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## Introduction

**Words** Josh Jones | **Images** © Josh Jones unless stated

Lying at the Western Palearctic's eastern periphery, Azerbaijan is an intercontinental state straddling the Asian-European border. For such a small nation it offers an outstanding array of habitats, ranging from steppe and semi-desert to the high, snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus via the spectacular wetlands of the Caspian Sea coast and lush deciduous forests of the Caucasian foothills. Azerbaijan's avifauna is therefore rich and diverse, and it is somewhat surprising that the nation is hugely under-visited by birders, who tend to favour more ornithologically-established destinations such as Georgia and Turkey.

For all four of us, this was a first visit to Azerbaijan. Primary targets included the High Caucasian specialities as well as Shikra, which breeds in the south of the country. Beyond this each of us had individual target species that we hoped to see, while we were also looking forward to exploring a wide range of habitats and hopefully enjoying some excellent general birding.

## Logistics

Ash, Dan and Josh flew to Baku from London Heathrow with [British Airways](#) for a little over £410. These direct flights operate from Heathrow daily, although it is also possible to fly via e.g. Istanbul with Turkish Airlines for a slightly lower cost. David's

trip began in his native Belgium, where he flew from Brussels to Baku via Moscow, arriving a few hours before the rest of the team on the evening of 3 May.

The cheapest and easiest method to obtain an Azerbaijani visa is via the e-visa service. This is offered by various tour operators in Azerbaijan; we obtained ours via Caspian Tours at a cost of \$80 per person, considerably cheaper than the £100 quoted by the Azerbaijan Visa Centre on Finchley Road, London. The e-visa comes as a PDF which can be printed out and produced on arrival in Baku.

Many of the sites visited require off-road driving and thus a 4x4 is essential. We hired a Hyundai ix35 at a cost of US\$80 per day for the ten days we were in 'mainland' Azerbaijan. At around 70 Qapik (50 pence) per litre, fuel costs will seem refreshingly cheap to Western Europeans. Though we did purchase a roadmap, Dan brought along a satnav which navigated us around the country without issue – with English somewhat lacking among the Azerbaijani population and signage often poor, this tool comes recommended.

Azerbaijan is a country obsessed with over-complicated bureaucracy. Its borders are guarded very closely and conflict with Armenia is ongoing. As such any westerner – particularly those carrying optics and/or cameras – is likely to be confronted and quizzed on a regular basis. This ranges from mildly annoying to downright tedious, and we'd strongly recommend organising the permits for various national parks prior to a trip. If you wish to obtain permits to explore the High Mountain Zone above Laza in the Greater Caucasus (strongly recommended), the process must be instigated several weeks in advance as it can take considerable time for this to be signed off by the relevant authorities.

Our initial plan had been to camp for much of the trip but we ended up seeking hotels on most evenings; prices ranged from £5-20 per night with the northern ski resort towns proving most expensive. As it turned out we camped for one night only, in the Zuvand region.

Our Nakhchivan extension was organised by Dr Elchin Sultanov, director of the Azerbaijan Ornithological Society, and guided by him and his former PHD student, Arzu Memmedov. This is a lengthy and difficult process, and anyone considering visiting the state should start planning well in advance. Due to the ongoing political instability in this region, it is essentially impossible to organise a trip to – and indeed visit – Nakhchivan independently and thus any prospective visitors should contact Dr Sultanov ([elchin\\_sultanov@aos.az](mailto:elchin_sultanov@aos.az)). Finally, it is worth noting that any trip to Nakhchivan is unlikely to be cheap and the state, separated from the rest of Azerbaijan, can only be reached by air on a single-entry visa. There are several flights daily from Baku, and a return ticket cost 140 Manat (£85) in May 2015.

## Resources & Acknowledgements

Special thanks must go to Kai Gauger and Michael Heiss for their co-operation and patience while passing on information on both species and sites – the success of our trip was largely thanks to their help. We recommend that any visitor purchases a copy of Gauger, Schmidt & Agayeva's *Birdwatching in Azerbaijan: a guide to nature and landscape* which, although not the most detailed of reads, acts as a useful reference and site guide.

We would also like to thank Pierre-André Crochet and Eric Didner for their valued input as well as Dobromir Domuschiev for additional information. Many thanks to Elchin Sultanov and Arzu Memmedov for organising a largely successful Nakhchivan extension.

## Itinerary

**Sunday 3 May:** Mid-morning flight from London Heathrow, arriving Baku early evening. Evening drive north to hotel in Qusar.

**Monday 4 May:** Early drive up to Khinaliq, birding en route. Day on slopes of Qizil Qaya before returning to Qusar in evening, birding along return drive.

**Tuesday 5 May:** Morning at Laza, afternoon spent in valley south-west of Qusar.

**Wednesday 6 May:** Day at Laza then long drive south. Birding on plains west of Qobustan in evening. Overnight in Masalli.

**Thursday 7 May:** Birding around Masalli early morning before mid-morning visit to Ghizil-Agaj National Park. Early afternoon back at Shikra site in Masalli before drive south to Lerik and Zuvand region, arriving mid-evening.

**Friday 8 May:** Birding in Zuvand until mid-afternoon. Drive north through late afternoon and evening to Quba.

**Saturday 9 May:** Day birding at Khinaliq. Overnight in Quba.

**Sunday 10 May:** Morning and early afternoon at Khinaliq. Afternoon and early evening birding along Caspian Sea coast north of Baku. Overnight in Baku.

**Monday 11 May:** Morning arranging Nakhchivan trip. Late morning and afternoon birding around Hajigabul Lake and fishponds. Ash, Dan and Josh on evening flight to Nakhchivan; David overnight in Baku awaiting morning flight to Brussels.

**Tuesday 12 – Friday 15 May:** Birding Nakhchivan. Mid-evening flight back to Baku on Friday with late evening drive south to Salyan.

**Saturday 16 May:** Birding around Kura Delta for much of the day; evening at Mahmudchala Lake. Overnight in Salyan.

**Sunday 17 May:** Early morning in Shirvan National Park; late morning and afternoon in Gobustan before returning to Baku. Mid-evening flight from Baku to London Heathrow.

## Daily Diary

### 3 May 2015

Having arrived in Baku on a very pleasant British Airways flight from London, we were given our first taste of Azerbaijan's paranoia and absurd bureaucracy almost immediately. It took a lot of convincing for customs to believe that my passport photo did in fact show a young version of myself (admittedly clean-shaven and with a bit more hair), and that I truly was who I was claiming to be. We were then accosted by security when they found my walkie-talkies buried in Dan's bag – apparently

they constitute 'illegal contraband' in Azerbaijan and were immediately confiscated. Ridiculously another pair remained undiscovered in the other bag Dan was carrying!

Over an hour after arriving we were finally able to escape border control and were let in to Azerbaijan. Both David and our hire car man, Fizuli, had been waiting patiently and so we wasted no time in heading back in to Baku to pick up supplies and finalise the car hire agreement.

This in itself took forever and as such it was not long before midnight by the time we arrived at our hotel in the town of Qusar, at the foot of the Greater Caucasus. Unfortunately the toilet had more than a faint whiff of sewage about it, and both Dan and Ash were particularly alarmed to find that the taps spat out a brownish liquid. Thankfully we'd bought bottled water and with that it was time to catch some sleep, for an early start beckoned.

#### 4 May 2015

We were out of the hotel by dawn, encouraged by the lingering stench emanating from the bathroom. Thankfully things took a turn for the better along the road to Khinaliq – as daylight encroached it soon became apparent it was going to be a beautifully clear day and that the scenery was utterly spectacular. Though surprisingly chilly early on a stop at the village of Cek brought great vistas as well as our first birds including Black Redstarts and Common Rosefinches.

Slightly further on we found Ortolan and the first Rock Thrush of the trip while a group of White-winged Snowfinches, scattering from the road just before Khinaliq village, were the first of many seen. Parking in the village and walking up the slopes was the strategy that had been recommended to us, but the spectacular scale of the scenery around us suggested driving as far as possible would be a good way of saving energy. As such we began the challenging drive out of the village and up on to the slopes of Qizil Qaya for the first time. We found that the ascent here isn't actually all that bad and was (just about) achievable in a modest 4x4 such as our Hyundai ix35. Climbing to around 2,700 m, we noted several *penicillata* Shore Larks by the track, while Northern Wheatears and *coutellii* Water Pipits were commonplace.

