



Japanese Robin, Hokkaido

JAPAN

20 MAY – 5/10 JUNE 2013

LEADER: DAVE FARROW

This tour is a gem, a truly wonderful island-hopping birding extravaganza around the Japanese archipelago. On the busy island of Honshu in wetland areas we saw Japanese Reed Bunting, Marsh Grassbird, Japanese Green Pheasant and many Great Bitterns, to the mountain forests of Karuizawa and Mount Fuji where we found Latham's Snipe, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Japanese Wagtail, Japanese Grosbeak, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Japanese Accentor, Brown and Japanese Thrushes, a stunning pair of Siberian Thrushes, Chestnut-cheeked Starling, Japanese Robin, Siberian Blue Robin, Red-flanked Bluetails, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Sakhalin and Japanese Leaf Warblers. On the delightful island of Miyakejima we saw Pleske's Warbler, Ijima's Leaf Warbler, Izu Thrush and Izu Tit, plus more Japanese Robins, Japanese Woodpigeon and Northern Boobook, and from the ferry we saw numerous Bonin Petrels, Black-footed Albatrosses, a Wedge-tailed and countless thousands of Streaked Shearwaters. In balmy tropical temperatures we explored Ishigakijima where we found Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Ryukyu Serpent Eagles, Ryukyu Flycatcher, Ryukyu Scops Owl, Ryukyu Minivets and Ishigaki Tit, plus Ruddy Kingfisher, Black-faced Spoonbill and

Malayan Night Heron. On Okinawa we found as many as 18 Okinawa Rails before breakfast one morning, Pryer's Woodpeckers, Okinawa Robin, the *pryeri* race of Japanese Scops Owl and some fine Black-naped and Roseate Terns. On Amami-oshima we enjoyed a superb Amami Woodcock, saw Lidth's Jay, Amami Woodpeckers, Amami Robins, and heard the Amami Thrush. We had an excellent post-tour extension to Hokkaido that apart from enjoying glorious weather, produced a great session with Blakiston's Fish Owl, plus Lanceolated, Middendorff's and Gray's Warblers, Grey Bunting, Spectacled Guillemot and Rhinoceros Auklets, Hazel Grouse, Red-crowned Cranes, an abundance of Siberian Rubythroats, Long-tailed Rosefinch, and many displaying Latham's Snipe. We recorded 207 species in all, including just four heard only, of which 42 were recorded only on the extension to Hokkaido. Those yet to visit the country may wonder why food gets mentioned so much here, but we had some wonderful feasts of excellent Japanese food, prompting many of us to bring cameras to dinner!

Our tour began once we had gathered together at Narita airport on a warm drizzly morning, and set off immediately for our first Japanese birding, to the Tonegawa river. The weather was not kind to us, with penetrating drizzle turning to lashing rain not quite the right weather for looking for reedbed species! Nevertheless we persevered, and as the rain occasionally slackened off, we were able to find some dapper male Japanese Reed Buntings sitting up and singing, and our other target – Marsh Grassbird (or Japanese Marsh Warbler) decided to put on a show despite the wet, song-fighting repeatedly from the tops of reeds and showing well. Eurasian Bitterns were flying about, and some fine male Japanese Green Pheasants appeared, reluctant to return to the wet grass however close we approached, plus Little and Great Egrets, Eurasian Whimbrels, Little Terns, White-cheeked Starling, Japanese Skylarks and noisy Oriental Reed Warblers. We headed off to another wetland closer to our hotel, and despite the persistent rain we were able to enjoy a pair of Eurasian Bitterns walking down an asphalted lane, obviously in some kind of nuptial stupor, with the pursuing bird (presumably the male?) all puffed up like a Bustard.



