

# Kazakhstan

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## Participants

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**White-winged Grosbeak**

## Leader Svetlana Ashby

**Day 1:** Overnight flight from London Gatwick via Kiev to Almaty.

**Day 2:** The group assembled in the arrivals area of Almaty airport at 04.30 and was quickly on its way. Our first stop was at a petrol station on the outskirts of the city where a Long-tailed Shrike was spotted atop a bush across the road. A swift disembarkation produced good views of the shrike, plus the evocative sounds of singing Common Nightingales and Common Cuckoos, which were to be a common experience over the next week. *pekinensis* Common Swifts wheeled around and we also had our first flock of Rosy Starlings flying over but we were soon on our way. Our next roadside stop produced very good views of two Azure Tits, as well as a Lesser Grey Shrike, a Eurasian Hoopoe, several European Rollers nesting in a sand bank, a Hume's Warbler and *bactrianus* Eurasian Magpies. We made our way to our breakfast venue, a lakeside stop. Most had good views of a singing Blyth's Reed-warbler, along with further Azure Tits, a Turkestan Tit apparently paired with a Turkestan/Great Tit hybrid, a singing Greenish Warbler, a hepatic Common Cuckoo and a Great Reed-warbler. As we headed north through a semi-desert area we stopped for our first views of male Red-headed Buntings, which were to become a common sight. We soon arrived at series of lakes at Sorbulak. We spent the middle part of the day here where the weather was sunny and warm and enjoyed the first of many excellent picnic lunches. This rich area produced a host of superb sightings including a pair of White-tailed Eagles seen at close range, at least 65 White Pelicans and three Dalmatian Pelicans, a stunning summer-plumage male Lesser Sandplover, which was grilled for several minutes to confirm the identification. A host of other waders included 48 Terek Sandpipers, 15 Temminck's Stints and a further two Lesser Sandpipers, whilst a variety of wildfowl included numerous Ruddy Shelducks and Red-crested Pochards, at least three pairs of Garganeys, a pair of Ferruginous Ducks and lingering winter visitors in the shape of a pair of stately Whooper Swans and numerous Northern Pintails, Eurasian Wigeons, Northern Shovelers and Common Teals. Herons were represented by frequent brief sightings of Little Bittern, a Great Bittern in flight and several Black-crowned Night-herons. Other raptors included Western Marsh-harriers, Long-legged Buzzards, brief views of two Shikras and several Eurasian Hobbies, whilst additional water birds included three superb Pallas's Gulls – an adult and two first-summers, three Gull-billed Terns, a single Black Tern and at least seven smart summer-plumaged Black-necked Grebes. Passerines were not overlooked and we had White (Masked) Wagtails, Isabelline Shrikes, Calandra Larks, (Indian) House Sparrows, several Bearded Tits and a frustratingly brief Citrine Wagtail. We now headed off for the desert camp near Konshengel. Another petrol station stop produced a pair of White (Masked) Wagtails carrying food, at least five Black (Black-eared) Kites, a Long-legged Buzzard carrying a snake and our first European Bee-eaters, Crested Larks and Spotted Flycatchers. At a well we saw at least two

Little Ringed Plovers, three skulking Sykes' Warblers, several migrant *orientalis* Oriental Turtle-doves, a Tawny Pipit and further European Rollers, Eurasian Hoopoes and Lesser Grey Shrikes.

**Day 3:** We were up before dawn to walk across the desert to an elevated area a kilometre away to scan for Macqueen's Bustards. Red-headed Buntings and Greater Short-toed, Bimaculated and Calandra Larks were numerous in the area and offered good views. A distant male Montagu's Harrier was watched and eventually a male Macqueen's Bustard was found about 500 metres away doing its spectacular display, with its head thrown back stomping around the top of the hill. Everyone got excellent views through telescopes before we returned to camp for breakfast, having seen a Persian Gazelle as well. At 07.30 we were off into the desert in the bus in search of other specialities. We saw many Black-bellied Sandgrouse, four distant Demoiselle Cranes, several Brown-necked Ravens, a sub-adult Egyptian Vulture and two groups of Greater Sandplovers comprising three males and seven females that offered superb views. However, the main target, Caspian Plover was still eluding us until a group who were being guided by a friend of Svetlana took us to another area. There we all enjoyed fantastic views of four superb males, presumably newly-arrived migrants. Later in the afternoon we travelled around 80km to a rocky gorge at Tamgaly where there were numerous nesting Rosy Starlings, several Lesser Kestrels and a pair of Eurasian Kestrels with three cute chicks in a hole in a cliff. The main target was Persian Nuthatch, of which two pairs were seen at close range, along with three male Pied Wheatears perched on top of the crags and a pair of Grey-hooded Buntings.