Parking by the old shepherd camp at 41.202, 48.139, we'd already seen our first *brevirostris* Twite by the time we began the slow and torturous uphill ascent. A Little Owl was a surprise while both Chough and Alpine Chough wheeled around in flocks overhead. It wasn't long before we could hear the far-carrying wail of Caucasian Snowcock carrying down the mountainside and Dan soon 'scoped a particularly chubby male sat on a rock a couple of hundred metres above us – the first main target in the bag!

We spread out to cover as much ground as possible and shortly after Ash called "Wolf!" By the time I'd got on to the animal, which had been lumbering across the slope above us, it had panicked and begun to scarper uphill. Still, wolf was a new mammal for me after dipping them in several countries and the views weren't too bad, if brief. It was also Ash that was the first to call G ldenst dt's Redstart at around 2,850 m – confusingly the rock on which it had sat was occupied by a Black Redstart by the time I had arrived, but a gaudy flash of white, black and red soon betrayed the continued presence of the male G ldenst dt's a short distance away. Though mobile, a pair of G ldenst dt's afforded Ash and I great views over the next few minutes, the experience enhanced by the sudden appearance of a female Great Rosefinch on a nearby rock for a matter of seconds before it flew off once more!



Little did we know that that would be our only sniff of Great Rosefinch all day, despite extensive searching right across the slopes as high as 3,000 m. In contrast G ldenst dt's Redstarts were widespread and we estimated to have seen double figures by mid-afternoon. Even more commonplace was Caucasian Snowcock – there was rarely a spell in the day when the species was not ubiquitous. Several Alpine Accentors were also noted (a long overdue tick for Josh), a single Goshawk cruised over at stratospheric height, a Golden Eagle and several Griffon Vultures were no doubt residents while migrant birds of prey included Montagu's Harrier and a smart 2cy Eastern Imperial Eagle.

The descent back down towards Qusar was punctuated by a few stops, the first of which was for a Lammergeier cruising down the valley just below Khinaliq. Ten Griffon Vultures also meandered over and the first Red-backed Shrikes of the trip were noted. A chance stop by the first scrubby area between Cek and Qirizd'hn produced several singing Green Warblers and, a few kilometres further down, just below the large canyon, singing Red-breasted Flycatcher, Hawfinch and another Lammergeier as well as plenty more Green Warblers.



Green Warbler, Cek

Back in Quba we found a reasonable restaurant on the junction at 41.3674, 48.5214, where we had our first typical Azerbaijani meal – grilled meat, bread and salad – before returning to the hotel in Qusar where, thankfully, the water supply was running a little clearer.

## 5 May 2015

The plan for the day was to explore the slopes around the village of Laza, which lies between Qizil Qaya and Shahdagh. The slopes of Shahdagh support at least one Caucasian Black Grouse lek, and the area is also touted as the best spot to see Great Rosefinch in the country. Unfortunately it appeared that the weather was going to try its best to disrupt our efforts, and disrupt

us it did. On arrival in Laza the cloud was so low that it had enveloped the village, reducing visibility to a matter of feet – not what you need when searching potentially hazardous slopes!

A couple of Golden Jackals gave us early excitement in the half-light of dawn and, despite the weather, Red-fronted Serins were quite apparent around the village with at least 10 seen. A Rock Bunting showed fairly well in the village and Water Pipits were common. When the cloud eventually lifted slightly, scanning the slopes above the village revealed several Ring Ouzels. Frustratingly this respite was short-lived: the cloud descended and the rain began again late morning, so we reluctantly decided to head back down towards Qusar with the aim of birding the forests around the town.

As it transpired the rain was actually worse at lower altitude, although at least the valleys were (just) below the clouds and so it was possible to see a few hundred metres. We decided to explore a valley south-west of Qusar that had been visited by a French team a few years previously. After crossing the river in the 4x4, we continued south-west along the track which runs up the valley. With the rain relentless we weren't overly keen to explore much on foot and the appalling weather no doubt curtailed bird activity quite heavily. That said we found at least three Red-breasted Flycatchers in the forest as well as a few *samamisticus* Common Redstarts. Nuthatch was an addition to the trip list while Green Warblers were very common, with birds heard singing at almost every stop. Nightingale, Red-backed Shrike and Corn Bunting as well as a typical range of woodland species were also commonplace but we could not find our primary target.

A change of tactic was needed and so we decided to cut away from the mature forest of the valley slopes, concentrating instead on the younger trees on the valley floor. We were utterly soaked and so were naturally elated when Dan found a male Semicollared Flycatcher in scrub on the banks of the river itself. The bird initially proved elusive and we soon realised why when we relocated it: it was feeding at ground level, no doubt in a bid to find insects sheltering from the deluge! We soon realised three individuals (two males and a female) were present, and it was quite amazing to watch them hopping about on the rocks in the river itself – so bad was the weather that these really were desperate times for insectivorous species.

Satisfied yet drenched, we decided to head back to the hotel to dry out although realised that the day's heavy rain was causing the river level to rapidly rise – it was clearly already a few inches higher than it had been just hours previously. If the crossing had been hairy earlier in the day, it was genuinely treacherous on the way back – had we left it an hour or two longer, it's unlikely we would have made it back to the hotel that evening! As it was luck was on our side and we were able to return to the hotel for more grilled meat, salad and bread, washed down with a much-needed alcoholic beverage.



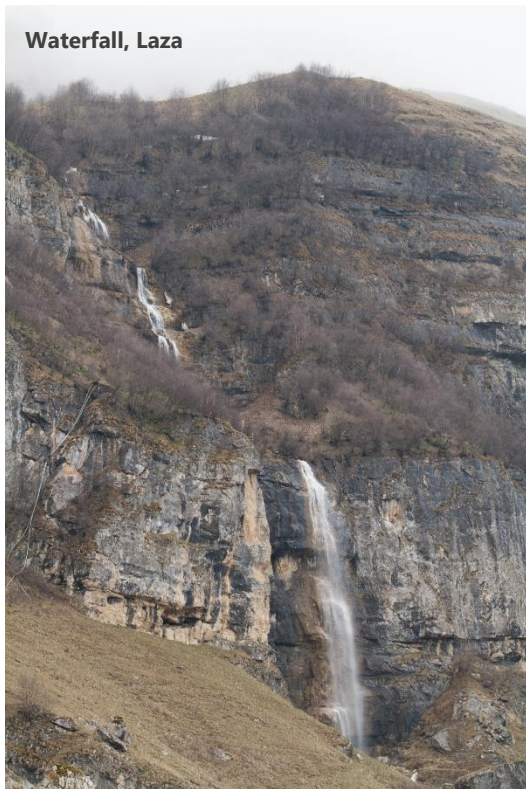
## 6 May 2015

After yesterday's disappointment we were relieved to find that the weather had improved by dawn. A clear morning was crucial in order for us to see our main target, and so it was a relief when we arrived in Laza to find that the impressive slopes of Mount Shahdag were visible. High up on the hill, just below the snow line, several black blobs were moving around, some occasionally

jumping in display – Caucasian Black Grouse. At least ten birds, mostly males, were scattered across the hillside – views were distant to say the least, but on 60x magnification the bird's long tail feathers were just about visible.

Behind us, a singing chiffchaff quickly transpired to be a Mountain Chiffchaff – the bird showing well in the birch scrub and responding well to brief bursts of playback, its subdued brown tones very much apparent although the supercilium was nowhere near as prominent as the *Collins Bird Guide* suggested.

With these two targets in the bag early, we set about heading up to the Suvar Resort in order to continue our search for Great



Waterfall, Laza

Rosefinch. Red-fronted Serins were again prominent in and around the village while an immature Lammergeier cruised by below us, giving excellent views. Birds were aplenty: at least a couple of Wallcreepers showed well and both Alpine Accentors and Ring Ouzels were numerous up on the slopes. At least a couple more Mountain Chiffchaffs were singing in the birches above Suvar, one affording excellent views, but our extended search brought not a sniff of any Great Rosefinches.