Oriental Reed Warbler, Inbanuma



Meadow Bunting, Inbanuma

We returned to the same wetland in the morning, finding the weather much more agreeable, and enjoyed further looks at the dapper Japanese Reed Bunting, saw abundant noisy Oriental Reed Warblers, Bull-headed Shrikes, Japanese Bush Warbler, several Meadow Buntings, and a couple more sightings of Eurasian Bittern. From here we hit the road to our next destination, a journey that took us through the heart of the Greater Tokyo metropolis, and out the other side towards the mountains. We headed first to a river where we found a drake Mandarin Duck, a Long-billed Plover female sat on a nest (remarkably close to where Little Ringed Plovers were also nesting) Japanese and Black-backed Wagtails, more Japanese Green Pheasants, and our first Black-eared Kites. We then visited an area of derelict paddyfields set within the forested hills, and enjoyed many gorgeous Chestnut-eared Buntings, Black-browed Reed Warbler, and a handsome Latham's Snipe sat in a damp field calling as he eyed us warily. A good end to the day, we then headed for our rather comfortable Onsen hotel set amid the woodland at Karuizawa, where dinner was an event in itself.

We began early in these mountain woods, starting with a fine Japanese Green Woodpecker in the hotel yard, our first Japanese Tits and Japanese White-eyes. A short way down the road and on the forest trails that loop through the lush forest we found a stunning male Siberian Blue Robin together with his demure mate. An Eastern Crowned Warbler in good voice showed well, and we went on to see several smart Japanese Thrushes, plus Brown Dipper, Eurasian Wren, Blue-and-White Flycatcher singing high in the tree tops, Japanese Grosbeaks and numerous Great Spotted Woodpeckers. This was all before breakfast, after which we returned to the forest, and found a lovely Japanese Yellow Bunting singing away, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Willow and Long-tailed Tits, and numerous Narcissus Flycatchers that popped up everywhere to dazzle us with their tangerine hues. We took lunch by a river where several Chestnut-cheeked Starlings appeared in a nearby tree, plus Asian House Martins joined the local Barn Swallows around the bridges. We returned once more to the abandoned paddyfields, enjoying the striking Chestnut-eared Buntings once again, had good looks at a Japanese Bush Warbler, plus a Japanese Weasel appeared briefly. Returning to Karuizawa we walked the forest roads and found an endearing pair of Varied Tits, and had a view of a Northern Hawk Cuckoo shooting across the treetops and continuing across to the next ridge! All in all a fine day indeed, complemented by the deciduous forests that were just coming into leaf, now at their optimum spring beauty.



Brown Dipper, Karuizawa



Japanese Thrush, Karuizawa

We made a final visit to the Karuizawa forest early the next day, and despite our best efforts to find a Copper Pheasant, we had not a sniff. A small compensation came in the form of a Lesser Cuckoo, plus plenty of other birds we had enjoyed for the first time just the previous day. We returned for breakfast and to pack up and leave this delightful place, and set a course for the sacred mountain of Fuji-san. After some hours driving we reached perfectly shaped giant volcano, and the gods were with us in that the weather was fine. We drove high up on its slopes to where we found a delightful Japanese Accentor, so friendly it flew towards us and posed at a range of three metres! We also saw several Red-flanked Bluetails singing their subdued little ditty, Coal Tit, Goldcrest and Spotted Nutcracker, but the Japanese Leaf Warblers stayed aloof despite singing vigorously. We heard the trilling song of a Japanese Robin, and with a little bit of 'going in' away from the busy road, we were rewarded with stupendous looks at a feisty male that even hopped into a sunny patch to show off his russet-orange tones. You lucky people! We finished off with a pair of Brown-headed Thrushes feeding in the open, before it was time to head downhill to our hotel for the night.

The next morning was bright and sunny, and the classic view of the mountain presented itself to us as we drove back uphill and into the lush forests on the slopes. We found Japanese Leaf Warblers singing at the roadside, Brown-headed Thrushes, and a couple of Northern Hawk Cuckoos, before we got our bus badly bogged down in some loose volcanic gravel in a roadside 'car park'! After a fine group effort at extracting ourselves, we had to admit defeat and call for rescue. After some time, and before any roadside rescue service could reach us, a passing gang of lads came to help, and throwing themselves into our problem with