**Day 4:** We had an early breakfast and were on the road by 06.00. In the cool hours of the early morning we made several stops in the desert. We saw a pair of Lesser Grey Shrikes at their nest, a mixed colony of (Indian) House and Spanish Sparrows and several Sykes's Warblers and Blyth's Reed-warblers. A walk round one area produced excellent views of several Southern (Steppe) Grey Shrikes, a couple of obliging Rufous Scrub-robins and numerous *halimodendri* Lesser Whitethroats, whilst lots of larks fed on the road until they were flushed by passing vehicles. Eventually, we obtained definitive views of several Lesser Short-toed Larks. Later in the morning we stopped at a series of roadside wetlands pools where we saw an excellent pair of Western Yellow (Black-headed) Wagtails, a Common Nightingale in full song and several of the water birds we had already recorded. The final stop produced one of our main targets, a superb pair of Saxaul Sparrows that were nest building. A little further on in an area of tamarisk-covered desert another pair of sparrows was found and a Short-toed Eagle soared overhead. A Bluethroat was only glimpsed briefly however, and an Asian Desert Warbler was even more uncooperative, calling briefly and remaining hidden in the thick undergrowth – no doubt reluctant to show itself in the hot midday sun. As we approached our lunch stop in the Turanga woodland, we paused to check out some doves perched on a power line which turned out to be Eversmann's (Pale-backed) Pigeons and got very good views of two which were evidently nesting in a large tree. The area of woodland also held at least a further six of the doves along with several White-winged Woodpeckers which afforded stunning views and more obliging Azure and Turkestan Tits. Well satisfied with our day's work so far, we set off for the long drive back to Almaty.

**Day 5:** Today we drove up into a valley in the foothills of the Tien Shan Mountains. Our roadside breakfast stop produced excellent views of several Indian Golden Orioles, a superb Common Nightingale at point blank range showing the greyer plumage of the eastern *golzii* race, the local race of Common Wood-pigeon, *casiotis*, with a small pink neck spot, Mistle Thrush and Eurasian Goldfinch – the latter surely a candidate for a future split in view of the different vocalisations and plumage details. Further up, a brief stop for a high-flying raptor revealed a Cinereous Vulture that gave good views. A walk up a track through flower-filled alpine meadows immediately produced our main target, a smart male Meadow Bunting singing from atop a bush. Other species singing and seen well included: Siberian Stonechat, Corn Bunting and Common Whitethroat of *rubicola* race. Several Common Quails were heard but they were more elusive, although eventually all the group had brief flight views whilst a distant Corn Crake was heard by some. There was a constant stream of *meena* Oriental Turtle-doves flying past while raptors flying overhead included an immature Lammergeier, a Eurasian Sparrowhawk, a Eurasian Hobby and a very distant Himalayan Griffon. Several Common Pheasants were heard – making a very different call to those in the UK – and eventually a male was seen well. A White-bellied Dipper showed briefly on a stream at the bottom of the valley. Our lunch stop was a stake out for White-crowned Penduline-tit. We played it cool – eating our sandwiches before searching seriously for the tits! After a few glimpses, a nest was located hanging from a tree by the riverside and superb views were obtained as the male came back and forth with the female occasionally popping its head out from the nest. A Brown Dipper was also seen well. After lunch we explored some fields with scattered trees. Golden Eagles displayed over nearby mountains, while closer to hand we found our first Common Rosefinches, a Tree Pipit, several Grey Wagtails and a female Eurasian Siskin, which proved to be the only write-in of the trip. Two more Cinereous Vultures were seen soaring high above as we returned to Almaty.

