out of the airport we soon found several **Red-footed Falcons** sat along the roadside telephone wires. It wasn't long before we were out of town and crossing endless flat farmland. We saw **Hooded Crows**, **Ruff**, **Western Marsh Harrier**, lots of **Common Kestrels** and a **Demoiselle Crane**. The farmland changed to open grassland and marshes where our first of the days twenty **Pallid Harriers** was well watched. In the same area we found a **Common Crane**, several **Yellow Wagtails** and a singing **Skylark**. Our next stop was for the much sought after **Black Lark**, which was to prove extremely common in the steppes where we were going to stay. **White-winged Terns** started to be seen in large flocks hawking for insects over any body of water that we passed, and then we came to a stop over some flat grassy fields where we soon located 11 **Sociable Lapwings**. We enjoyed great scope views of this endangered species, seeing males, females, and birds flying around. Moving on we saw more **Pallid Harriers**, **Western Marsh Harriers**, **Black-eared Kites** and a **Steppe Eagle**, as well as six **Demoiselle Cranes** flying past. With so many birds to stop for it seemed like we would never reach our destination! The following numerous roadside stops produced **Whooper Swans**, **Montagu's Harrier**, lots of **Yellow Wagtails** of the race *beema* (Syke's), **Graylag Geese** and seven **Greater White-fronted Geese**. We then passed two very close **Demoiselle Cranes**, some **Slender-billed Gulls**, **Caspian Tern** and hundreds of **Ruff** in all colours and guises. We eventually arrived at our ideally situated accommodation which although basic, still had comfortable rooms and a very nice dining area. After lunch we set off into the reserve where we passed close by several **Ferruginous Duck** and a beautiful breeding plumage **Red-necked Grebe** right beside the road. Crossing the grassland we saw numerous **Black Larks**, plus some very showy **White-winged Larks** that were watched displaying. Stopping beside a lake we had close looks at a colony of **Black-winged Pratincoles**, and nearby there was **Kentish** and **Little Ringed Plovers**, **Marsh** and breeding plumage **Curlew Sandpipers**, **Slender-billed Gulls**, **Caspian** and **Common Tern**, plus two **Black-necked Grebes**. Driving to another area of the lake we watched more **pratincoles**, and a very nice **Terek Sandpiper** and two groups of **Red-necked Phalaropes** that totalled 58 birds. Moving on we stopped alongside another lake and got excellent views of four **Pallas's Gulls**, two **Dalmatian Pelicans**, summer plumaged **Dunlin** and up to five **Terek Sandpipers**. As we slowly returned we found a **Merlin**, and finally a very showy **Booted Warbler** and a very bright **Bluethroat**, which ended a very rewarding and very long day.

Day 11 Wednesday 16th May

Some of us this morning took a pre breakfast walk around the nearby reeds and scrub. We found several **Citrine Wagtails** and a **Reed Bunting**, but were more tuned into the sounds of both **Common Grasshopper** and **Savi's Warbler** reeling their songs out. Concentrating on the **Savi's Warbler** we eventually found it and got reasonably good scope views as it perched in the reeds with its head going from side to side. A couple of **Caspian Reed Warblers** were also present and in a patch of scrubby bushes we found **Lesser Whitethroat** and several **Greenish Warblers**. Steve H had been watching a small garden that belonged to Alex our local guide, and on joining him we were amazed at the variety and close views of birds in this tiny oasis of bushes. **Blyth's Reed**, **Willow** and **Greenish Warblers**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Spotted Flycatchers**, **Common Rosefinches** and a male **Red-backed Shrike** all showed very well. After breakfast we set off