relish, pulled us clear with their 4x4 Subaru. Hooray for Japan! Not without a great sense of relief (but how bad could it get – this is Japan after all!) we headed downhill, meeting a large cycle rally coming up the other way that had all but closed the road while we were stuck at the top! We checked out of our hotel and ate a late breakfast at the restaurant next door, before heading back up the mountain, this time to its southern flank. By the roadside we found a Sakhalin Leaf Warbler singing, then we walked into the forest on some trails and found a pair of Siberian Thrushes, the male showing superbly as he hopped about feeding among the forest floor strewn with mossy logs. More Brown-headed Thrushes, a pair of (introduced) Red-billed Leiothrix and a handsome male Siberian Blue Robin were seen before we left the mountain and headed for Tokyo. We eventually navigated our way to Takeshiba port, and boarded our ferry to Miyakejima late in the evening.



Japanese Accentor, Mt Fuji



Japanese Leaf Warbler, Mt Fuji

The ship arrived at Miyakejima soon after dawn, and we shuffled ashore to our hotel and settled in for some breakfast. Once our rental car was secured, we headed for some coastal scrub and grass where we could see Pleske's Warblers perched up and singing with gusto even before we the van had stopped! We enjoyed some very close views of these obliging fellows, singing from the tops of the grass and bushes. Nearby we found our first Izu Tits, Izu Thrush and Ijima's Warbler, which meant we had seen all four of the Izu Islands endemics and had only been on the island for three hours! We then headed for a crater lake where the best forest had survived the past eruptions, and here we had multiple encounters with the Tit, Thrush, and Ijima's Warbler, plus the Izu race of Japanese Robin that defied its usual skulking reputation by perching high in open trees and fanning its orange tail at us. Japanese White-eyes and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers also appeared, and on the lakeshore were Intermediate and Great Egrets. Later we went on a circumnavigation by road of this small and delightful island, and scanning out to sea we saw a couple of Black-footed Albatross, and thousands of Streaked Shearwaters streaming past offshore. A late afternoon return to the crater lake provided us with a good look at a Black Woodpigeon, and a Northern Boobook popped up to check us out, much to the distaste of the local Brown-eared Bulbuls!

With all our targets secured we could relax and enjoy the island, yet we still went out before breakfast and found Brown Booby, Osprey, Bull-headed Shrikes and more Pleske's Warblers, plus a large Turtle was seen surfacing off the rocky shore. A final look in the crater lake woods produced more Japanese Robins and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, we heard the Northern Boobook and an Oriental Cuckoo, and enjoyed more views of the other endemics. Then it was time for a final excellent lunch in our hotel and then board the ferry to take us back to Tokyo, looking forward to an afternoon of seawatching from the ship. Once a little way offshore, we hit the stream of thousands of Streaked Shearwaters that continued all the way to Tokyo Bay, then some well-marked Pterodromas were seen heading towards us - Bonin Petrels! Also we saw several Black-footed Albatross, (some on the water taking flight as the ship got too close), a couple of Tristram's Storm Petrels, Pomarine Skua, Short-tailed Shearwaters and a Wedge-tailed Shearwater. A pod of Whales

surfacing and blowing together was exciting, their identities a little more difficult to divine. We docked in Takeshiba port, content with a good seawatch, and headed to our city hotel for the night.

We then travelled to Kagoshima in Kyushu, arriving fairly early in the morning, once there we collected our next minibus and headed for Mi-ike. We started our birding with a good walk in the tall forests, however it was dim, dark and seemingly bird-free! Apart from some Japanese Pygmy and Japanese Green Woodpeckers, and a glimpse of flying Ruddy Kingfisher, there was no sign of any Fairy Pitta. We then tried going on a 'Pheasant drive' to try and see some Copper along forest tracks, but were only successful in seeing several Japanese Green Pigeons, Japanese Varied Tits and many Meadow Buntings. Never mind, the food at our hotel was truly excellent.