**Day 6:** Today we headed east towards the Chinese border. A breakfast stop at the Kolja Road produced a superb pair of Long-tailed Shrikes. We moved on to an old sand pit where we counted 130 occupied holes of Pale Sandmartin and saw (Indian) House Sparrows, European Bee-eaters and European Rollers nesting as well. Several Isabelline Wheatears were around and we had our first good views of a pair of Demoiselle Cranes in a roadside field. We were now in a very dry area with isolated rocky outcrops and gorges where we made several stops. At Kokpek Pass we got excellent scope views of a male Chestnut-breasted Bunting and also saw several Hume's Whitethroats. At our lunch stop we saw our first Rufous-tailed Rock-thrush, a male, a pair of Isabelline Wheatears carrying food to a nest, a male Grey-hooded Bunting and a large colony of Rosy Starlings. Later in the afternoon, as the heat began to abate we stopped near an abandoned village. An hour watching a water hole proved productive, with at least 60 Mongolian Finches, a couple smart male Crimson-winged Finch of Eurasian race *sanguineus*, a pair of Rufous-tailed Rock-thrushes, a male Eurasian Linnet, two Horned Larks and several Grey-hooded Buntings and Greater Short-toed Larks coming to drink. A male Desert Wheatear led us a merry dance out in the desert but eventually it was seen well by everyone. We arrived at our local hotel in the early evening.

**Day 7:** Today we explored another desert area scattered with artesian wells with lots of good birds. One of the targets was Desert Finch – of which we had several tantalising glimpses of small flocks but only a brief view of a settled pair. Other sightings included a flock 32 Demoiselle Cranes plus a pair with two chicks nearby, a pair of Desert Wheatears, two Black Storks flying low overhead and a dark-phase Booted Eagle but unfortunately there was no sign of Pallas's Sandgrouse or Asian Desert Warbler that are normally regular in this area. We left mid afternoon for the long drive back to Almaty.

**Day 8:** Today we set off for our long-awaited drive up to the observatory high in the Tien Shan Mountains. Our breakfast stop by a rushing river produced a pair of superb Blue Whistling-thrushes and a pair of Azure Tits nesting inside a metal post. We gradually ascended, with clear blue skies and a not a cloud to be seen, a situation that was thankfully to last throughout our two-day stay in the peaks. Our first stop was at a reservoir where we looked for Ibisbill and were eventually rewarded with very good views of a pair with small four chicks. The forested mountain slopes nearby produced fine views of Rufous-backed and Blue-capped Redstarts, Black-throated Accentors, White-winged Grosbeaks, Plain Mountain-finches, a pair of Red-billed Choughs and a male Fire-fronted Serin. We reached the observatory at midday where close by several stunning male White-tailed Rubythroats as well as a female Red-mantled Rosefinch and more White-winged Grosbeaks were seen. After lunch, we went a little higher to search for more specialities. We were rewarded with close views of a cooperative Sulphur-bellied Warbler, several Red-mantled Rosefinches including a smart male and more White-tailed Rubythroats but despite several hours of diligent searching we failed to find White-browed Tit-warblers.

**Day 9:** After an early breakfast, we headed straight up to the higher observatory at 3300m. Northern Wheatears and Water Pipits were around but our attention was quickly drawn to more interesting things when we heard Himalayan Snowcocks calling. After a few minutes a group of two males and two females was located and over the next hour we had progressively better views of them as they made their way across the alpine meadow. In the meantime, both Himalayan and Brown Accentors and White-winged Redstarts gave themselves up and we had repeated good views of these species. There were several mountain-finches around and we had good views of Plain but we had to be content with flyby views of Black-headed. Fully satisfied with our efforts at high altitude, we descended to spend the mid morning period searching for the elusive tit-warbler. Fortunately, we didn't have to wait too long and everyone obtained fabulous views of a male and female carrying food to a nest hidden somewhere on the hillside. After lunch, we set off back to Almaty and stopped in pine forest where a pair of Songar Tits was readily located along with the local race of Coal Tit and a fine male Fire-fronted Serin. Further stops produced another Brown Dipper and two or more Blue Whistling-thrushes. By now the cloud was building and it was becoming hot and humid, so we made a timely return to the air-conditioned comforts of our hotel to sample some local beer and prepare for the extension or our return to the UK. It had been a very successful trip! After the group's last supper, a few of us gathered by the lake, to reflect on the trip, with the music from a Kazakh wedding in the background. I must say I wasn't expecting their first song to be "Together Forever" by Rick Astley! As it darkened and before we all said our goodbye's, we were treated to a silhouetted Eurasian Scops-owl calling in the tree above our heads.