towards a set of reed fringed lakes. It was a little breezy today and on our arrival we settled down and scanned the first lake soon finding our target species with a count of 39 **White-headed Ducks**. Amongst the many grebe species were up to 20 **Red-necked**, plus several **Great Crested**, 4 **Slavonian** and two **Black-necked Grebes**. Countless **Western Marsh Harriers** quartered the reed beds and by the end of the day we had estimated seeing some 75 individual birds. A few ghostly **Pallid Harriers** gave excellent views and in the reeds we managed to locate singing **Savi's**, **Caspian Reed** and **Sedge Warbler**, while a **Moustached Warbler** was heard and eventually a **Paddyfield Warbler** was seen well. Finally we spotted a pair of **Bearded Tits** flitting though the tops and flying away. Returning for lunch we met up with Steve H who had stayed behind and studied the migrant warblers at close range in Alex's garden. In the afternoon we set off across open grassland towards a distant group of lakes. Our first quarry however was to find **Twite** of the subspecies locally known as **Steppe Twite**. This we did and managed good views of 5 birds. There were plenty of **Black Larks** to distract us before we arrived at a high plateau overlooking two huge lakes. From our high vantage point we scanned the whole area soon finding **Grey Plover** and **Whimbrel** close by. Through the scopes it became apparent that we were to be witness to two species on mass migration. Across the entire length of one lake and covering every bit of open water were **Red-necked Phalaropes**, and I have estimated 10,000 birds but in reality it was impossible to count and there could have been 10x this. The 200 **Greater Flamingos** fell into insignificance as the numbers of **Ruff** were simply unprecedented. Again a guesstimate was 20,000 but imagine trying to count a swarm of mosquitoes over a marsh it was as impossible as that. The sheer spectacle of so many birds and in just one small area of this immense steppe land just defies belief, but was an avian event never to be forgotten. Moving on to another lake we found several **Common Gulls** and a group **Slender-billed Gulls**. With the evening light giving us perfect viewing conditions we returned to a small pool we had passed earlier. Scanning this pool which was full of wading birds allowed some the nicest views imaginable. There were plenty of **Ruff** in all shapes and colours, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Common Ringed Plover**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, **Terek Sandpiper**, both **Little** and **Temminck's Stint**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, and overhead **Little Terns** and a **Merlin**. With one last site to check we returned to our base and then drove just a short distance to a lake fringed with many reed beds. Here we eventually found two summer plumaged **Black-throated Divers** and yet again more **Ruff** with a flock of a 1,000 birds flying around us and settling in the grassy fields. What another excellent day this was!

Day 12 Thursday 17th May

Our early morning look around Alex's garden produced exceptionally good close views of **Blyth's Reed Warbler**, **Booted Warbler**, lots of **Greenish Warblers**, eight **Common Rosefinch**, **Bluethroat**, **Common Whitethroat**, **Lesser Whitethroat** and a male **Red-backed Shrike**. Down by the reed-bed were **Savi's** and **Grasshopper Warbler** plus hundreds of **Yellow Wagtails** which seemed to consist of the races **Beema** and **Thunbergi**. With breakfast over and our bags packed we set off towards Astana. Along the way we made brief stops for **Pallid Harrier** and **Demoiselle Crane**. Closer to Astana we found a **Common Buzzard** before entering the city, driving through and then going to an area of arable fields and scattered bushes where we located a gorgeous male **Pine Bunting** and another less well marked bird. Both of which gave fantastic views and were a fitting end to our tour. We continued on to our lunch stop and then onto the airport for our early evening flight back to Almaty. At the airport we said our goodbyes to Svetlana who had been our excellent and most professional and knowledgeable guide. We all learnt so much, although remembering all the many races of birds that occur here will tax the brain for some time to come.

Day 13 Friday 18th May

Departing Almaty on our early flight we arrived back in the U.K in the early evening ending a fantastic tour to a beautifully scenic and bird rich country.

Many thanks must go to Svetlana who's knowledge and understanding of her country's birdlife is outstanding, and to her ground crews who were attentive and excellent in every way ensuring a trouble free tour.

I would also like to thank all the participants of this tour for making it such a pleasure to lead.

Steve Bird

Checklist starts on next page -

BIRDLIST FOR KAZAKHSTAN 7th MAY – 12th MAY - 2007

SPECIES	<i>Scientific Name</i>	No of birding days out of 11 recorded	Highest daily count C.= Common LC = Locally Common H or h.= Heard only N/C.= No count	
1.	Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>	1	2
2.	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	2	2
3.	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	2	20
4.	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	4	50
5.	Slavonian Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>	1	4
6.	Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	3	30
7.	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	1	1
8.	Dalmatian Pelican	<i>Pelecanus crispus</i>	3	60
9.	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	3	70
10.	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	5	20
11.	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	4	20
12.	Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	1	3
13.	Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1	3
	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	2	H
14.	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	1	200
15.	Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	1	4
16.	Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>	2	6
17.	Greylag Goose	<i>Anser anser</i>	2	30
18.	Greater White-fronted Goose	<i>Anser erythropus</i>	1	7
19.	Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	6	20
20.	Common Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	3	30
21.	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	2	6
22.	Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	4	30
23.	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1	4
24.	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	2	L/C
25.	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	2	4
26.	Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	4	80
27.	Northern Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	3	20
28.	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	4	100
29.	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	3	20
30.	Ferruginous Pochard	<i>Aythya nyroca</i>	3	8
31.	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	3	10
32.	White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	1	30
33.	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1	1
34.	Black-eared Kite	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	6	100
35.	White-tailed Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	1	2
36.	Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	1	1
37.	Himalayan Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	2	12
38.	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1	1
39.	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	3	75
40.	Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>	2	25
41.	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	4	1