As if to compound the frustration, the weather began to worsen again with the clouds rolling in by early afternoon. With the forecast predicted to be poor in the Greater Caucasus for the coming days, we made the decision to begin the long drive south, where we hoped the weather would be better. As we headed towards the coast from Quba we began to encounter our first Lesser Grey Shrikes and Rollers while two Ruddy Shelducks were seen close to Besh Barmeg. Rose-coloured Starling flocks were also conspicuous on the coast – as were Lesser Kestrels, which seemed to be everywhere.

By the evening we'd arrived near the village of Qobustan, on the coast road south of Baku. With an hour to go before darkness we decided to explore the adjacent plains, which brought a tick for Ash and myself – a male Finsch's Wheatear feeding two fledged youngsters. A nearby pool held a Ruddy Shelduck while Isabelline and Black-eared Wheatears, Lesser Short-toed Lark and Spanish Sparrows were common and a flock of c.50 Mediterranean Gulls flew through.

Despite being exhausted we decided to continue driving south. The road south of Alat is very poor and with so many HGVs on the road, was extremely slow going. To make matters worse the rain returned and the drive south to Masalli was a real struggle late at night, and we arrived in the early hours.

## 7 May 2015

A slightly later start than the previous couple of mornings saw us head south-west out of Masalli just after sunrise. The roads were lined with countless Lesser Grey Shrikes and many Black-headed Buntings as we made our way towards the deciduous forests of the nearby foothills. Our target here was a near-endemic – the *poelzami* race of Great Spotted Woodpecker – and it wasn't long before we had our first sighting of this distinct taxon, flying across the wooded river valley at Istisu. Acquiring good views was a different challenge altogether with the dense canopy making finding the woodpeckers in trees extremely difficult, although we did manage views of an adult climbing up a tree trunk and revealing the distinct 'tea-stained' brownish underparts



– one of a pair seen. The wood was alive with birdsong: Green Warblers were common although a singing Willow Warbler was more of a surprise. Several Hawfinches called as they flew over and other trip list additions included Robin and Spotted Flycatcher.

It was then back to Masalli for a crack at one of our main trip targets. Azerbaijan is the only country within the Western Palearctic to support breeding Shikra, with the area around Masalli widely publicised as the most reliable spot to find the species. Sure enough at least one male Shikra showed in flight over oaks, viewed from the clearing just east of the Olympic Complex. Also seen were at least one Eurasian Sparrowhawk, many Rollers, Golden Oriole and plenty of Cuckoos and Rose-coloured Starlings. Unfortunately dark clouds were looming once more and figuring that we'd need good weather for further Shikra action, we made the call to head east to the coast with a view that we'd return to Masalli later in the day.

The few hours we spent at Ghizil-Agaj State Reserve were undeniably some of the best we had during our fortnight in Azerbaijan. The birding here was exceptional, not least for the stunning numbers of marsh terns over just about every waterbody. Most were White-winged Black Terns, with birds busily feeding in all directions – we estimated that there must have been in excess of 50,000 birds; an extraordinary sight that will live long in the memory. Good numbers of Whiskered Terns (2,000+) and Gull-billed Terns were noted but just a handful of Black Terns could be found among the throng.

Great Reed Warblers sang from the reedbeds and our first Barred Warbler of the trip was seen. Other passerines included Penduline Tits in the reeds and Red-throated Pipits moving through. Out on the lagoons a great selection of waders included 15 Terek Sandpipers, 10 Broad-billed Sandpipers, three Red-necked Phalaropes and Collared Pratincole among the much commoner Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints. Pygmy Cormorants were numerous while Purple and Squacco Herons, Glossy Ibis and Caspian Gulls were also conspicuous – the entire area was alive with birds. Overhead a small flock of northbound Honey Buzzards carried with them a single Black Kite.



**Dalmatian Pelican**



**Shikra**

Moving round to the coast we found several Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and a couple of singing Ménétries's Warblers by the road. The beach was quite 'birdy' with another flock of Terek Sandpipers the highlight, though we were soon shooed off by a rather unfriendly-looking soldier who was immediately on the phone for backup. We made a quick exit and made another stop a kilometre or so back down the road. The bay here produced the arguable highlight of our visit to the area in the form of three immature Dalmatian Pelicans – a tick for all but myself. Also here was a drake Pintail and a Bar-tailed Godwit, the latter apparently a particularly good Azerbaijani record.

Back at Masalli a troublesome haze had formed and the mid-afternoon light was harsh. We'd had another brief sighting of a male Shikra over roadside oaks south of the town but it had been far from satisfying, so we returned to the clearing where we'd tried earlier. Birds of prey were very much apparent: Short-toed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Sparrowhawks and then, just when David had decided to wander off, two male Shikras drifted over, giving reasonable views – typical! Fortunately we didn't have to wait long for another sighting: a stop just a few hundred metres away brought



great views of a low-flying male that sat up in an oak and proceeded to eat some sort of invertebrate in full view for several minutes – at last, satisfying views for all the team!

With plenty of light left in the day we stocked up on supplies in Masalli and began the drive south to the Zuvand region. The woods on the drive up to Lerik were impressively dense and we could only think that Caspian Tit – the near-mythical species not confirmed from these forests for many years – must still exist here.

We arrived in Lerik late afternoon and the canyon a few kilometres to the south of the town produced nice views of a roadside Western Rock Nuthatch, which was a lifer for Ash and Dan. We reached the plains west of Gosmajilion with a couple of hours daylight left, and a stroll here produced a couple of singing Bimaculated Larks west of the road. Short-toed Lark, Tawny Pipit and Isabelline Wheatears were all common.

We chose to camp in the river valley south of Gosmajilion where both Green and Syrian Woodpeckers, Cetti's Warbler and even Kingfisher were seen. At dusk two Purple Herons arrived from height and several Scops Owls began to sing on a beautiful, if slightly chilly, evening.

## 8 May 2015

The morning dawned clear and we were treated to crippling views of a pair of roosting Scops Owls as we packed up our tents. Our destination was the village of Mistan, a short drive to the east, where we intended to explore the surrounding hills for two of our primary target species.

The highest peak here exceeds 2,300 m and so despite the unbroken sunshine, it was refreshingly cool for much of the morning – very helpful when climbing punishingly steep slopes. Species selection was similar to that in the Greater Caucasus with Rock



and Blue Rock Thrush, Water Pipit, Shore Lark, Ring Ouzel, Alpine Accentor and Rock Bunting all numerous. Black-eared Wheatears were also common on the slopes with both Crag Martins and Alpine Swifts seen overhead. Occasionally raptors would pass through with small groups of Honey Buzzards heading north as well as 2cy Steppe Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Egyptian Vulture and two Montagu's Harriers, the latter including a stunning dark morph.

While on the ascent Ash had flushed an Asian Crimson-winged Finch – one of our targets – from beneath his feet but the bird had quickly disappeared. David had remained not far from the vehicle but the rest of us reconvened at the top of the ridge east of the village. Not long after we were pleasantly surprised to stumble across our hoped-for target, singing from a rocky outcrop at the very top of the hill – a male Radde's Accentor. The bird proved

extremely mobile and quite elusive in the midday sun but eventually gave some great views, even allowing time for David to make the arduous climb to see it.

On the way up David had glimpsed a Crimson-winged Finch and so Ash, Dan and I headed down towards the area in which he'd seen it. It didn't take long for the bird to show but it remained extremely skittish and mobile, denying any decent photo opportunities.

With our main objectives achieved we decided to start the momentous drive back north to the Greater Caucasus to recommence the search for better (or just any) views of Great Rosefinch. En route back to Lerik we stopped in the same canyon as the previous day and quickly found a singing Barred Warbler and Red-fronted Serin among the expected species. A couple of kilometres further south produced a hillside littered with Black-headed Buntings as well as both Marsh and Great Reed Warblers in scrub – no doubt both migrants. Our first Quail of the trip was singing, Western Rock Nuthatch was seen on the slopes above and a Long-legged Buzzard drifted over.

Distracted by the buntings, I'd stupidly left the car key in the ignition and managed to leave the air conditioning on. Returning to the vehicle, we found the battery to be completely flat! At least the locals were both friendly and willing to help: within just an hour were back on the road after a local couple had been to retrieve jump leads from Lerik. Who'd have thought a battered old Lada could power up a brand new 4x4?! Wonders never cease.

