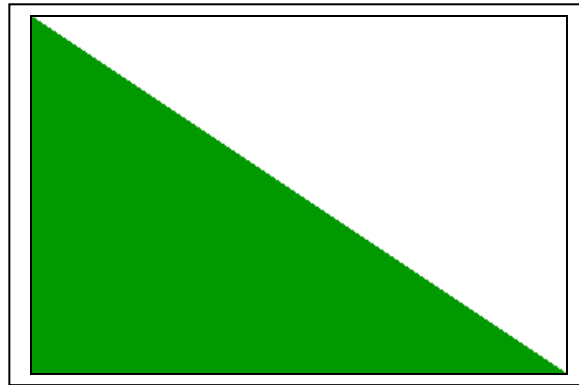


Siberia – Lake Baikal
31 May – 15 Jun 08
Mark Easterbrook



I travelled as a member of a Birdseekers tour of Siberia - Lake Baikal (31May – 15 Jun 08). Despite a last minute weather hitch on attempting to return from Nizhneangarsk (Northern edge of Lake Baikal) to Irkutsk due to low cloud and the 50 seater - Antonov 23 being unable to land, causing a delay and many expensive phone calls to the UK, the trip was extremely productive and enjoyable.

Siberia is a vast wilderness, with plenty of suitable varying habitat and lots of ticks, desperate to clamber on board and extract some blood. Several migratory species were missed as they probably hadn't yet arrived at the time of the trip; however, numerous other much sought after Western Palaearctic species were seen. To see species that occur on Fair Isle and the Shetlands in the autumn as juveniles, adorning pristine adult breeding plumage in Siberia was a real treat. Hearing species like Red-flanked Bluetail and Siberian Chiffchaff sing was very educational.

The food was "interesting", the Babushkas frightening, the women charming (I can see why Russianwives.com is a popular site) and the beer/vodka extremely cheap – no wonder they have a problem. All in all, quite an enjoyable place to be!

List of species seen: (Species annotated in **RED** were lifers)

<i>Scientific Name</i>	Common Name
<i>Gavia artica</i>	Black-throated Diver
<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	Great Crested Grebe
<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	Black-necked Grebe
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron
<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Great Bittern
<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	Ruddy Shelduck
<i>Anas Penelope</i>	Eurasian Wigeon
<i>Anas falcate</i>	Falcated Duck
<i>Anas strepera</i>	Gadwall
<i>Anas crecca</i>	Common Teal
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard
<i>Anas acuta</i>	Northern Pintail
<i>Anas querquedula</i>	Garganey
<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Northern Shoveler
<i>Aythya farina</i>	Common Pochard
<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	Tufted Duck

<i>Melanitta stejnegeri</i>	Asian (Stejneger's) Scoter
<i>Bucephala clangula</i>	Common Goldeneye
<i>Mergellus albellus</i>	Smew
<i>Mergus serrator</i>	Red-breasted Merganser
<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Osprey
<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>	White-tailed Eagle
<i>Aquila clanga</i>	Great Spotted Eagle
<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Steppe Eagle
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black Kite
<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	Black-eared Kite
<i>Circus spilonotus</i>	Eastern Marsh Harrier
<i>Buteo buteo</i>	Common Buzzard
<i>Buteo buteo japonicus</i>	Steppe Buzzard
<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Oriental (Crested) Honey Buzzard
<i>Accipiter gentiles</i>	Northern Goshawk
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Eurasian Kestrel
<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	Eurasian Hobby
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Peregrine Falcon
<i>Perdix dauurica</i>	Daurian Partridge
<i>Porzana pusilla</i>	Baillon's Crake
<i>Fulica atra</i>	Common Coot
<i>Grus Grus</i>	Common Crane
<i>Anthropoides virgo</i>	Demoiselle Crane
<i>Glareola maldivaurm</i>	Oriental Pratincole
<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	Little Ringed Plover
<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Ringed Plover
<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	Pacific Golden Plover
<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	Northern Lapwing
<i>Calidris alpina alpina</i>	Dunlin
<i>Calidris minuta</i>	Little Stint
<i>Calidris subminuta</i>	Long-toed Stint
<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Wood Sandpiper
<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Green Sandpiper
<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper
<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	Marsh Sandpiper
<i>Numenius arquata</i>	Eurasian Curlew
<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	Whimbrel
<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	Common Snipe
<i>Heterosceles brevipes</i>	Grey-tailed Tattler
<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull
<i>Larus canus heinei</i>	Common Gull
<i>Larus cachinnans mongolicus</i>	Mongolian (Caspian) Gull
<i>Larus minutes</i>	Little Gull
<i>Sterna hirundo longipennis</i>	Common Tern
<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	White-winged Black Tern
<i>Sterna caspia</i>	Caspian Tern
<i>Columba rupestris</i>	Hill Pigeon
<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	Oriental Turtle Dove
<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	Common Cuckoo
<i>Cuculus saturatus</i>	Oriental Cuckoo