The next day it rained. It rained all day. We were out early to try and find our targets in the dark quiet forest, but the rain worsened and the leeches came alive, so we withdrew to find our breakfasts. A couple of vocal Ruddy Kingfishers were a welcome sight, and back in the forests we found some furtive White-backed Woodpeckers. We tried to use the rainy day by once again cruising up and down the forest tracks, trying to find Pheasants but without success. An afternoon lull in the downpour yielded a fine Ryukyu Minivet, but Asian Stubtails taunted us with their barely audible high-frequency song, and managed to elude us repeatedly. We just had time on our final morning to try once again to find a Pitta, but again without success. Frustratingly it was shaping up to be a fine day, but we had a flight to catch and therefore we had to head off to Kagoshima airport. We flew to the island of Ishigakijima via Okinawa, and once we had picked up our van, found our hotel, and adjusted to the hot humid climate, we headed out into the local forest park. Here we found a superb performing Ryukyu Green Pigeon, while a skulking Ryukyu Flycatcher was rather harder to see. The Large-billed Crows here are rather interesting; the *osai* race here is so much smaller, smaller billed and with a different call – it's clearly a different bird.



Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Ishigaki



Ryukyu Scops Owl, Ishigakijima

We returned to the forest before breakfast, and had good views of a lovely Ryukyu Flycatcher and the very distinctive Ishigaki Tit, a Ruddy Kingfisher, and a Malayan Night Heron standing in a muddy paddock together with a Purple Heron that got chased away by Cows! After some breakfast we headed back into the field, and hunted high and low for Ryukyu Serpent Eagle. We eventually found a pair in some open country, perched at the roadside and closely watching a farmer cutting his silage, seemingly unconcerned by how close we were. We paused by the coast, found a big flock of Greater Crested Terns, plus some gorgeous Black-naped Terns. In the afternoon we went to the beach, where we found an obliging Black-faced Spoonbill, Grey-tailed Tattlers, Greater Sand, Mongolian and Kentish Plovers, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Greenshank, Pacific Swallow, and some massive female Giant Wood Spiders, one of which had a tiny male scampering about on her back – I wonder how long it was before he was going to be a snack for his huge mate. After a fine supper ourselves we headed back into the forest, and quickly found a wonderfully obliging Elegant (or Ryukyu) Scops Owl.



Ryukyu Serpent Eagle, Ishigaki

Another morning visit to the forest began well with a Northern Boobook that perched nearby in broad daylight (the form *totogo* here in the Ryukyu islands is a potential split), a lovely purple-washed Ruddy Kingfisher showed well, but a pair of Japanese Paradise Flycatchers played hard-to-get and only offered brief looks. It was then time to head off, pack up and make our way to the airport for our next leg of island hopping. We flew into Naha on Okinawa – an altogether different place with a busy airport thronged with tourists, and a queue to get on the shuttle bus to the car rental office! Once organised we hit the highway northwards, got out of the conurbation that is southern Okinawa, and made our first stop along the coast where flocks of Roseate Terns together with a few Black-naped Terns were swarming over the water. Onwards we drove, to the Yamburu peninsular, and reaching the target area we parked at the roadside - and within seconds of stepping off the bus we were looking at an Okinawa Rail trotting through a field! Hurrah! If only they had been this easy on my previous visit! We strolled along a jungle track and found a furtive pair of Pryer's Woodpecker, plus a couple of Okinawa Robins lurking in the bushes. As we came to leave we found another Okinawa Rail, feeding in a field in the open. What a bird! We had been in the habitat for just a couple of hours and had seen all three endemics, so we were able to celebrate with some snake-venom Sake and a truly elegant dinner.

An early cruise around the narrow lanes yielded a staggering 16 Okinawa Rails, mostly running about on the roadsides and banks. Exploring the Yambaru peninsula more widely we drove along some narrow forest roads, finding several Pryer's Woodpeckers, although they never wanted to pose for us for very long! We had some great looks at the jewel that the Okinawa Robin, typically skulking but they can't stay hidden for ever... Japanese Paradise Flycatchers continued to be exceedingly shy despite several encountered, and on some wet fields we found Black-winged Stilt, the strange-calling Zitting Cisticolas, and Pacific Swallows taking mud for their nests. A night drive was successful in scoring two obliging Northern Boobooks, an Elegant Scops Owl, and a 'Pryer's' Japanese Scops Owl that sat on a roadside wire, before being flushed by a passing car before we could have a long close look at it (which was *very* annoying!)