Aside a White-tailed Eagle flying over the car near Mahmudchala Lake at dusk and a typical Azerbaijani dinner in nearby Salyan, the long drive north was utterly uneventful and we pulled up at a hotel in Quba at around 01:00.

## 9 May 2015

Early morning arrived and with it the familiar ascent up through Khinaliq village and on to the slopes above. Despite our previous struggles we were reasonably confident of finding the rosefinches, particularly with the weather quite settled. Alas a day's searching once again proved extremely frustrating: though we searched at a higher altitude more consistently our sightings amassed to a flyover male (seen by Ash and David, heard-only by Josh) and an extremely distant and brief perched female (Dan only).

Consolation came in the form of 15+ *Güldenstädt's* Redstarts, 20+ Caucasian Snowcocks (both species were widespread and conspicuous), several brilliant *Lammergeier* sightings and memorable encounters with Wallcreepers, including a couple of males fighting in a meltwater stream right in front of Dan and I. Other highlights were at least four Cinereous Vultures, Golden Eagle and the regular high-altitude species seen on previous visits, including abundant Alpine Accentors.

## 10 May 2015

Once again we returned to Khinaliq but, as on previous visits, the rosefinches proved elusive. To compound matters I suffered a bout of altitude sickness and, despite trying to battle through it, my symptoms worsened as I gained height and I had no option but to return to the car after just a couple of hours. The others continued their search but it was only Dan who was rewarded for the toil, obtaining decent views of a pair of Great Rosefinches at around 3,150 m. On returning to the vehicle to try and sleep off the nausea, I was soon accosted by a truckload of army personnel wanting to know what I was doing, where I was from and if I was with anyone. In fairness this particular bunch were reasonably friendly but nevertheless a pain, hanging

around over an hour before Dan returned from the higher slopes and repeatedly stating that it was not permitted to walk freely here.

Fed up with the barrage and a little sick (in my case literally) of Qizil Qaya, we elected to leave the area for good and head back to the coast. Stopping off in Quba, a brief bit of Wi-Fi was enough to send Dan in to delirium with news of a Citril Finch present in Norfolk. Ash, though not as distraught, was also getting a bit twitchy and the atmosphere among the team became very tense as we headed south. Once again the drive produced typical species included Lesser Kestrel, Roller, Lesser Grey Shrike and Rose-coloured Starlings.

With plenty of time left in the day we stopped off at Shuraabad, situated on the coast about 40 km north of Baku. Black-necked Grebe, Garganey and Shoveler were all seen on flooded fields near the village. Further along the road runs along a peninsula, with a shallow inlet on the landward side forming a sheltered coastal lagoon. Despite the howling wind (which is typical of the coast here) we located two immature Dalmatian Pelicans, a flock of Spoonbills, good numbers of Little Stints, and a few Slender-billed Gulls and Little Ringed Plovers. Among the Caspian Gulls offshore were smaller numbers of Mediterranean Gulls as well as a single Little Gull. A White-tailed Eagle was seen distantly.



Mediterranean Gull, Shuraabad

On our previous drive past the Azerbaijani capital we'd spied a small, bird-filled lagoon near Sumgayit at 40.620, 49.543. Stopping off here and viewing from the south side, we again found it to be hugely productive. Waders were present in brilliant numbers and among the dozens of Curlew Sandpipers and Little Stints we found 10 Black-winged Pratincoles, 3 Broad-billed Sandpipers, 20+ Temminck's Stints, 11 Red-necked Phalaropes and 3 Black-tailed Godwits. Wood Sandpiper was comfortably the most numerous species with over 200 present. At least 50 White-winged Black and a handful of Whiskered Terns patrolled the lake while our first Woodchat Shrike of the trip was seen and a Garganey was also present.

Thankfully both Dan and Ash had elected against trying to fly back to the UK for the Citril Finch (as it proved, a very sensible decision given the bird's departure early the following morning). Much of the evening was spent trying to find suitable accommodation on the coast east of Baku – something that proved extremely challenging. Tiredness caused our tempers to fray and it wasn't actually until the early hours that we were finally settled in a hotel – back in the city itself after a wasted 80 km detour!

## 11 May 2015

After a couple of long days and a late night the previous evening we decided not to rush around, instead enjoying a rare lie-in until mid-morning, when we were due to meet Dr Elchin Sultanov to sort out preparations for our Nakhchivan extension. As it turned out, finding the AZAL office was the biggest challenge and purchasing our flight tickets was straightforward. After agreeing to meet Elchin at the airport in the evening, we decided to head south from Baku to the Hajigabul area in order to get something out of the day.

It was the midday (and very hot) by the time we reached Hajigabul. The intensity of the heat haze made viewing the lake a challenge in itself, unfortunately rendering the distant wader flocks virtually unidentifiable – though the 50 or so Greater Flamingoes and five Avocets were easy enough to decipher. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were numerous while our first Rufous Bush Chats of the trip were noted in the surrounding tamarisk scrub. Other passerines included numerous Eastern Olivaceous and Ménétries's Warblers, Isabelline Wheatears and Lesser Short-toed Larks. Adjacent fishing lakes held the usual waterbirds including White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns, Wood Sandpipers, Purple Herons and Great White Egrets, but activity was slow in the heat of the day.

We decided to check out the saltpans and fishing lakes a little further west (40.0255, 48.8809) and found a little more diversity. As well as further views of the above passerines, sightings included our first *caspia* Reed Buntings illustrating their curiously bulbous bill shape, three Red-crested Pochards, a drake Pochard, two Ruddy Shelducks, three Terek Sandpipers and a singing male Black Francolin.

With the afternoon wearing on we started heading back to Baku, but were pulled over a police checkpoint just north of Hajigabul. It transpired that I'd been caught speeding and that they were looking to impose a substantial fine but, as ever, playing the quintessential dumb British tourist proved successful and I was let off after several minutes of shrugging coupled with blank expressions.

After a week of punishment our hire car was in a bit of a state and so we stopped off to have it washed before returning it to the hire car company – fortunately they didn't look too hard underneath and missed the rather bruised underbelly! Fizuli, our car hire representative, was in a seemingly foul mood that was compounded when he received a ticket for parking illegally as we dropped David off in the centre of Baku. Saying our goodbyes, David offered us the best of luck for the trip to Nakhchivan and hoped that we managed to stay alive until we reached the airport. Despite the raging Fizuli's efforts to break just about every basic rule of sensible driving, we did remain intact until the airport and quickly fled in to the terminal for our flight to Nakhchivan, where we arrived late evening and were quickly introduced to Azru Memmedov, Elchin's former PHD student and just about the only birder living in the region.



## 12 May 2015

We awoke early but needn't have bothered – it appeared Arzu and Elchin weren't as keen to get an early start despite it likely to be hot as the day progressed. In fact, the first of many bewildering quotes from Elchin during our four days in Nakhchivan was that "birds become more active as it gets warmer".

One of the first birds of the day was a Pygmy Cormorant flying over Nakhchivan City. As we drove east towards the village of Ordubad we scored a few sightings of flyover Black-bellied Sandgrouse and an Egyptian Vulture. Our first stop was at a bridge east of Ordubad at 38.888, 46.047. The highlight here was one of our Nakhchivan targets – a pair of manky Persian Wheatears that were evidently feeding young in the wadi. The far-carrying call of Eastern Rock Nuthatch could be heard all around us and careful scanning of the hillsides produced distant views of several birds – another tick for both Dan and Ash. Several Finsch's Wheatears were also found around the wadi while a Lammergeier and a couple of Griffon Vultures floated overhead. Other birds included both Woodchat and Red-backed Shrikes, Golden Oriole, Rock Sparrows, Crag Martin and the ubiquitous Rose-coloured Starlings.

Heading back west to Yayci we stopped for some lunch by a small almond grove at 38.9808, 45.6782. Desert Finches were quite conspicuous here: we recorded at least five adults and found two nests in the small almond trees. Black-headed Buntings



Desert Finch

were also making the most of the cultivation with a number of territorial males. Other birds included Spotted Flycatcher, Whinchat, Rufous Bush Chat, Woodchat and Lesser Grey Shrikes plus four Black-bellied Sandgrouse and an Egyptian Vulture overhead.

