

Kyrgyzstan July/August 2026

In July/August 2026 I made a botanical collecting trip to Kyrgyzstan with my PhD student Dieder de Frens and my daughter Sophie. The itinerary was optimized towards ferns, and we were quite busy during the days, but I still managed to squeeze in some birding and mammal watching. Also, we often stayed in areas with steep, well-vegetated valleys which are not suitable for night drives, and most roads were in the process of being paved, which led to much disturbance and also did not help. We made one longish drive in Semenovka valley, but only saw a single bat and thousands of horses, cattle, and sheep. Nevertheless, the trip was quite successful. However, I was surprised by the paucity of rodents, both when searching with the Thermal Master at night and looking for burrows during the day. This was the first trip on which I used my new Thermal Master DV2 under field conditions and I was very pleasantly surprised. The main advantage of course is that several people can watch simultaneously (no more: "I can see something, oh yes, it is a pangolin, now it is gone, too bad for you all"). The logistics in Kyrgyzstan were organized via the Swiss-Kyrgyz travel agency Alpasia.

Itinerary

23 July: Flight Zurich to Bischkek via Istanbul, arriving ...

24 July: at 4 am; taxi to the hotel; then visit to the national herbarium, and rest. Night in Futuro Hotel.

25 July: Day trip to Sulutur Lakes west of Bischkek. Night in Futuro Hotel.

26 July: Early morning visit to a steppic hill south of Bischkek, then drive to Alamedin Valley south of Bischkek and hike to Alamedin waterfall. Night in Rahmat Yurts.

27. July: Long drive to Chon-Kemin valley; afternoon exploring the valley above Kok Archa Guesthouse; night there.

28: July: The original plan was to continue on to the Issyk-Kul Lake area, but a severe case of food poisoning had us returning to Bischkek to go to the hospital. Night in Futuro Hotel.

29.-30. July: Two days recovering in Futuro Hotel. Dieder and the guide Ularbek continued on to Karkyra Valley in easternmost Kyrgyzstan.

31. July: Transfer to Altygat Lodge in Barskoon Valley south of Lake Issyk-Kul; met up with Dieder and Ularbek; night there.

1. August: Full day drive to explore the upper reaches of Barskoon valley and the plateau beyond; night Altygat Lodge.

2. August: Drive around the Lake to the north side, exploring Grigor'yevka Gorge; night at Kochmodon Erdo Yurt Camp in Semenovka valley.

3. August: Drive back to Bischkek; visit to the herbarium.

4. August: Early am flight back to Zurich via Istanbul.

The original itinerary:



Species recorded

Turkestan Red Pika (*Ochotona rutila*): Several seen running around scree slopes in Alamedin valley; Dieder had one dash across the trail close to the falls. Too fast for photographs. There are also numerous records of the species in Ala-Artscha National Park in the next valley to the west (which is also good for Siberian Ibex).

Large-eared Pika (*Ochotona macrotis*): Several seen running around scree slopes in the upper Barskoon valley. Too fast for photographs.

(Tolai Hare (*Lepus tolai*)): A dead one in upper Barskoon valley at 2750 m; droppings and tracks in the semidesert southeast of Toru Aygyr on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul.)

Herb Field Mouse (*Apodemus uralensis*): A long-tailed mouse seen with the Thermal Master climbing in a bush and then dropping to the ground along the road to Kok Archa Guesthouse was presumably this species.

Tian Shan Vole (*Microtus ilaeus*): A vole seen with the Thermal Master in riparian vegetation along the road to Kok Archa Guesthouse was presumably this species.

(Eastern Mole Voles (*Ellobius tancrei*): "Mole hills" seen at Alamedin, Barskoon valley and in the Semenovka valley all probably relate to this species, but I had no time to dig them up and check. Fresh mounds generally lacked an open entrance.)

Eurasian Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*): A habituated individual “helped” us with pressing fern specimens at the base of Barskoon waterfall.