Another pre-breakfast sortie around the lanes counted 18 Okinawa Rails, then it was time to leave and drive to the other end of the island to catch our next flight. We paused by the coast once more and had some closer views of Roseate Terns, then it was goodbye Okinawa, and after a short flight, hello to Amami-oshima.



Okinawa Rail, Ada



Malayan Night Heron, Ishigaki

Our first stop was at a beach near the airport, where we found Mongolian Plovers in breeding plumage, a Long-toed Stint together with a Red-necked, Marsh Sandpiper and Common Redshank. We then headed to the forest where thick fog hampered our birding completely, although the Amami Robins serenaded us with their sweet songs, and a Lidth's Jay popped out of the gloom. After finding our hotel and having some dinner, we headed out once more, this time for a night drive, to hunt for the Amami Woodcock. We headed up into the misty hills, slowly searching along the winding forest roads. We had a good look at an Amami Black Rabbit scampering along the track in front of us, then we met some Japanese birders who were doing the same as us. They had just seen a Woodcock, and kindly led us to the place, and there it was – sat up on a bank, blinking back at us. *Amami Yamashigi!* A great view of this gripping bird for several minutes, eventually it walked off and then noisily flew up into the forest. Hurrah!

The next day was blessed with fine weather, and we began with a great look at a female Amami Woodpecker with a fully-grown juvenile. In the dark forest, Amami Robins sang their haunting melodies, and we had a fine male darting about over our heads for several minutes. From a watchtower overlooking the whole range of forested hills between the shallow pale blue bays, we found a mixed flock of hirundines that included saw Red-rumped, Barn and Pacific Swallows hawking over the forest, Sand and Asian House Martin, Pacific and House Swifts, and a surprise in the form of a Swiftlet, watched at close range at eyelevel (not typical Swiftlet views at all!) which helped secure its identification as a vagrant Himalayan Swiftlet. We made our usual visit to the convenience store for our lunch, opposite which a Japanese Paradise Flycatcher decided he was going to sing loudly above the traffic noise, and taunt us with some brief glimpses. We then visited a very rich area of forest in the western part of the island where we found more Amami Robins, Amami Woodpecker drummed noisily and showed well once again, some more brief views of the shy Lidth's Jay, and were taunted by the song of an Amami Thrush coming from the forested hillside.

The next morning we made an early start, walking along a forest track and searching for Amami Thrush, without success. We did however enjoy great looks at a male Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, had our best looks at Lidth's Jay, Ryukyu Flycatcher, and saw more Robins and Woodpeckers. We had to rush back to the hotel to check out, then headed for the airport, checking the nearby beach where in addition to a fine spread of shorebirds we added Pied Avocet, then it was time to end our Ryukyu island-hopping and fly back to Tokyo

The next morning we said goodbye to those leaving the tour here, while those of us continuing on the post-tour extension to Hokkaido returned to the airport to fly to Asahikawa, second city of the northern island. Here we picked up our seventh and final rental car of the tour, picked up some lunch supplies then headed into the forested mountains. We birded along the roadsides up to 800m, where spring was hot on the heels of the melting snow, with some very exotic flora emerging on the forest floor. In these lush temperate forests we found Black-faced Buntings of the Japanese *personata* form to be abundant, Eastern Crowned Warblers, Narcissus and Asian Brown Flycatchers, Japanese Bush Warblers, a superb Japanese Robin that posed for photos, White-throated Needletails whooshed low overhead together with Pacific Swifts, and many Asian

House Martins. At the end of the day we drove through spectacular scenery of the Sounkyo gorge, to our rustic hotel near Lake Oketo.