<i>Surnia ulula</i>	Northern Hawk Owl
<i>Hirundapus caudacutus</i>	White-throated Needletail
<i>Apus apus</i>	Common Swift
<i>Apus pacificus</i>	Pacific Swift
<i>Upupa epops</i>	Hoopoe
<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	Eurasian Wryneck
<i>Dryocopus martius</i>	Black Woodpecker
<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	Great Spotted Woodpecker
<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	White-backed Woodpecker
<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>	Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Eurasian Skylark
<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sand Martin
<i>Hirundo rustica tytleri</i>	Barn Swallow
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	Common House Martin
<i>Anthus richardi</i>	Richard's Pipit
<i>Anthus godlewskii</i>	Blyth's Pipit
<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	Olive-backed Pipit
<i>Anthus trivialis</i>	Tree Pipit
<i>Anthus gustavi</i>	Pechora Pipit
<i>Motacilla flava tuchenensis</i>	Alaskan Yellow Wagtail
<i>Motacilla flava taivana</i>	Green-backed Yellow Wagtail
<i>Motacilla alba baicalensis</i>	Baikal White Wagtail
<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Citrine Wagtail
<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	Grey Wagtail
<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	White-throated Dipper
<i>Prunella montanella</i>	Siberian Accentor
<i>Luscinia svecica svecica</i>	Red Spotted Bluethroat
<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	Red-flanked Bluetail
<i>Luscinia calliope</i>	Siberian Rubythroat
<i>Luscinia cyane</i>	Siberian Blue Robin
<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>	Common Redstart
<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	Daurian Redstart
<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	Northern Wheatear
<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	Isabelline Wheatear
<i>Saxicola torquata maurus</i>	Siberian Stonechat
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle Thrush
<i>Sylvia curruca blythi</i>	Siberian Lesser Whitethroat
<i>Locustella lanceolata</i>	Lanceolated Warbler
<i>Locustella certhiola</i>	Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>	Dusky Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus schwarzi</i>	Radde's Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	Arctic Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus plumbeitarsus</i>	Two-barred Greenish Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	Yellow-browed Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus proregulus</i>	Pallas's Yellow-browed Warbler
<i>Phylloscopus collybita tristis</i>	Siberian Chiffchaff
<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Asian Brown Flycatcher
<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>	Dark-sided (Siberian) Flycatcher

<i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>	Mugimaki Flycatcher
<i>Ficedula albicilla</i>	Taiga Flycatcher
<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	Long-tailed Tit
<i>Parus major</i>	Great Tit
<i>Parus ater</i>	Coal Tit
<i>Parus montanus</i>	Willow Tit
<i>Sitta europaea</i>	Eurasian Nuthatch
<i>Certhia familiaris</i>	Eurasian Treecreeper
<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	Brown Shrike
<i>Pica pica</i>	Eurasian Magpie
<i>Perisoreus infaustus</i>	Siberian Jay
<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	Spotted Nutcracker
<i>Corvus monedula</i>	Eurasian Jackdaw
<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>	Daurian Jackdaw
<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	Rook
<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>	Oriental Carrion Crow
<i>Corvus cornix</i>	Hooded Crow
<i>Corvus corax</i>	Common Raven
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	European Starling
<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>	White-cheeked Starling
<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House Sparrow
<i>Passer montanus</i>	Tree Sparrow
<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>	Brambling
<i>Carduelis spinus</i>	Eurasian Siskin
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula cineracea</i>	Baikal Bullfinch
<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	Hawfinch
<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>	Common Crossbill
<i>Loxia leucoptera</i>	Two-barred Crossbill
<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Common Rosefinch
<i>Carpodacus roseus</i>	Long-tailed Rosefinch
<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	Common Reed Bunting
<i>Emberiza spodocephala</i>	Black-faced Bunting
<i>Emberiza leucocephalos</i>	Pine Bunting
<i>Emberiza citronella</i>	Yellowhammer
<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	Siberian Meadow Bunting
<i>Emberiza pusilla</i>	Little Bunting
<i>Emberiza chrysophrys</i>	Yellow-browed Bunting
<i>Emberiza aureola</i>	Yellow-breasted Bunting