After lunch we made the short drive north towards Dari Dagh. Dan quickly spotted a pair of See-see Partridges from the van where it crosses a small bridge just before the building at 39.001, 45.679. Piling out of the van we soon noticed a family of Persian Wheatears on the opposite slope, the adults feeding at least three fledged youngsters. While the wheatears performed well for the camera a passerine began to sing close by, any mystery quickly dissolving when it perched on wires above my head: male Grey-necked Bunting!

Things continued to improve as a large, grey *Hippolais* warbler lumbered past, slowly working its way up the slope among the scant weeds – Upcher's Warbler, and the third of our key Nakhchivan targets at this spot in the space of 10 minutes! While Dan and Ash searched for the See-sees I wandered further up the valley and, now familiar with the song of Grey-necked Bunting, quickly found more territorial males – in total 6-7 were present, a real surprise to Elchin who'd confidently stated that the species would be "difficult"!

Further birds seen at this excellent spot included a couple of flyover Trumpeter Finches, a Lammergeier and a couple of Chiffchaffs before a spectacular thunderstorm brought an end to proceedings. After a meeting with Taniel Talibov, the director of Nakhchivan's Bioresources Institute, in which we were shown some truly gripping camera-trap footage of Caucasian Leopards, Brown Bears, Caspian Snowcocks and much more besides, the rest of the evening was spent relaxing in the hotel bar a brief walk around the outskirts of Nakhchivan city – Syrian Woodpecker and nest-building Penduline Tits were the avian highlights.

### 13 May 2015

Another late start meant it was already mid-morning by the time we arrived at our first destination. It had rained quite considerably overnight and our old Mercedes van was far from suited to tackling the slippery off-road terrain, but eventually we reached our target destination in the Negram Mountains.

The scenery here was fantastic with brilliant vistas, and the birding proved very good too. Both Persian and Finsch's Wheatears seemed quite common along the rocky escarpments and small parties of Trumpeter Finches were regularly encountered. At least a couple of male Grey-necked Buntings were holding territory and both Eastern and Western Rock Nuthatches were noted. Occasional fly-bys from Black-bellied Sandgrouse amounted to around 20 birds; other flyovers included Golden Eagle, Long-legged Buzzard, a couple of Egyptian Vultures and Ruddy Shelduck. Our primary target, however, took some time to nail down but eventually we found a flock of 11 Mongolian Finches along the escarpments, over a kilometre from our start position. Though they proved extremely mobile and generally unapproachable, we were eventually rewarded with decent views of this difficult-to-see WP species.



Mongolian Finch, Negram, Nakhchivan (Ashley Howe)

With another success under the belt we decided to drive north towards the village of Gal. Exploring from the road at 39.0990, 45.7356 we were treated to at least three further Grey-necked Buntings, several singing Pale Rock Sparrows, Trumpeter Finch, Long-legged Buzzard, Short-toed Eagle and three Egyptian Vultures. Migrants in the small roadside wadi included a female Oortolan as well as Garden Warbler and Spotted Flycatcher.

Exploring the roadside hills at 39.049, 45.749, just north of Diz, produced a pair of See-see Partridges as well as a familiar selection of the typical Nakhchivan species: at least two singing Grey-necked Buntings were located plus a couple of Pale Rock Sparrows, several Persian Wheatears and, overhead, five Griffon Vultures and a Honey Buzzard.

**14 May 2015**

After promising an early start, Elchin and Arzu left us pretty infuriated when they decided to show up at 07:00, rather than the agreed start time of 05:30. Citing poor weather in the hills at our destination, the Lesser Caucasus mountains above the village of Güney Qışlaq, it was extremely frustrating when we arrived to find the mountaintops clear with no sign of any rain.

We soon set about ascending to search for our main target, Caspian Snowcock, only to receive a call from Elchin after half an hour telling us not to go too high as we would be "shot by the Armenian army"! Unfortunately it was about this point that the rain and mist began to roll in and our visibility was cut close to zero, ruining any slim hopes we had of finding the snowcock. The long walk back to the village in dismal conditions was barely made tolerable by a selection of typical high-altitude species including Rock Bunting, Rock Thrush, Ring Ouzel, Water Pipit and Dipper, though Grey Partridge was a new species for the trip among the commoner Chukar.



Clouds roll through the Lesser Caucasus above Güney Qışlaq, Nakhchivan

The rain seemed well set and so we took refuge in Arzu's family home, where his sister and parents lived. Here we experienced an authentic taster of life in Nakhchivan – quite basic but we were welcomed warmly nonetheless and drank plenty of tea while Dan scoffed the chocolates put out for us.

After almost two hours the rain began to ease and so we seized the opportunity to begin the drive back down towards Nakhchivan City. We were keen to try for White-throated Robin but Elchin insisted the "strong rain" (which had become little more than drizzle by this point) would mean we'd fail. Nevertheless we persuaded him to pull over at a likely-looking valley at 39.4662, 45.5979 and found a singing male White-throated Robin within about five minutes of arriving. The rain soon stopped and it transpired that at least three males were singing in the immediate area, with sightings of at least one female. The birds tended to keep returning to a putrid manure pile by some farm buildings, no doubt attracted by the multitude of invertebrate life swarming all over the dung. Lesser Grey and Red-backed Shrikes, Rock and Black-headed Buntings, and Red-fronted Serin were the best of the rest. Following this, we returned to Nakhchivan City (again prematurely, well before dusk) and settled in for another night in the hotel.



## 15 May 2015

Our final day in Nakhchivan was to be dedicated to photographing Upcher's Warblers. Our first stop was east of the village of Beneniar, where a congregation of gulls and birds of prey to the north of the road betrayed the presence of the local refuse dump at 39.136, 45.680. Closer examination revealed a 2cy Lammergeier and a single Black Vulture, these gargantuan beasts dwarfing the seven Egyptian Vultures, 20+ Steppe Eagles and scores of Black Kites, White Storks and Armenian Gulls also present, all within the shadow of the mighty Ilan Dag.



Cinereous Vulture (left) and Lammergeier east of Beneniar, Nakhchivan

Continuing south-east along the minor road for a few kilometres, we stopped to explore the open plains. A handful of Bimaculated Larks were singing overhead although they proved nigh on impossible to see on the ground. Isabelline Wheatears, Short-toed and Crested larks were all very common.

Our next stop was towards the village of Gal, a little further north of where we had visited a couple of days previously. Here, at 39.1066, 45.7414, we found a singing male Grey-necked Bunting and Pale Rock Sparrow. Continuing north of the village, we stopped at a picnic spot by a small pond at 39.126, 45.7414, where a 2cy male Levant Sparrowhawk gave great views – a tick for both Dan and Ash. Also here were both rock nuthatches (including an active nest of Western very close to the ground) and a Barred Warbler, but no Upcher's Warblers.

It was a similar story to the north-east at Shurut. We explored a wadi that Arzu had described as good for Upcher's but found none – presumably they were simply not in yet and thus our sightings a couple of days previous were fortuitous. We did find three more singing male Grey-headed Buntings as well as a singing Marsh Warbler, several Golden Orioles and, best of all, two Sheltopusiks, which we failed to catch despite trying.

The final stop of our Nakhchivan trip was a wadi south of Camaldin where we found a single Upcher's Warbler (though not seen well enough for photos) in addition to at least two singing Grey-necked Buntings, several Persian Wheatears, singles of Finsch's Wheatear and Egyptian Vulture, a showy Golden Jackal and a Greek Tortoise. It was then back to Nakhchivan airport, where we said our goodbyes to Arzu.



Unfortunately our flight back to Baku was delayed by almost two hours due to poor weather over the Lesser Caucasus, and it was in the early hours by the time we had finally got out of Baku airport and on the road south. Eventually we arrived in Salyan at around 03:00, where we found a decent hotel and flopped straight in to bed.

## 16 May 2015

After the previous evening's escapades we were not out until sometime after 07:00. Our plan was to explore the Kura Delta for the morning, starting on the south side. One of the first birds of the morning was White-tailed Lapwing – a pair feeding on a stagnant roadside pool just south-east of Banka. The fishponds on the south side of the delta were fairly productive with a male Black Francolin and Broad-billed Sandpiper seen close to the track. The fishponds themselves were teeming with the usual waterbirds, although views were not great due to distance – Garganey and Gadwall were new for the trip. In the scrub both Rufous Bush Chats and Ménétries's Warblers were numerous and Blue-cheeked and European Bee-eaters were scattered around.