We spent the day in the mountain forests here, enjoying a great start with a Hazel Grouse male that sat up in a tree looking at us, and watched a pair of Black Woodpeckers excavating a nest hole. There was massive damage to the trees from the winter snow here, and the forest roads were blocked at the higher levels by trees that were bowed horizontal across the way, or snapped off by the weight of the snow. The woods were alive with birdsong, and we saw Japanese Robin, Red-flanked Bluetail and Siberian Blue Robin, plus Brown-headed Thrush, Sakhalin and Eastern Crowned Warblers, and Eurasian Treecreeper. Grey Bunting kept us waiting until late in the afternoon when we found a splendid purple-hued male singing in the forest. A foray for nightbirds produced a great look at a Grey Nightjar, several Eurasian Woodcocks were roding over the forest, and a few Red Foxes scampered about.



Black-faced Bunting, Akan



Black-browed Reed Warbler, Kiritappu

With dawn occurring somewhere around 3am, it was hard to avoid being out very early! Today we drove southwards to the Kushiro area, to a splendid patch of forest and meadows. Here we found a noisy but furtive Gray's Grasshopper Warbler, displaying Latham's Snipe were sitting on phone poles, some Long-tailed Rosefinches and a quartet of Red-crowned Cranes walking around on a riverbed. In the forest we saw abundant Eastern Crowned Warblers plus Sakhalin Leaf Warblers, White-backed and Black Woodpeckers, Japanese and Brown Thrushes, Marsh Tit and Narcissus Flycatcher. We then drove cross-country, various stops providing us with Siberian Rubythroat, a more exhibitionist Gray's Grasshopper Warbler, and Eastern Marsh Harrier. Reaching the marshes of the Kiritappu area we saw our first Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler (scuttling under the boardwalk we were stood on!), Black-browed Reed Warblers posed well, plus Siberian Stonechats, more Red-crowned Cranes, Slaty-backed and Black-tailed Gulls, Falcatid Ducks and Greater Scaup. Despite all of this, it was the many Latham's Snipes that really grabbed our attention, with their manic display flights carving through the air over our heads, with squealing calls and banshee tail feathers. Following this adventure, we found ourselves to be staying at perhaps the most elegant hotel of the tour, with gorgeous wood and paper interiors, and a dinner table groaning with King Crab and Oysters!

The next morning was cool and foggy, preventing searches out to sea, but a walk along a boardwalk through the meadows provided us with stunning views of Lanceolated Warblers singing from the top of little bushes (and also scuttling beneath the boardwalk itself) plus several Middendorff's Grasshopper Warblers, and numerous Siberian Rubythroats singing from every prominence. The Latham's Snipes kept up their relentless aerial displays, then the fog lifted a little so we could see some Greater Scaup, and Temminck's and Pelagic Cormorants. A superb male Long-tailed Rosefinch showed nicely, and numerous White-tailed Eagles dotted the place, with an active nest seen with one chick still within. We travelled from here to Lake Furen, along some forest roads where we found some Brown Bear scat (the closest encounter of the trip!) to a grassy marsh where we found a pair of Eastern Water Rails that showed superbly. We headed up along

the east-facing coast, and various stops produced Goosanders with cute fluffy chicks, a couple of Kamchatka Gulls, Northern Pintail, Black Scoter, Red-throated Diver, Spectacled Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklet, and some dapper Harlequin Ducks. As we reached Rausu we could see a large dark patch on the ocean, which on closer inspection turned out to be tens of thousands of Short-tailed Shearwaters in an offshore feeding swarm, turning the ocean black. We hastened towards our way to our accommodation, the minshuku famous for its resident family of Blakiston's Fish Owl. Prior to commencing the vigil for our target, before dusk fell we had to work our way through another great feast laid out for us, of huge Spider and Kamchatka Crabs, a fish called Kinky, and an array of Sashimi, Sukiyaki and other delights. Wow! We dragged our full bellies off to our simple rooms, and so we waited with windows open (so unlike the winter tour!) overlooking the roaring stream that runs past the guesthouse. Our hostess staggered out into the fast flowing water to place fish into the midstream rock pool, and so we waited. A calling Owl sat high in a tree behind the house distracted us momentarily, then this beast of a bird flew down and landed mid-river, sitting there until he had caught and devoured two fish before flying back into the forest. A little later two birds could be seen sitting together high in the trees and making their deep 'uh-uh-houu' calls, then another bird flew down to the rock pool in front of our rooms, this time taking rather longer to find its supper before heading off into the night. What a show!