42.	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	3	7
43.	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	2	3
44.	Eurasian Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	1	1
45.	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	6	8
46.	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	4	2
47.	Eastern Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	1	2
48.	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	1	1
49.	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	1	1
50.	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	2	10
51.	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	9	30
52.	Red-footed Falcon	<i>Falco vespertinus</i>	1	8
53.	Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius pallidus</i>	3	2
54.	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	3	3
55.	Black Grouse	<i>Tetrao tetrix</i>	1	1
56.	Himalayan Snowcock	<i>Tetraogallus himalayensis</i>	3	2+H
57.	Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	2	1
58.	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	3	2
59.	Demoiselle Crane	<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	4	11
60.	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	2	2
61.	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	3	L/C
62.	Common Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	4	L/C
63.	Macqueen's Bustard	<i>Chlamydotis macqueenii</i>	1	8
64.	Ibisbill	<i>Ibidorhyncha struthersii</i>	1	1
65.	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	5	40
66.	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	3	10
67.	Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	1	1
68.	Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	2	60
69.	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	4	20
70.	Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>	1	11
71.	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	1	12
72.	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	3	20
73.	Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	1	1
74.	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	2	6
75.	Greater Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	2	6
76.	Caspian Plover	<i>Charadrius asiaticus</i>	1	1
77.	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	3	20
78.	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	2	20
79.	Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>	1	1
80.	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>	3	N/C
81.	Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>	3	25
82.	Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	3	5
83.	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	15
84.	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	3	6
85.	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	3	50
86.	Terek Sandpiper	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	2	6
87.	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	4	6
88.	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	2	20
89.	Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>	4	20+
90.	Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	3	4
91.	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	2	3
92.	Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	2	20.000+

93.	Red-necked Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	2	10.000+
94.	Common Gull	<i>Larus canus heinei</i>	1	3
95.	Caspian Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans</i>	1	50
	Steppe Gull	<i>Larus cachinnans barabensis</i>	2	40
96.	Pallas's Gull	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	2	7
97.	Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	5	100
98.	Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	2	150
99.	Little Gull	<i>Larus minutus</i>	1	2
100.	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	3	4
101.	Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	2	4
102.	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	4	20
103.	Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	1	2
104.	White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	5	1.000+
105.	Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	2	N/C
106.	Pallas's Sandgrouse	<i>Syrrhaptes paradoxus</i>	1	2
107.	Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	4	100+
108.	Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	4	8
109.	Stock Dove	<i>Columba oenas</i>	1	2
110.	Yellow-eyed Stock Dove	<i>Columba eversmanni</i>	1	6
111.	Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	3	4
112.	European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>	2	1
113.	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	6	20
114.	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	5	4
115.	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	1	2
116.	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	9	6
117.	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	3	12
118.	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1	1
119.	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	5	30
120.	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	5	40+
121.	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	6	10
122.	White-winged Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucopterus</i>	2	2
123.	Three-toed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	1	1
124.	Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	3	100+
125.	Bimaculated Lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i>	2	10
126.	White-winged Lark	<i>Melanocorypha leucoptera</i>	3	12
127.	Black Lark	<i>Melanocorypha yeltoniensis</i>	2	80+
128.	Greater Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla longipennis</i>	5	8
129.	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	2	4
130.	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	2	10
131.	Horned Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris albigula</i>	1	N/C
132.	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	3	30
133.	Pale Martin	<i>Riparia riparia diluta</i>	1	20
134.	Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Hirundo rupestris</i>	1	4
135.	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	9	C
136.	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica rufula</i>	2	6
137.	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	4	6
138.	Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	4	2
139.	Red-throated Pipit	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>	1	1
140.	Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	1	1
141.	Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta blakistoni</i>	3	20
142.	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	3	2