White-tailed Lapwing, Banka

By lunchtime we decided to move round to the north side of the river, first of all taking an extremely bumpy track north from Banka for four kilometres to a small settlement. We were truly astounded at what we found on the edge of the village (co-ordinates 39.4899, 49.2653): a huge colony of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, which we were able to watch feeding and digging nest holes in the ground at point-blank range. Definitely one of the highlights of the fortnight!

The nearby lagoon was fairly quiet although 20 Mute Swans represented a new species for the trip. Offshore a Caspian Tern drifted by and the beach held c.50 Whimbrel and a single Turnstone – all new species for the trip list.

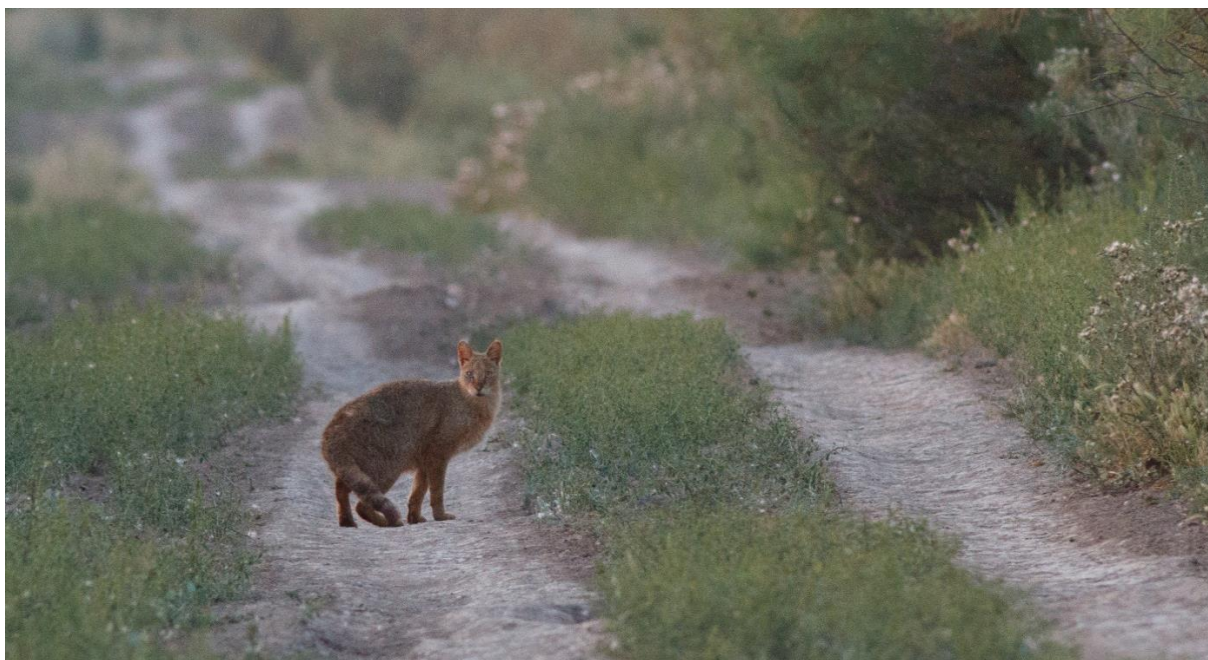
The bee-eater colony was so brilliant that we agreed to return later in the afternoon when the weather cooled and the light softened, so we headed south to the large coastal lagoon at 39.384, 49.342. This turned out to be the best place we visited all trip for shorebirds: the number and variety was simply exceptional and we estimated that there were 400+ Red-necked

Phalaropes, 150+ Broad-billed Sandpipers and 200+ Terek Sandpipers among the hundreds of Little Stints and 1,000+ Curlew Sandpipers present. Other birds present included a couple of Avocets, Sanderling and 200+ Greater Flamingos as well as the ubiquitous Lesser Short-toed Larks. The only downside to the spectacle was the intense heat haze that had enveloped the lagoon – if only we'd known about this spot earlier, as views (and photo opportunities) would have been exceptional early morning!

The old salt pans just west of here were somewhat less birdy, although five Terek Sandpipers showed quite well and we managed three new trip ticks: Little Grebe, Green Sandpiper and Common Snipe.

After returning to the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater colony for a photo-shoot in improved (but still far from perfect) light conditions, we decided to head west to Mahmudchala Lake for the final couple of hours of the day. The lake here is easily viewable from the main road and we were able to obtain distant views of a mixed flock of wildfowl that contained six White-headed Ducks, five Red-crested Pochards and a couple of Ferruginous Ducks among the commoner species (three Eurasian Wigeon were new for the trip list). A handful of Black Terns were also over the water and a Calandra Lake sang overhead.

Wanting to explore further, we took the extremely bumpy track southwards along the east side of the reservoir. This allows considerably better views of the extensive reedbeds. A typical selection of waterbirds gave excellent views while our first Moustached Warblers of the trip were seen and heard and a Bittern flew over the reeds. Osprey was another trip list addition and Penduline Tits seemed common. Best of all, though, was a Jungle Cat that gave excellent views as it rested along the track some 50m in front of our vehicle towards dusk – a mammal tick for all three of us!



Jungle Cat, Mahmudchala Lake

## 17 May 2015

We started our final day in Azerbaijan at the famous Shirvan National Park. Several Black Francolins were audible near the park entrance and a number of good-sized flocks of Rose-coloured Starlings were flying around. Stone Curlew took us past 250 species for the trip and several Calandra Larks gave good views but, ultimately, we found the park disappointing for birds. Save

a few herons and ducks, the main lake was extremely quiet and the birding was nothing on the previous day. After a couple of hours we decided to leave Shirvan and head north towards Gobustan to look for Greater Sand Plovers.

We'd been given GPS co-ordinates for several small pools in the Gobustan region, west of Baku, but our search for sand plovers drew a blank – the best we managed were commoner species such as Little Ringed Plover and Black-winged Stilts, and some of the pools had either disappeared or were rubbish-filled and polluted.

A great surprise, however, were two falcons high overhead at 40.4594, 49.4038. Watching them through the telescope, each of us became convinced that they were more likely Sakers than Lanners – although the smaller, older (3cy+) bird was very pale. Fortunately both came considerably closer and I was able to obtain a reasonable series of record shots. The 2cy bird was particularly large and imposing and more convincing as Saker, although the older bird less so. Subsequent circulation of the images brought a mixed response with Dick Forsman declaring that he would be happy to call them Sakers; this is a pretty good record for Azerbaijan at this time of year – a few isolated pairs of Lanner are now known to breed in Azerbaijan, while Saker is thought solely to be a scarcer winter visitor.

A final stop at 'Red Lake', on the outskirts of Baku, brought nice views of a flock of eight Terek Sandpipers, a male Little Bittern and both Little and Gull-billed Terns. It was then back to Baku airport, via our final meeting with the ever-unreliable car hire man Fizuli (who refused to take us back to the airport unless we paid him – we opted for a taxi). From many aspects it had been a superb trip: birds, general wildlife and scenery had been difficult to beat, but I think it's fair to say that all three of us were happy to be leaving certain things behind as we headed for the airport – the stressful end to the fortnight somewhat typified the hassle and difficulties in this otherwise brilliant country.



Terek Sandpipers, Red Lake, Baku

## SELECTED SPECIES NOTES

**Dalmatian Pelican:** a common wintering species in Azerbaijan, the vast majority of birds leave for breeding grounds further north in spring and thus a May trip is likely only to encounter stragglers, invariably immatures, hanging on along the Caspian coast. We had no real expectations to connect with this species and so were pleased to find three immatures on the coastal



lagoon viewed from the car park at 38.865, 48.855 at Ghizil-Agaj State Reserve on 7 May, followed by two further youngsters sheltered bay south of Shuraabad at 40.782, 49.542 on 10 May.

**Shikra:** seemingly fairly common in the lowlands around Masalli, generally keeping close to the large oak stands, and substantial concentrations of this habitat are well worth exploring. On 7 May we saw at least three birds over the clearing north of the Olympic Complex, viewed from 39.0227, 48.6975, as well as had fantastic views of a male perched in an oak at 39.025, 48.700. A further bird was also seen over the main road at 39.012, 48.706 – clearly the species is quite easy to find.