SUMMARY

Outstanding and well worth while, with generally friendly and welcoming people. Seeing species that are relevant to the UK is always an enjoyable experience. Whilst the concentration of birds was not prolific, probably due to the vast expanses of suitable habitat, the species that were encountered were well worth the wait. Birding in the taiga forests is a demanding and frustrating experience. At times extremely quiet, punctuated by snippets of bird song, once the birds are located it is extremely rewarding and a fantastic warm up for the forthcoming Kazakhstan expedition.

Quote from Birdseekers Web Page – <http://www.birdseekers.co.uk>

*Our first visit to the Siberian shores around Lake Baikal turned up a 'who's who' of those sought after vagrants that turn up in Britain on occasion. We began with a visit to the Novo-Leninsky marshes on the edge of Irkutsk, where several Yellow-breasted Buntings sang from exposed perches. There was also Baillon's Crake, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Marsh Sandpiper, Mongolian Gull, several Citrine Wagtails, Brown Shrike and Little Bunting. Later that same day a large park opposite our hotel appeared to be a true migrant trap with both Asian Brown and Dark-sided Flycatchers, Brown Shrike, 10+ Arctic Warblers, Siberian Chiffchaff, Radde's and Yellow-browed Warblers, Hawfinch and both Black-faced and Yellow-breasted Buntings seen well. We spent a lot of time birding amidst the vast Siberian Taiga forest where species such as Mugimaki Flycatcher, Siberian Blue Robin and Olive-backed Pipits were very common. Several Taiga Flycatchers were also seen, along with Oriental Cuckoos, Northern Red-flanked Bluetails, Two-barred Greenish and Dusky Warblers, Long-tailed Rosefinches and Yellow-browed Bunting. The marshes and steppes near Arshan were very productive and our birding against a backdrop of clear blue skies and snow-capped mountains was complimented by a good selection of species. Pride of place and certainly one of the most popular birds was a very cooperative Northern Hawk Owl, with a White-backed Woodpecker visiting its nesting hole nearby. Not far away a Siberian Meadow Bunting posed nicely as it sang from a bush with a pair of Pallas's Warblers below it! A pair of Daurian Partridges fed beside the road and a pair of White-cheeked Starlings we found nest-building in a small village was only the second record for this region! Out in the steppe a colony of 20+ singing Blyth's Pipits was found thanks to Krister Mild – and were well outside their normal or recognised breeding range. Several stately Demoiselle Cranes were also seen, along with a group of 5 Common Cranes and Pine Buntings. Several Lanceolated Warblers were also seen very well, some in the marshes and one extremely obliging individual in a small clearing in the forest. We also took a short flight 650 kms to the northern shores of Lake Baikal and continued birding in earnest. Amongst the highlights were Falcated Duck, Stejneger's Scoter, Grey-tailed Tattler, Long-toed Stints, Pacific Golden Plover, an out of range Oriental Pratincole, Three-toed Woodpecker, White-throated Needletails, Oriental Turtle Dove, Siberian Jay, and Siberian Accentor. Just a couple of Pallas's Grasshopper Warblers were seen, but several Pechora Pipits gave excellent views. Garden birds here included **Siberian Rubythroat**, Radde's, Two-barred greenish and Arctic Warblers, and even a pair of Two-barred Crossbills!*

Next year we plan to stay in the south, visiting the Selenga Delta for waders and Pallas's Reed Bunting, as well as an extremely good area for thrushes and exploring the area close to the Mongolian border for Swan Goose, Azure Tit and Mongolian Lark amongst others.