**Day 10:** Then there were four! After saying goodbye to John, (my room-mate for the trip) at 03.00, I had a lie-in. The fall-out from the wedding meant a packed lunch for breakfast. After asking the receptionist what we could drink: a 10 minute phone-call with the manager followed, which resulted in her passing me the phone! On the

other end, a deep Russian voice said “No coffee, just water, you drink water!” so we did. At the arranged 10.00 pick up time Elena arrived, her car boot containing coffee and snack emergency backups. As we tucked in, a Booted Eagle was a nice surprise over the hotel’s lake whilst four Black-crowned Night-herons roosted in the trees. Regarding the extension, one thing that was playing on my mind was the news of one of our main target species. The village we would be staying in usually had nesting Sociable Lapwings in the fields surrounding it. For whatever reason, this year there were no sign of them around the village and the Birdquest group that had visited the area before us had only just managed to jam-in on one bird as they were travelling around that area so could this be a problem bird? There was a short internal flight from Almaty to Astana and Mr Bean was the en-flight entertainment. As we left Astana airport, Hooded Crows soon became the dominant corvid but not long out of the city we were into road-works. We quickly piled onto the kerb for our first birding stop as the detour skirted some bird-filled wetlands. There were lots of White-winged Terns, a few Blacks and Common Terns, Red-crested Pochards, Caspian (Steppe) Gulls and Black-necked Grebes were all close by. Citrine Wagtails were zipping around with the odd one feeding in the open on the edge of the reeds. Then we moved into the reeds and a cacophony of *Acrocephalus* warblers. These included many Paddyfield Warblers, a few Great Reed-warblers and a Sedge Warbler. One or two more distant Savi’s Warblers added their songs to the din. A cracking male Bluethroat popped up giving great views before we hopped back onto the bus. The next lagoon held several very close Dalmatian Pelicans giving great views. As we headed off out into the steppe it became apparent that there was a problem with our bus so we had to pull over and wait for a replacement. The “bus swap-stop” however, was by a nice reed-fringed pool with accompanying bushes. There were some distant wildfowl but passerines were of more interest here with Booted Warblers being quite active and with the lure of Svetlana’s iPod we soon had fantastic views on top of the nearest bush. We also had great views here of male and female Western Yellow (Sykes’s) Wagtail. Common Rosefinches and a Bluethroat were singing from nearby vegetation and a fine male Pallid Harrier circled overhead. Just before we left, our attention turned to the water which held Tadpole-shrimps, reminiscent of miniature King-crabs. Then it was back onto the new bus with a new driver and as we continued along our long straight road, Short-eared Owls and Pallid Harriers became regular sights. Then, after we hit the steppe proper, Black Larks became a regular sight. As we moved on further on someone shouted to stop as they had seen a raptor on the ground. As we decelerated I saw a bird with a lot of white on it at the back of a roadside pool. It was too bouncy to get my ‘bins’ on the bird so I rattled-off a few shots with my camera. I looked at the back of my camera and shouted “Sociable Lapwing!” We jumped out of the bus and watched two cracking Sociable Lapwings 200 meters away. I quickly unpacked my ‘scope and tripod from my rucksack in the back of the bus, sending underpants flying everywhere! Then we all enjoyed ‘scope views of this globally rare and beautiful Lapwing! They then flew across the road into the adjacent field where we followed them to get more views. As we left them there was a small flock of Western Yellow (Sykes’s) Wagtails frequenting a weedy patch and a pair of Pallid Harriers calling overhead which we think were nesting there. Back on the bus and onwards again. About 30 minutes later Craig shouted “stop”, he had spotted more Sociable Lapwings! This time there were five adults, and another five chicks, presumably from two different broods as two chicks were noticeably larger than the others and they all showed very well in the roadside field. After we had had our fill we continued onto our destination, but due to all these birding stops we were going to have a late arrival for our evening meal. However, with our main potentially tricky target bird in the bag we could now relax somewhat for the remainder of the extension. We just had one remaining stop when we entered Red-footed Falcon territory. There are some medium-sized trees planted in a line alongside the road, and in these trees there were probably a few dozen Red-foots, Eurasian Kestrels and Oriental Turtle-doves all giving great views from the bus. Finally, we arrived at our destination, the town of Korgaldgin, around 21.00 to the welcome sight of the lovely Mrs Nadejda and her Kazakh hospitality and home cooking. She occasionally rents her rooms out for visiting birdwatching groups, whilst ousting her husband to the garden shed for the period of the visit. The accommodation was basic but comfortable with a nice homely feel.