**See-see Partridge:** absent from mainland Azerbaijan, this is a speciality of Nakhchivan that was only rediscovered in recent years. A pair was seen at Dan Daghi (39.001, 45.679) on 12 May with another pair at 39.049, 45.749, just north of Diz, the following day. Birds were seen in dry wadis on both occasions and with no shortage of similar habitat spread across Nakhchivan, the species is presumably quite common and widespread.

**Caucasian Black Grouse:** the only truly accessible lek of this species in Azerbaijan lies on the slopes of Mount Shahdag, high above Laza. Note that this is a restricted area that can only be accessed by arranging the necessary permits several weeks in advance – something that, due to an unfortunate series of circumstances and being fed misinformation, we did not realise. We therefore had to make do with extremely distant views from the approach road to Laza village – a telescope is essential, ideally with the capability to zoom to 60x. Even at this magnification the birds were little more than black blobs, although you could make out their impressive tails and watch them 'dance'. The lek can be viewed by looking high up the slopes from 41.2994, 48.1174, along the road in to Laza – for the exact area of the lek itself, please [email me](#).

**Caucasian Snowcock:** the far-carrying, Curlew-like call of this species is one of the defining features of the pristine Greater Caucasian landscape. We found them very numerous and easy to see from ~ 3,000 m at Khinaliq, both perched on the rocky escarpments and in flight when spooked by passing birds of prey. Though we did not venture high enough to encounter birds at Laza, we nevertheless heard them calling on a few occasions.

**Bimaculated Lark:** though fairly common and widespread in Nakhchivan this species is restricted to the Zuvand region in mainland Azerbaijan, where it is scarce. We found at least two birds holding territory on the plains north of the road at 38.675, 48.350 during a relatively brief search early evening on 7 May. Though we did not search thoroughly for the species in Nakhchivan, we easily found several singing males over the plains south-west of Ilan Dag on 15 May – suitable habitat can be found right along this stretch of road, although we walked around at roughly 39.112, 45.686.

**Radde's Accentor:** just one was seen – around the escarpment at the very top of the highest peak to the east of the village of Mistan (38.645, 48.449) on 8 May. Though quite mobile and elusive, it could often be heard singing and responded well to playback. The species has also been seen in the Batabat region of Nakhchivan, though our relatively tight timescale and earlier success in Zuvand meant that we didn't try here.

**Güldenstädt's Redstart:** seemingly reasonably common above ~ 2,800 m at Khinaliq, this species was found with relative ease around the boulder fields and rocky scree slopes as high as the snow line. Birds were typically seen in pairs, the gaudy males generally seen first, and were usually mobile and difficult to approach. We did not search high enough at Laza to encounter the species.

**Semicollared Flycatcher:** three birds, including two males, were observed along the river south-west of Qusar at approximately 41.3365, 48.3418 on 5 May. This area can be accessed off the main Qusar-Quba road at 41.4104, 48.4698,



although note that it is necessary to cross the river bed at 41.3885, 48.4261 to reach the north side and continue along the track to the good areas of forest – a 4x4 is essential.

**Mountain Chiffchaff:** a few were seen, heard and photographed in the birch scrub on the slopes immediately above Laza village. We had particularly good views of birds at 41.300, 48.120 and approximately 41.283, 48.118, both individuals responding well to playback. The low number of birds suggested that they may only have recently arrived.

**Green Warbler:** common in all forested areas, both in the Greater and Lesser Caucasus and also the forested hills of the Hirkan National Park. Several presumed migrants also seen along the Caspian Sea coast.

**Upcher's Warbler:** supposedly common in the dry wadis of lowland Nakhchivan, we encountered this species at just two locations – our suspicion was that, despite it being mid-May, they were only just beginning to arrive. Two were seen at Dan Dagħ (39.001, 45.679) on 12 May and a single bird south of Camaldın on 15 May.

**Great Rosefinch:** if the redstarts had proved surprisingly easy to locate, Great Rosefinch was anything but – it took several days of searching the slopes above Khinaliq for us all to see this species. A female was seen very briefly early on 4 May (AH, JJ), a flyover male (AH, JJ, DM) and a very distant female (DP) on 9 May and, finally, a showy pair at 3,150 m on 10 May (DP only). Given that other teams visiting Khinaliq have connected with significantly less effort in years gone by, we can only conclude that it was either a poor year for the rosefinches or that we had been desperately unfortunate. Similarly, searching the slopes above Laza also failed to produce sightings in spots that they have been seen previously.

**Asian Crimson-winged Finch:** the only sightings of the trip were of single birds on the slopes east of Mistan on 8 May – both times about half-way up the slope.

**Mongolian Finch:** another species found only in Nakhchivan, we found a flock of 11 birds along the ridge in the Negram Mountains on 13 May. A rough GPS position for the obvious ridge is 39.0565, 45.5340, although the birds were mobile and seen several hundred metres in either direction from this waypoint.

**Grey-necked Bunting:** another species absent from mainland Azerbaijan, this is a speciality of Nakhchivan. In mid-May we found males singing at almost every site we visited throughout the republic's lowlands, with some spots producing several birds. Typically they occupy rocky escarpments on the edge of dry wadis, or open hill slopes with very little vegetation. For specific sites, see the main text.

## TRIP LIST

- |                  |                          |                       |
|------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Mute Swan      | • Shoveler               | • Quail               |
| • Shelduck       | • Pochard                | • Black Francolin     |
| • Ruddy Shelduck | • Red-crested Pochard    | • See-see Partridge   |
| • Pintail        | • Ferruginous Duck       | • Black-necked Grebe  |
| • Garganey       | • White-headed Duck      | • Great Crested Grebe |
| • Teal           | • Caucasian Black Grouse | • Little Grebe        |
| • Wigeon         | • Caucasian Snowcock     | • Moorhen             |
| • Gadwall        | • Chukar                 | • Coot                |
| • Mallard        | • Grey Partridge         | • Dalmatian Pelican   |

- Cormorant
- Pygmy Cormorant
- Greater Flamingo
- Squacco Heron
- Night Heron
- Little Egret
- Cattle Egret
- Great White Egret
- Bittern
- Little Bittern
- Grey Heron
- Purple Heron
- White Stork
- Glossy Ibis
- Spoonbill
- Lammergeier
- Griffon Vulture
- Cinereous Vulture
- Egyptian Vulture
- White-tailed Eagle
- Steppe Eagle
- Golden Eagle
- Eastern Imperial Eagle
- Lesser Spotted Eagle
- Short toed eagle
- Osprey
- Black Kite
- Marsh Harrier
- Montagu's Harrier
- Steppe Buzzard
- Long legged Buzzard
- Honey Buzzard
- Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- Levant Sparrowhawk
- Shikra
- Goshawk
- Kestrel
- Lesser Kestrel
- Hobby
- Peregrine
- Saker
- Avocet
- Black-winged Stilt
- Collared Pratincole
- Black-winged Pratincole
- Ringed Plover
- Little Ringed Plover
- Kentish Plover
- Grey Plover
- Lapwing
- White-tailed Lapwing
- Sanderling
- Dunlin
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Broad-billed Sandpiper
- Little Stint
- Temminck's Stint
- Wood Sandpiper
- Green Sandpiper
- Common Sandpiper
- Terek Sandpiper
- Common Redshank
- Spotted Redshank
- Greenshank
- Whimbrel
- Stone Curlew
- Black-tailed Godwit
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Ruff
- Turnstone
- Common Snipe
- Red-necked Phalarope
- Black-headed Gull
- Slender-billed Gull
- Mediterranean Gull
- Armenian Gull
- Caspian Gull
- Little Gull
- Little Tern
- Caspian Tern
- Sandwich Tern
- Gull-billed Tern
- Common Tern
- Black Tern
- White-winged Black Tern
- Whiskered Tern
- Rock Dove
- Stock Dove
- Wood Pigeon
- Laughing Dove
- Collared Dove
- Turtle Dove
- Ring-necked Parakeet
- Common Cuckoo
- Little Owl
- Scops Owl
- Black-bellied Sandgrouse
- Common Swift
- Alpine Swift
- Hoopoe
- European Bee-eater
- Blue cheeked Bee eater
- Roller
- Green Woodpecker
- Great Spotted Woodpecker
- Syrian Woodpecker
- Middle Spotted Woodp'r
- Eastern Rock Nuthatch
- Western Rock Nuthatch
- Sky Lark
- Crested Lark
- Wood Lark
- Short-toed Lark
- Lesser Short-toed Lark
- Bimaculated Lark
- Calandra Lark
- Shore Lark
- Sand Martin
- Crag Martin
- Swallow
- House Martin
- Tawny Pipit
- Water Pipit
- Tree Pipit
- Red-throated Pipit
- White Wagtail
- Yellow Wagtail
- Grey Wagtail
- Dipper
- Dunnock
- Alpine Accentor
- Radde's Accentor
- Rufous Bush Chat
- White-throated Robin
- Robin

