Occurrence of Western Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis* in Kazakhstan, in relation to its recent eastwards expansion in Russia

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The Western Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis* breeds in most parts of Europe, after having expanded its breeding range over much of northwest Europe since the 1850s. The population is stable in most of the European countries and has increased in relatively recently colonised Denmark, Norway and Finland, and at the eastern margins of its range *ie* Ukraine, Latvia and Estonia (Hagemeijer & Blair 1997). In Russia, the expansion of *gibraltariensis* still continues. While Stepanyan (2003) stated that the eastern border of its breeding range (roughly) runs from Moscow south to the Crimea, other publications and information show that *gibraltariensis* also occurs much further eastwards. After having spread to Tartarstan and a record of a singing male at Yekaterinburg in the Ural region on 6 April 1995 (Boyko 1995), breeding was confirmed for the first time in the Ural region at Mys, Perm krai, in 2005 (Kuzikov 2006, Ryabitsev 2008). It now also breeds commonly along the Volga river between Kazan, Ulyanovsk and Samara (Oleg Borodin *in litt*), south to Saratov province (Vladimir Piskunov *in litt*).

In Kazakhstan, *gibraltariensis* was not recorded until 2006. Since then, 18 records involving 23 birds have become known. These Kazakhstan records are listed below and their locations shown in Figure 1:

1 November 2006, adult male, photographed, platform in the Caspian sea, 30 km north of Buzachi peninsula, Mangghystau province (Gistsov 2007).

23–29 March 2007, male, Karazhar, Korgalzhyn nature reserve, Aqmola province (Koshkin 2008).

14 November 2007, female-type, Shakpak-Ata necropolis, Mangghystau province (Belyalov 2008).

26 October 2008, two (male and a female-type), photographed, Kyzyl-Kapkan, West Kazakhstan province (Bidashko 2009).

15 December 2008, three female-types, Aqtau, Mangghystau province (Karpov & Kovshar 2009).

26 March–28 April 2009, eight records involving eight birds, Kenderli resort and Fetisovo plateau, Mangghystau province (Le Neve *et al* 2010).

19 May 2009, female-type, Fetisovo plateau, Mangghystau province (Le Neve *et al* 2010).

2 December 2009, male, photographed, Karamendy, Qostanay province (Timoshenko 2009, Timoshenko 2010)

13 December 2009–13 January 2010, male, Peschnyy cape, Mangghystau province (Kovshar & Karpov 2009).

April 2010, first-summer male (*cairii*-type), photographed, artificial island in the northeastern Caspian sea, Mangghystau province (Victoria Kovshar *in litt*).

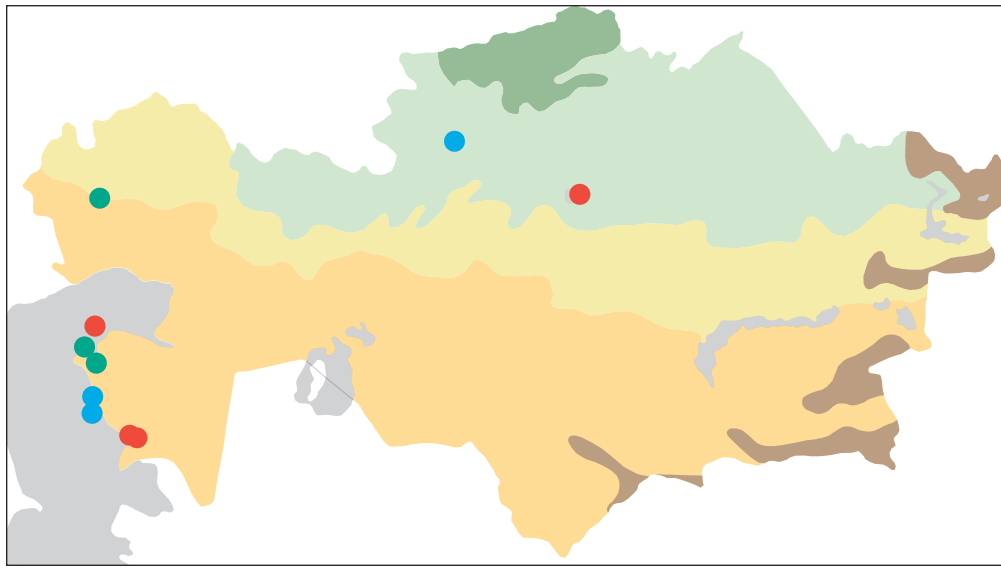

Figure 1. Biogeographical map of Kazakhstan (Wassink & Oreel 2007) showing locations of Western Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros gibraltariensis* records. Green, blue and red dots represent autumn, winter and spring records respectively.

1 April 2011, adult male and two females, photographed, Karazhar, Korgalzhyn nature reserve, Aqmola province (Alexej Koshkin *in litt*).

Female-type *gibraltariensis* cannot be safely distinguished from *ochruros*. However, given the fact that all males mentioned in the records above and those in the Russian part of the Volga delta (see beneath) were *gibraltariensis*, it seems most unlikely that the female types would then have been *ochruros*. Furthermore, the timing of the records does not coincide with that of the migration of *ochruros*. The latter has left the breeding areas in the Caucasus by late September, and is back again in late March or early April (Cramp 1988). Wintering in the Zagros mountains and western Iraq, *ochruros* shows a southerly biased migration route in autumn, with Kazakhstan far to the east and north.

Records from Astrakhan province, Russia, suggest that *gibraltariensis* probably also migrates through or even winters in the bordering Volga-Ural region of Kazakhstan (Atyrau and West Kazakhstan provinces): 3 February 2002, one bird at Damchik, Volga delta (Kvartalnov *et al* 2002); several records prior to 2009 in the Volga delta and, on 11 May 2009, two or three singing males at the Akthuba river at Charabali (Innokenty Smetanin *in litt*), only 30 km from the Kazakh border.

The records in Kazakhstan show that *gibraltariensis* has recently become a rare but regular passage migrant and winter visitor, undoubtedly as a result of the eastwards expansion in Russia. However, there are indications that this taxon could have occurred much earlier, albeit more rarely.

Mitropolskiy (2009) trapped two male Black Redstarts and identified them as Caucasian Black Redstarts *P. o. ochruros*, on 19 October 1962 at Sakakuduk and 9 January 1963 at Chuyli, both in Mangghystau province. He ruled out the birds being *gibraltariensis* on three criteria: *gibraltariensis* had not expanded its range so far east at that time, the absence of any red on the underparts and the absence of a white wing panel. The first reason should, at least to my opinion, not play a role in the identification process. The second criterion does not say anything about subspecific identity as all *gibraltariensis* and part of *ochruros* lack red on the vent and belly. The third is also not a reason to exclude

gibraltariensis. The first and second calendar year male '*paradoxus*' morph of the latter (the only morph distinguishable from first calender year female) resembles adult males in varying degrees, but retains the juvenile wing, lacking a white panel (only some moult one or two tertials creating indication of a wing panel in autumn, which wear to narrow white edges in spring) (Svensson 1992). Furthermore, a Black Redstart, not subspecifically identified, was found on the border of Aqtöbe province, Kazakhstan and the Orenburg region, Russia on 21 April 1990 (Berezovikov 2001, Wassink & Oreel 2007).

Although we do not know the true subspecific identity of the discussed older records of Black Redstart in Kazakhstan, at least the recent records give reason to assume that it seems only a matter of time before *gibraltariensis* will start to breed in northwestern Kazakhstan, taking into consideration that the nearest breeding location, at Saratov, Russia, lies only 140 km from the Kazakh border.

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