**Day 11:** Our first stop was not far out of town to an area of wetland and grassland. There was a colony of Black-winged Pratincoles here giving great views. White-winged Terns were milling around and the odd Pallas’s Gull in immaculate breeding plumage would drop in to bathe. In the foreground we got great views of large numbers of the paler local race of Bearded Tits. Also in the reeds were good numbers of showy Paddyfield warblers, a few ‘Caspian’ Eurasian Reed-warblers and a very showy male red-spotted Bluethroat. After feasting on this lot we turned our attention to the pool to our rear where there was a close feeding group of Red-necked Phalaropes, Little Stints and a Marsh Sandpiper. Then we worked the grasslands until we had tracked down a pair of White-winged Larks. They are at their best in flight when suddenly the lark in front of you turns into a redshank, such is the extent of white on the wings. Moving along on another road out of town, we got lots more great views of Black Larks, and their somewhat nightjar-like display flight. We also got good views of the long-tailed local race of “Steppe” Twite. We then arrived at a shallow lake with an island covered in nesting gulls including Caspian

(Steppe), *heinei* Common Gulls and Pallas's Gulls, the later hanging out with their young in a largish crèche. As we looked over the lake there were hundreds, probably thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes on the water and similar numbers of Little Stints lining the shores whilst Black Larks flew by carrying food and Pallas's Gulls in immaculate plumage were circling close over our heads. John put up a female Black Lark off its nest and watched it do its broken wing distraction display. It was another great birding spot, then it was a short ride back to base for lunch. In the afternoon we visited some riverside vegetation on the outskirts of town, crossing an interesting but slightly precarious-looking fjord. Our main quarry here was a pair of Barred Warblers including a very showy singing male in fine plumage. It was fully barred with a beady yellow eye, a totally different bird to the drab juveniles that frequent the UK in the autumn. Other birds here included European Bee-eaters, Eurasian Hobby, Common Rosefinches, Lesser Whitethroats and a very close Caspian Tern. We then went back to the pratincole colony for seconds and had a close encounter with a family of Northern Wheatears. It seemed quite weird as prior to this they were only high up in the mountains but they were also common down here on the steppe nesting in holes in the ground. We finished off at another spot of nearby wetland where there were lots of waders, terns and wildfowl including a pair of Whooper Swans with chicks, Black-tailed Godwits, Ruffs, Common Redshank and Little, Caspian and White-winged Terns, then it was back to base for the evening.

**Day 12:** We met up with one of Svetlana's friends, Alexey, who is a warden on the wildlife reserve; this was great as you can't beat local knowledge! As we approached the park, near the entrance, we flushed a Steppe Eagle from a telephone pole at the side of the road. At the gate there were a few Susliks (ground squirrels) showing well. As we entered the reserve Black Larks were flying up in front of the bus as well as a few Western Marsh-harriers and a couple of *meena* Oriental Turtle-doves showing off their lovely white edged tails. We stopped and scanned over the lakes with large numbers of waterbirds present. Pelicans, Common Goldeneyes, Pied Avocets, Common and Red-crested Pochards to name but a few. It wasn't long before Geoff picked up a not-too-distant first-year male White-headed Duck, with a pied head. As we moved on to the next lake a sub-adult Common Crane walked away from the track giving very close views. Looking over the next reed-fringed pool there were several breeding plumaged Red-necked Grebes, including one pair displaying to each other. There was no sign of the hoped for Slavonian Grebes but there were other birds to keep us occupied including a few more White-headed Ducks and a Great Bittern. In the reedy fringes there were a few Reed Buntings with frostier plumage than UK birds and a whitish rump. The bill was a little chunkier than the British ones, but not enough to make it *pyrrhuloides*. There were also singing Paddyfield Warblers, Bluethroat and a Moustached Warbler, but the latter bird didn't show itself. We did however, get good views of a pair of Savi's Warblers here. As we moved off, we had several views of one or more male Citrine Wagtails sitting on bushes at the side of the road and a Siberian Stonechat. We also saw a pair of the very pale race of 'Steppe' Merlins in the area flying around. We got better views of them again as we visited two nests in the nearby vicinity including a female on a nest 15m away and a male standing guard at a similar distance near another nest. We then scanned over a nearby reed-fringed lake where we saw our only breeding plumaged Black-throated Divers of the trip and had another singing Moustached Warbler that refused to show itself! After lunch we visited another lake with a gull colony on it which consisted mainly of Slender-billed Gulls which were seen very close over our heads. The shores were lined with Pied Avocets whilst Gull-billed Terns were also patrolling nearby. We also bumped into a pair of Kentish Plovers here which showed very well. On the lake there were dozens of Common Pochards and other ducks but a late redhead Smew was quite unusual and a surprise. As we headed back across the plain we got good views again of a pair of White-winged Larks before the group headed back for an early shower. I stayed out for an extra hour to try and get some more Black Lark photographs, but then it was back for dinner at 20.00.

