

# SIBERIA

## LAKE BAIKAL, TAIGA, FORESTS AND WETLANDS



Brown Flycatcher  
(Machial Valkenburg)

**Saturday June 2nd – Thursday June 14th 2012**  
**Leaders: Machial Valkenburg and Mark Finn**  
**Group Size: 8**  
**Birds: 170-200**

This new Birdwatching Breaks tour brings us to central Siberia, Lake Baikal. As the vast evergreen forests of Russia's Siberian taiga extend southward toward Mongolia, the ground rises and the terrain becomes more varied. The border between Siberian Russia and Mongolia is a natural divide here, with rugged hills and mountains forming a series of ranges between the sprawling Russian forests to the north and rolling grasslands to the south. About midway along this border, in a gigantic stone bowl nearly 636km long and almost 80km miles wide, lies almost one quarter of all the fresh water on earth, Lake Baikal. Baikal is easily the largest lake in Eurasia and it is just as easily the deepest lake in the world at 1620 meters.

On the merits of magnitude alone, the lake is renowned as one of the earth's most impressive natural wonders. Lake Baikal is situated in a region of unsurpassed beauty, its forested shores surmounted by the jagged, snow-clad peaks of the Barguzin Mountains.

This tour offers you a chance to see many species which occur as major rarities in Europe

**Day 1:** Fly to Irkutsk via Moscow where arrival is early on Day 2.

**Day 2:** Irkutsk is one of the largest cities of Siberia and also known as an open museum with its authentic wooden houses. The city is built on the shores of the Angara River, a tributary of the Yenisey River. Transfer to our hotel where common Siberian species reside including Pacific Swift, Olive-backed Pipit and Yellow-browed Warbler. An afternoon visit to Novo Leninsky Marshes for Eurasian Bittern, Garganey, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Marsh Sandpiper, Yellow-breasted Bunting and, perhaps, the scarce Falcated Duck. Night in Irkutsk

**Day 3:** Today we travel south to Bolshoye Goloustnoye via Listvanka. We follow the River Angara and make several stops along the road for Swinhoe's Snipe, Mugimaki Flycatcher, Siberian Thrush and Chestnut Bunting. The floodplains of the Angara attract Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Hen Harrier, Citrine Wagtail, Richard's Pipit and Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler. Transfer to the village of Bolshoye Goloustnoye where our base for two nights is in an attractive guesthouse.



Siberian Rubythroat (Machial Valkenburg)

**Days 4-5:** The birding near the village is good with Hill Pigeon, Thick-billed Warbler, Blyth's Pipit and a colony of Daurian Jackdaws. On the shores of Lake Baikal we may find Grey-tailed Tattlers and, in the lake itself, Asiatic Scoter, Red-breasted Merganser and Mongolian Gull. Just north of the village, an open steppe-like habitat attracts Black Stork, Brown Shrike, Isabelline Wheatear and Richard's Pipits. Naturally, we do more birding in the famous Russian taiga where wooded valleys attract Oriental Cuckoo, Rufous-tailed Robin, Red-flanked Bluetail, Dark-sided Flycatcher, Dusky and Two-barred Greenish Warblers. Above the taiga we have a chance of Crested Honey Buzzard and Eastern Imperial Eagles. On Day 5 we drive back, birding en-route, to Irkutsk where we stay the night.

**Day 6:** This morning we travel west to Arshan and the Tunka Valley. Arshan is a small village known for its mineral springs. Around our hotel Daurian Redstart and Baikal Wagtail are common. A walk into the mountains above Arshan may reveal Dusky, White's and Red-throated Thrushes, Eversmann's Redstart, Arctic Warbler and one of the most difficult to see species in Siberia - Pallas's Rosefinch. Two-night stay at Arshan.

**Day 7:** Today, we visit the Tunka marshes which are accessed by driving through typical Siberian woodlands and agricultural fields holding Black Grouse, Daurian Partridge, Yellow-browed and Radde's Warblers, Pine and Meadow Buntings. Once at the marshes we should see Greater Spotted, Booted and White-tailed Eagles, Common and Upland Buzzards, Eurasian Hobby, Common Crane, White-winged Tern, Little Gull and various dabbling ducks.



Mugimaki Flycatcher (Machial Valkenburg)

**Days 8-9:** We retrace our journey and turn south towards Vydrino and Teplie Ozera for a one-night stop. The thick taiga on the southern shores of Lake Baikal has a plethora of interesting species. Our main interest is finding White-backed, Three-toed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Siberian Jay, Eye-browed and Siberian Thrushes, Dark-sided, Asian Brown and Taiga Flycatchers, Radde's, Arctic and Greenish Warblers, White-throated Needletail, Siberian Blue Robin, Siberian Rubythroat and Black-faced Bunting. On the evening of Day 9 we travel to Slyudyanka where the station is completely built in white marble. From here we board the night train on the Trans Siberian Railway to Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat republic.

**Day 10:** From Ulan-Ude our journey takes us south towards Mongolia with birds along the way including Saker and Amur Falcons, Swan Goose, Demoiselle Crane, Asiatic Scoter, Mongolian Lark and Chestnut-eared Bunting and, perhaps, the rare Pallas's Bunting. Our base for the next two nights is at an old school in the village of Bjeloozersk which literally means the 'white lake'.

**Day 11:** Today is spent birding around the upper and lower salt lakes of Bjeloozersk and the adjacent dry, arid countryside dotted with stunted bushes. The steppe attracts Eurasian Black Vulture, Steppe Eagle, Black Kite, Upland Buzzard, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Eurasian Hobby, Horned Lark, and Isabelline Wheatear. Thousands of ducks use the salt lakes with the commonest species being Ruddy Shelduck and Common Pochard and the least common being Falcated and Eastern Spot-billed Ducks. Shorebirds use the lakes and may include the rare Asiatic Dowitcher, Pied Avocet, Pacific Golden Plover, Long-toed Stint, Marsh Sandpiper, Little Ringed and Kentish Plovers. Deeper waters attract Swan Goose, Black-necked and Slavonian Grebes, Smew and White-winged Terns.

**Day 12:** After a final morning birding at Bjeloozersk, we head back to Ulan-Ude for our final night in Siberia. In the evening we celebrate with a final dinner and drinks.

**Day 13:** Fly to London via Moscow with arrival later the same day.

Ground Price: £2885

Single room: £250

\*Air Fare: £750

Total Tour Price: £3635

Total Tour Price Irkutsk/Ulan-Ude: £2885

Deposit: £350

\*please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights on pages 5 and 71

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport and permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

**Not included:** drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature and any relevant fuel surcharges. Visas required for Russia.

Good accommodation throughout Siberia with en-suite facilities at most locations. Guesthouses at Teplie Ozera and Bolshoye Goloustnoye are clean but basic with shared facilities. Picnic lunches provided.

Transport by small bus/minibus and 4x4 in the mountains. Short walks through forest and marshes and one optional steep walk in the mountains above Arshan.