- Nightingale
- Common Redstart
- Black Redstart
- Güldenstädt's Redstart
- Northern Wheatear
- Isabelline Wheatear
- Black-eared Wheatear
- Persian Wheatear
- Finsch's Wheatear
- Whinchat
- Caspian Stonechat
- Song Thrush
- Mistle Thrush
- Blackbird
- Ring Ouzel
- Rock Thrush
- Blue Rock Thrush
- Barred Warbler
- Blackcap
- Common Whitethroat
- Lesser Whitethroat
- Ménétries' Warbler
- Sedge Warbler
- Moustached Warbler
- Reed Warbler
- Marsh Warbler
- Great Reed Warbler
- Cetti's Warbler
- Garden Warbler
- Icterine Warbler
- Upcher's Warbler
- Eastern Olivaceous Warbler
- Willow Warbler
- Common Chiffchaff
- Mountain Chiffchaff
- Green Warbler
- Wren
- Spotted Flycatcher
- Red-breasted Flycatcher
- Semicollared Flycatcher
- Great Tit
- Coal Tit
- Blue Tit
- Long-tailed Tit
- Bearded Tit
- Nuthatch
- Common Treecreeper
- Wallcreeper
- Penduline Tit
- Lesser Grey Shrike
- Red-backed Shrike
- Woodchat Shrike
- Magpie
- Jay
- Jackdaw
- Alpine Chough
- Chough
- Hooded Crow
- Rook
- Raven
- Starling
- Rose-coloured Starling
- Golden Oriole
- House Sparrow
- Spanish Sparrow
- Tree Sparrow
- Rock Sparrow
- Pale Rock Sparrow
- White-winged Snowfinch
- Chaffinch
- Linnet
- Twite
- Goldfinch
- Greenfinch
- Red-fronted Serin
- Desert Finch
- Bullfinch
- Hawfinch
- Trumpeter Finch
- Mongolian Finch
- Common Rosefinch
- Great Rosefinch
- Crimson-winged Finch
- Ortolan Bunting
- Black-headed Bunting
- Corn Bunting
- Grey-necked Bunting
- Yellowhammer
- Rock Bunting
- Reed Bunting

**Total:** 252 species

## GALLERY

A selection of images taken during our fortnight in Azerbaijan can be found on the following pages. All photos are by Josh Jones. To see more images from our May 2015 trip, consider visiting the following websites:

- David Monticelli (pbase): [Bird trip to Azerbaijan \(May 2015\)](#)
- Josh Jones (Flickr): [Azerbaijan, May 2015](#)



**Above:** Güldenstädt's Redstart, Khinaliq, 4 May 2015

**Below:** Mountain Chiffchaff, Laza, 6 May 2015







**Above:** Finsch's Wheatear, Qobustan, 6 May 2015

**Below:** White-winged Black and Whiskered Terns, Ghizil-Agaj National Park, 7 May 2015

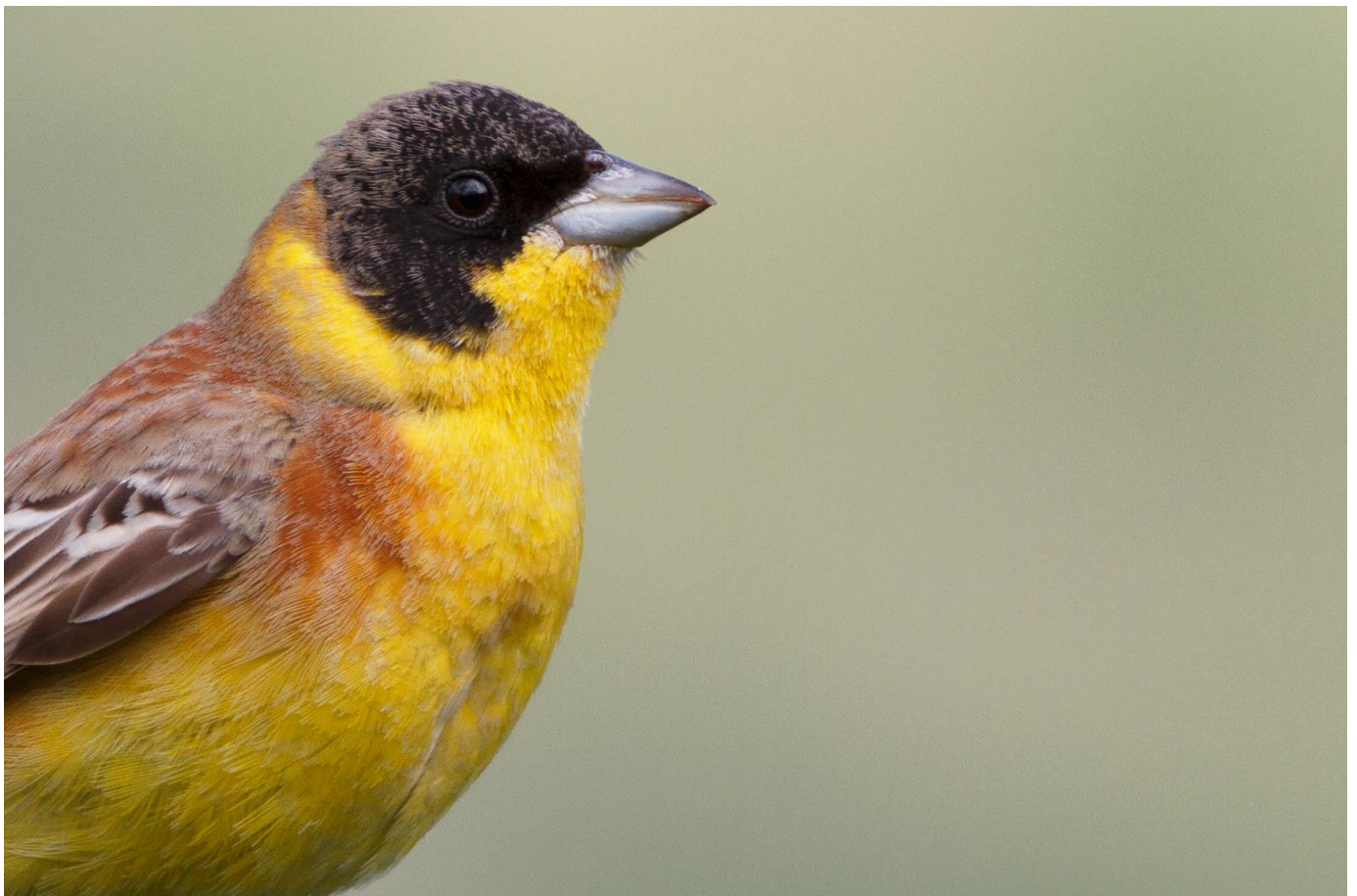






**Above:** Bimaculated Lark, Gosmajilion, 7 May 2015

**Below:** Black-headed Bunting, Lerik, 8 May 2015







**Above:** Caucasian Snowcocks, Khinaliq, 9 May 2015

**Below:** Lammergeier, Khinaliq, 9 May 2015







**Above:** Persian Wheatear, Dari Dag, Nakhchivan, 12 May 2015

**Below:** Grey-necked Bunting, Dari Dag, Nakhchivan, 12 May 2015







**Above:** See-see Partridge, north of Diz, Nakhchivan, 13 May 2015

**Below:** White-throated Robin, Nakhchivan, 14 May 2015





**Above:** European Bee-eater, Kura Delta, 16 May 2015

**Below:** Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Kura Delta, 16 May 2015

