

Accidental observations of birds during a trip through Kyrgyzstan in August 2017.

There was an offer from friends to go on a short trip around Kyrgyzstan.



The planned route was: first to drive through the Too Ashuu Pass, the Suusamyr Valley, the Alabel Pass, the Chychkan Gorge, the Toktogul Reservoir, to move along the cascades of the Toktogul Hydroelectric Power Station, reach Jalal-Abad, drive to Arslanbob, then to drive to Naryn region, Kazarman, and then through the Pass Moldo-Ashuu to reach Lake Sonkul.

Since a part of the team was starting from Bishkek and the second group was in Issyk-Kul area, we agreed to meet in Suusamyr valley, as the car from Issyk-Kul decided to go through Kochkor.

Due to the fact that the main purpose of the trip was to travel, and the half of the participants were not particularly into birds, I apologize in advance for the quality of some pictures, since basically all shots were taken from the car, along the way, without preparation.

At the entrance to the Too Ashuu Pass there was the Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), and on serpentines, on the rocks by the river, we saw a Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*).





As it often happens, the weather in the Suusamyr Valley was very changeable. After the hot dusty Bishkek there were storm clouds, wind and rain, turning into snow and the change in temperature was rather pleasant.

After contacting the second team and realizing that before the meeting we have about an hour of free time, we agreed to meet just below Alabel pass.

To kill the time, I planned to take a ride through a small gorge, where (according to Oleg Belyalov and S. Toropov), we could see White-winged Snowfinches (*Montifringilla nivalis*). The weather, which at first was pleasantly cool, worsened, and, of course, did not help to search for birds and photography. The temperature dropped to plus 4 degrees, rain occasionally turned into snow. Therefore, after driving through the gorge, only a few chicks of Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) and a Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) with a chick were seen.





Having passed Chychkan, we descended to the Toktogul reservoir already in the evening.

We stayed overnight in a guest house on the seaside of Toktogul reservoir. After going out to look at the sunset, we noticed a Common Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) sitting on the pole and eating something, and, already at home, on the computer, we noticed that the bird had a large camel spider for dinner, found in the area in abundance. On the slopes Chukar Partridges (*Alectoris chukar*) were calling, on the shore of the reservoir we came across a carcass of a young Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*). What happened to it remained a mystery, at least there were no high-



voltage power lines around.



In the morning, after bathing in the warm waters of the reservoir, we went further, towards Jalal-Abad. The second team decided to go the lakes of the Sary-Chelek reserve. On the way to Jalal-Abad there is a village Kyzyl-tuu, where for many years the White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) have been breeding in the village itself and in the nearby fields on the power lines. We recorded around 20 nests, but only one on the power line support in the middle of the field belonged to a White Stork. Later in the evening, when the second part of the group was returning from Sary-Chelek along the same road, they observed seven birds.



The second night was planned for Arslanbob. But, unfortunately, a large number of tourists and local residents created certain inconveniences for spending the night in the gorge, so we decided to spend the night near the Bazar-Korgon reservoir. It was a pleasant surprise to see along the road nesting site of Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and a Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) (nests were on one cliffs, 50 meters apart from each other) near Arslanbob. The Egyptian Vulture had two fully fledged chicks. We were lucky enough to watch (from afar), the feeding of the vulture chicks by parents. Within half an hour, adult birds arrived three times with food.





After spending the night on the shore of the reservoir, in the morning we took some photos of the Common Sandpiper and the young Lesser Grey Shrike (*Lanius minor*), and moved toward the pass to Kazarman. In the gorge flew Lammergeiers (*Gypaetus barbatus*) and Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*), on the slopes we saw a Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*).





After crossing the pass we reached the Naryn region, where we crossed the Naryn River and drove over three small passes, in the gorges of which we saw a young Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*), and two adult birds flew along the slopes.



By the evening, after reaching the gorge of Kurtka, we stopped for an overnight stay in a picturesque grove on the river bank. In the morning, on the branches of the trees, we saw a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) and European Golden Orioles (*Oriolus oriolus*).

We climbed to the Moldo-Ashuu pass and drove to Lake Sonkul. It was a wonderful sunny weather. On the shore of the lake, Common Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*), Little Ringed Plovers (*Charadrius dubius*), young Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*) and Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) were plentiful. In the coastal swamps there were Ruddy Shelducks (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*), Common Sandpipers and Broad-billed Sandpipers (*Limicola falcinellus*).







Above the valley flew Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) and Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*), Long-legged Buzzards (*Buteo rufinus*) were circling.

Further we moved towards the southeast of the very picturesque pass locally called "38 parrots". On the edges of the road we noticed a large number of Northern Wheatears (*Oenanthe oenanthe*), and marmots (*Marmota baibacina*).

After descending from the pass, we stopped in a picturesque rocky canyon. Here we found Red-fronted Serins (*Serinus pusillus*), White Wagtails (*Motacilla alba*), Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava*); a Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) circled above the vehicles.







High on the bare rock a bright-colored bird moved as a flash. –I instantly thought: was it really a Wallcreeper (*Tichodroma muraria*)? As it turned out, it was the bird, but very far, unfortunately, so it was not possible to make a good picture, but even without that, I was very glad to see this wonderful bird.

While looking for the Wallcreeper , raising our heads, hoping that he will appear again and fly closer, we stood there for about 30 minutes. At the moment when the hope had already left us, and the necks were very sore, a pair of Lammergeiers (*Gypaetus barbatus*) appeared, flying along the rocks. Flying smoothly over the car, they disappeared behind the rock. Unfortunately, they did not appear anymore, as did not the Wallcreeper.



Having passed down the gorge, we came across a brood of Chukar Partridges (*Alectoris chukar*) - around 10 already well-flying chicks and an adult bird.



It was already the evening of the last day of the trip, we headed towards home along the Bishkek-Naryn road, and almost by the exit to the asphalt road, the Ibisbill (*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*) came out of the creek and quickly disappeared. Unfortunately, it was not possible to take a picture of it and further searches along the river were unsuccessful.

The rest of the route to Bishkek was spent on the dark road, without any encounters with the birds.

The total length of the route was 1,400 km and during the trip we crossed 12 mountain passes.