143.	Masked Wagtail	<i>Motacilla personata</i>	5	1
144.	East Siberian Wagtail	<i>Motacilla ocularis</i>	1	1
145.	White-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla leucocephala</i>	1	1
146.	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola werae</i>	4	4
147.	Grey-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla thunbergii</i>	4	1.000+
148.	Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla feldegg</i>	2	4
149.	Sykes's Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava beema</i>	3	2.000+
150.	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea melanope</i>	4	4
151.	Brown Dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii tenuirostris</i>	1	2
152.	Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes dauricus</i>	3	2
153.	Altai Accentor	<i>Prunella himalayana</i>	1	4
154.	Brown Accentor	<i>Prunella fulvescens</i>	2	3
155.	Black-throated Accentor	<i>Prunella atrogularis</i>	3	4
	Common Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos Hafizi</i>	3	H
156.	White-tailed Rubythroat	<i>Luscinia pectoralis</i>	3	4
157.	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	1	1
158.	Rufous Bush Robin	<i>Cercotrichas galactotes</i>	1	2
159.	Eversmann's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythronotus</i>	3	3
160.	Blue-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus</i>	1	3
161.	Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	4	2
162.	Guldenstadt's Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus erythrogaster grandis</i>	1	3
163.	Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	4	35+
164.	Pied Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i>	5	4
165.	Desert Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	1	2
166.	Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	5	18
167.	Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata maura</i>	5	3
168.	Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	3	2
169.	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	2	1
170.	Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	3	6
171.	Dark-throated Thrush	<i>Turdus ruficollis atrogularis</i>	1	1
172.	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus bonapartei</i>	3	2
173.	Blue Whistling Thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus temminckii</i>	1	4
	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	1	H
174.	Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Locustella naevia</i>	3	1
175.	Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	1	2
	Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	1	H
176.	Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaemus</i>	1	1
177.	Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	1	2
178.	Caspian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus</i>	3	4
179.	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	2	3+h
180.	Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	1	10+
181.	Booted Warbler	<i>Hippolais caligata</i>	2	4
182.	Sykes' Warbler	<i>Hippolais rama</i>	2	12
183.	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1	3
184.	Siberian Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita tristis</i>	2	3
185.	Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>	1	6
186.	Hume's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus humei</i>	5	6
187.	Greenish Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	3	7
188.	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis rubicola</i>	2	1
189.	Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca halimodendri</i>	2	10
190.	Hume's Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca althaea</i>	1	2

191.	Barred Warbler	<i>Sylvia nisoria</i>	1	1
192.	White-browed Tit-Warbler	<i>Leptopoeecile sophiae</i>	3	2
193.	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	1	1
194.	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	5	10
195.	Songar Tit	<i>Parus songarus</i>	1	4
196.	Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater rufipectus</i>	3	2
197.	Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	4	1
198.	Turkestan Tit	<i>Parus bokharensis</i>	1	8
199.	Azure Tit	<i>Cyanistes cyanus</i>	2	4
200.	Bearded Reedling	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	1	2
201.	Eastern Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta tephronota</i>	1	1
202.	White-crowned Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz coronatus</i>	2	3+h
203.	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	2	2
204.	Turkestan (Isabelline) Shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>	5	30
205.	Steppe Shrike	<i>Lanius pallidirostris</i>	1	2
206.	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor turanicus</i>	4	3
207.	Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	8	N/C
208.	Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	2	2+h
209.	Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax centralis</i>	1	6
210.	Yellow-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus graculus</i>	1	8
211.	Eastern Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula sommerringii</i>	6	50
212.	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	7	N/C
213.	Oriental Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>	8	8
214.	Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus cornix</i>	2	50
215.	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	2	1+h
216.	Brown-necked Raven	<i>Corvus ruficollis</i>	3	4
217.	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	7	N/C
218.	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	4	5.000+
219.	European Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris poltaratskyi</i>	5	10
220.	Saxaul Sparrow	<i>Passer ammodendri</i>	1	6
221.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	7	N/C
	Indian House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus bactrianus</i>	4	5
222.	Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	2	1
223.	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	6	10
224.	Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	1	4
225.	Eurasian Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	1	4
226.	Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	1	5
227.	European Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis chloris turkestanika</i>	2	4
228.	Grey-crowned Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis caniceps</i>	4	3
229.	Red-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	3	4
230.	White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>	3	4
231.	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	2	5
232.	Red-mantled Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rhodochlamys</i>	2	3
233.	Mongolian Finch	<i>Bucanetes mongolica</i>	2	50+
234.	Desert Finch	<i>Bucanetes obsoleta</i>	3	5
235.	Plain Mountain-Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>	1	150
236.	Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus pyrrhuloides</i>	3	4
237.	Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani neobscura</i>	1	6
238.	Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	2	4
239.	Pine Bunting	<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	1	2
240.	Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	1	3

241	White-capped Bunting	<i>Emberiza stewarti</i>	2	2+h
242	Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	4	100
243	Corn Bunting	<i>Emberiza calandra</i>	1	N/C

Other Animals

Souslik	Pika	Camberwell Beauty
Steppe Marmot	Horsefield's Tortoise	Small Tortoiseshell
Red Fox	Agama Lizard	Black-veined White
Stoat	Orange Tip	Black-tailed Skimmer
Eversmann's Polecat	Peacock	
Gerbil	Painted Lady	

Please note that our checklists do not include species seen by leaders only.

We also do not include single observer sightings or very poor views.

We do not count heard only or subspecies, although they are noted.

This we believe gives us a very honest accurate group total.

With this in mind we welcome you to compare our lists with other companies, check out our high standards and above all our prices which offer the very best value for money.

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