Blakiston's Fish Owl

Our last day was bathed in glorious sunshine, and we explored the coast nearby in the early morning, finding a Glaucous-winged Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake and Bull-headed Shrike, some very showy Japanese Bush Warblers and a fine Blue and White Flycatcher that sat above our lodgings. After we had said goodbye to our hostess, we scanned the seas, finding a very distant Northern Minke Whale and some distant Porpoises breaking the glassy surface. Once the road over the pass was open we headed up to the snowy mountains, with spectacular views of the stunning scenery all around. The birds were rather few up here, but we found a fine Grey Bunting and an showy Narcissus Flycatcher, then we headed down to the north facing side of the Shiretoko peninsula. Here there were several smart Spectacled Guillemots fishing close inshore, plus a few Rhinoceros Auklets along with many Temminck's Cormorant and Slaty-backed Gulls, the latter almost tame enough to feed from the hand as we ate our picnic lunch by the harbour. Then it was time to head back across the island, finding yet another Gray's Grasshopper Warbler that showed very well, and a bubble-gum pink Long-tailed Rosefinch provided the last avian eyeful of the tour. Then we headed to Kushiro airport for a late flight back to Tokyo, and the end of our tour. What a magical trip it had been.



Lanceolated Warbler, Kiritappu



Middendorff's Warbler, Kiritappu

While at Narita airport waiting for my flight home, I was accosted by a Japanese TV crew who were interviewing tourists. They kept asking me 'What was the most difficult thing when travelling in Japan?' Apart from not being able to read Japanese, I couldn't actually think of anything! It is such a joy to travel in this wonderful country; great birding, wonderful food, excellent service and friendly hosts, all goes to make this trip one of the most fantastic travel experiences available. I can't wait to return!



Ruddy Kingfisher of the race bangsi, Ishigakijima

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO)

Species which were not personally recorded by the leaders are indicated by the symbol (NL)

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

Hazel Grouse ◊ *Tetrastes bonasia* Great looks at a male sat in a tree on Hokkaido. Another was seen in flight

Chinese Bamboo Partridge (introduced) *Bambusicola thoracicus* (H) Heard on Miyakejima and at Mi-ike

Ring-necked Pheasant (introduced) *Phasianus colchicus* A couple seen on Ishigakijima.

Japanese Green Pheasant ◊ *Phasianus versicolor* Outstanding encounters with numerous examples around Narita

Indian Peafowl (introduced) *Pavo cristatus* Not uncommon on Ishigakijima.

Mandarin Duck ◊ *Aix galericulata* Just one drake, on the Chikuma river at Lake Toden.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* Two at Kiritappu on Hokkaido.

Falcated Duck ◊ *Anas falcata* Three at Kiritappu on Hokkaido

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope* A flock of 40 seen at Notsuke Hanto on Hokkaido.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* Seen at Karuizawa and on Hokkaido.
Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha* Rather common on Honshu, also a few on Ishigakijima.
Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* A few seen on Hokkaido.
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* A few fine examples seen along the coast of Hokkaido.
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* A single seen at Kiritappu on Hokkaido.
Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* A few at Lake Toden, more seen on Hokkaido.
Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* Rather numerous around the coasts of Hokkaido.
Harlequin Duck ◇ *Histrionicus histrionicus* Great looks at these fine birds along the coast of Hokkaido.
Black Scoter ◇ *Melanitta americana* Several small groups seen along the coast of Hokkaido.
Goosander *Mergus merganser* Some mothers with very cute chicks on Hokkaido at various locations, also at Oketo.
Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Seen off the east coast of Hokkaido.
Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* A single identified off Notsuke Hanto on Hokkaido
Black-footed Albatross ◇ *Phoebastria nigripes* Great looks at birds on the water and in the air from the Izu ferry.
Bonin Petrel ◇ *Pterodroma hypoleuca* A nice surprise – 16+ seen from the Izu ferry, some fairly close.
Streaked Shearwater ◇ *Calonectris leucomelas* Awesome numbers of these around the Izu islands, in thousands.
Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* A single from the Izu ferry was unexpected.
Short-tailed Shearwater ◇ *Puffinus tenuirostris* A handful in the Izu seas, a frenzy of thousands off Rausu See note.
Tristram's Storm-petrel ◇ *Oceanodroma tristrami* Two seen from the Izu ferry.
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Seen near Narita, also at Toden lake.
Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* A single in summer-plumage on the sea off Notsuke on Hokkaido.
Black-faced Spoonbill ◇ *Platalea minor* An immature showed exceptionally well and closely on Ishigakijima.