(Yellow Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus fulvus*): We visited a colony on a hill south of Bischkek (at 42°47'57"N, 74°33'54" E; the burrows are visible on Google Earth) but while there were numerous burrows that looked fairly fresh, the ground was smooth after rain a few days earlier and showed no recent tracks. I therefore assume that the animals had already entered aestivation. A visit in April or May would probably be more productive. This was one of the few sites where there were also burrows of smaller rodents, so a night visit might be productive. Note that the dirt road up the hill is closed, so one has to hike up. Also, the ground squirrels around Bischkek are reputed to be quite shy and if one walks uphill, one comes very abruptly into the colony. Approaching from uphill and viewing from a distance might be better.)

Tian Shan Ground Squirrel (*Spermophilus nilkaensis*): We saw this locally common but highly localized species at various sites in the upper Grigor'yevka and Semenovka valleys. The best sites are within the U-turn of the freshly paved road at 42°49'54"N, 77°26'43" E (approach from above for better visibility) and in the meadow in front of Kochmodon Erdo Yurt Camp at 42°49'19"N, 77°30'17" E. However, there is a lot of construction going on in the valleys due to the Nomad Games that will take place there in September, and the paved road will lead to more visitors in general, so the situation might change soon.



Gray Marmot (*Marmota baibacina*): Common in Alamedin valley, Barskoon valley, and Karkyra valley. However, populations are said to be declining. I also heard a distant marmot at Sulutur Lakes, a few kilometers from the nearest records of Long-tailed Marmot (*M. caudata*), but I did not manage to locate it.





European Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida teniotis*): Dozens of bats hunting far above the ground at Altygat Lodge included some of this.

Botta's Serotine (*Eptesicus bottae*): Dozens of bats hunting far above the ground at Altygat Lodge probably included this species, although I cannot fully rule out *E. nilssonii* or *Vespertilio murinus*.

Ikonnikov's Myotis (*Myotis ikonnikovi*): A single individual seen well and recorded above the riverine vegetation at the river near at Kochmodon Erdo Yurt Camp.

Kuhl's Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus kuhlii*): In Bischkek.

(Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*): Perhaps this species seen around Kok Archa Guesthouse, but I was unable to get any recordings (loud stream and many crickets.)

(Siberian Roe Deer (*Capreolus pygargus*): Heard calling in the forested slopes above Kok Archa Guesthouse, but I was unable to locate it.)

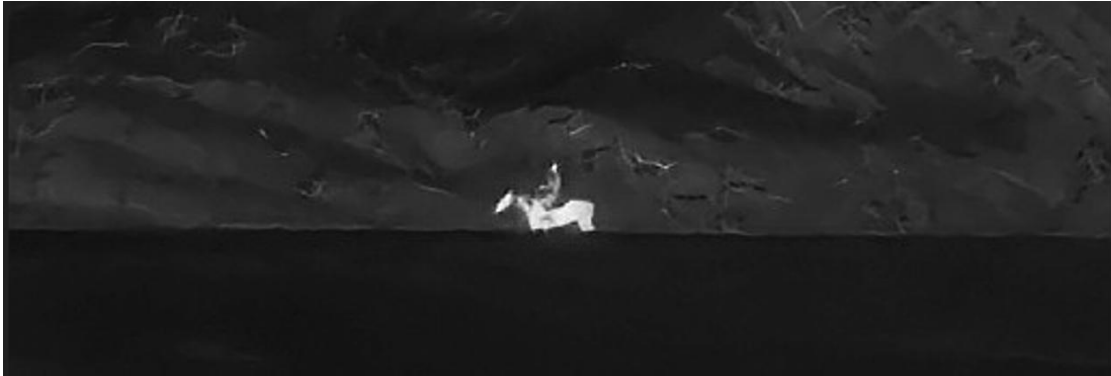
Tien Shan Argali (*Ovis ammon karelini*): Three or four individuals seen high on a ridge south of the road leading to Kumtor Gold Mine from Barskoon Pass. Throughout the barren mountains above the high-elevation plain (3800 m), one could see tracks of sheep, while the valley bottom had large herds of domestic sheep (see photo). Too far away and hazy for photography.



(Asian Badger (*Meles leucurus*): One seen by Dieder and Ularbek in broad daylight a few kilometers up the valley from Kok Archa Guesthouse in broad daylight; I already had weak legs from the impending food poisoning and lagged behind. Dieder even managed a shot with his phone.)



And of course many horses



And amazing landscapes ...