**Day 13:** After another lovely breakfast we thanked Mrs Nadejda for allowing us to stay, for her home-cooking and her all-round welcoming hospitality. We also thanked her husband who could now move back out of his shed into the house! Our first stop was a photo opportunity to get a shot of the steppe grass shining in the morning sunshine. It was a pure coincident that there was a pair of Black Larks walking on the road right at the side of the bus down to a few meters. A slightly odd sight was a Sand Martin colony that had sprung up in the banks of a recently dug hole in the ground. As we headed back into nesting red-foot territory, we were treated to good views in great light of a pair mating in a small bush at the side of the road. We pressed on as we had to get to our Pine Bunting site. Next, we had to pull into a security stop, and had to show our "papers please"! Unfortunately, one person had lost his immigration card (small slip of paper they give you on arrival in the Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan. Whilst they were trying to sort it I went into the bushes at the back of the check-point. Here there was a pair of Eurasian Hobbies feeding on a Western Yellow (Sykes's) Wagtail. Unfortunately, our friend couldn't find his piece of paper so to avoid being arrested and taken to the capital for interrogation we had to return straight to the airport to evade any more confrontation with the local constabulary. The upshot was, no Pine Bunting, doh!!! Our friend looked

very sad and guilty, so I felt I had to point out that it wasn't the end of the world and not to feel so bad. We tried a poplar wood on the outskirts of Astana but Great Tit, Lesser Whitethroat and Hooded Crow was all we could produce. Then we moved onto another wood by the airport. A bit of a commotion turned out to be four Fieldfares including nice views of one on the nest. A pair of Red-footed Falcons, Oriental Turtle-dove and a singing Common Rosefinch were all nearby. As we moved further along the road the Rook colony became quite raucous so we turned around. We headed back and after a pair of Lesser Whitethroats we finished off the extension with great views of Azure Tit which was showing well in a dead tree with bright blue sky as a backdrop, nice! I was about to pack away my 'scope when our friend decided to take a bullet for the team and Svetlana dropped him off at the airport (to avoid any further police check-points) whilst we could have a try at Pine Bunting. Even though there wasn't enough time to go to her traditional site she wanted to try some potentially suitable sites closer to the airport. About 20–30 minutes from the airport we pulled off the motorway onto a farm track (via a three point turn)! As we disembarked the vehicle, there were two birds singing like Yellowhammers. But maybe the song was a little shorter? We quickly found the birds, ruling out Yellowhammer (and hybrids) that can be in the area. Before long we were all getting fine views and photos of a cracking male Pine Bunting! "High Five" I said in a Borat-esque voice as I slapped hands with Svetlana. Mission accomplished I felt. But the moment was a little bitter-sweet as we couldn't help but feel a little bad that our friend had missed this bird. We detoured back through the new capital of Astana and all its new interesting looking buildings before our rendezvous with our friend prior to our flight back to Almaty. Back at the hotel in Almaty it was raining, so we packed, had our "last supper" and went off to bed for a few hours.

**Day 14:** Before we blinked it was pick up time for our international flight at 02.30. At our Ukraine stop-off in Kiev, birds seen from the airport terminal included Black Redstart, a Fieldfare mobbing a Eurasian Jay, Common Swifts and a few other bits and bobs. It was a long drive back from Gatwick to North Wales but at least it meant I could clock up 40 Red Kites on the southern half of the M40. All in all it was a great trip that we would highly recommend to anyone.

**John Clark and Stephen Culley**