Black-faced Spoonbill, Ishigaki

Eurasian Bittern ◇ (Great B) *Botaurus stellaris* Stellar views of seven or more around Narita, out in the open too.
Malayan Night Heron ◇ *Gorsachius melanolophus* Great looks at two birds on Ishigakijima, one with cattle!
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Many around Narita, at Toden, odd singles elsewhere,
Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* Four seen near Ada on Okinawa
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Numerous on Honshu and Hokkaido.
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Two seen on Ishigaki.
Eastern Great Egret *Casmerodius modestus* Fairly regularly encountered.
Intermediate Egret *Mesophyx intermedia* One at Tairo-ike, Miyakejima, also seen in the Ryukyus.
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Seen around Narita, Ishigakijima, and Amami.
Pacific Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* Seen on all three Ryukyu islands.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* One watched fishing off the Miyakejima coast.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Many seen around Narita and at Lake Toden.

Temminck's Cormorant ◊ (Japanese C) *Phalacrocorax capillatus* A single seen on Miyakejima, more on Hokkaido

Pelagic Cormorant ◊ *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* A few seen around the Hokkaido coast.

Eurasian Kestrel (Common K) *Falco tinnunculus* One at Inbanuma was the only one.

Eurasian Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Seen on Miyakejima, Ishigaki and Okinawa.

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis orientalis* One soaring over Mount Fuji.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus* A few scattered birds on Honshu, more numerous on Hokkaido.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Good numbers along the coasts of Hokkaido, one nest observed near Kiritappu.

Ryukyu Serpent Eagle ◊ *Spilornis perplexus* Very pleasing views of two following a yelping farmer on Ishigaki!

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* A single seen in Hokkaido.

Japanese Sparrowhawk ◊ *Accipiter gularis* A worn looking bird on Amami, another seen on Hokkaido.

Grey-faced Buzzard ◊ *Butastur indicus* Two seen in a busy sky on Amami.

Eastern Buzzard ◊ (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus* Seen at Karuizawa, Mt Fuji and on Hokkaido.

Okinawa Rail ◊ *Gallirallus okinawae* Stunning encounters with this fellow. See note.

Eastern Water Rail ◊ *Rallus indicus* Great views of a pair at Lake Furen on Hokkaido.

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* Rather common on Ishigakijima, a single seen on Amami.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Seen on Okinawa, also at Lake Toden.

Red-crowned Crane ◊ (Japanese C) *Grus japonensis* A lovely encounter with 4 in a riverbed near Kushiro. See note

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* A number of these on Ose beach on Amami.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostrata avocetta* Two on Ose beach on Amami were a write-in.

Long-billed Plover ◊ *Charadrius placidus* A female sitting on her nest seen on the Chikuma river.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Present alongside the above and also nesting. Also a single on Hokkaido.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* Seen on beaches on Ishigakijima and Amami.

Mongolian Plover (M Sand P) *Charadrius mongolus* As for the above, several in vivid breeding dress.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Seen in smaller numbers on beaches on Ishigaki and Amami

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* At least three roding birds at Oketo Lake on Hokkaido.

Amami Woodcock ◊ *Scolopax mira* Excellent looks at a bird sat on a bank by a forest road on Amami. See note.

Latham's Snipe ◊ (Japanese S) *Gallinago hardwickii* One in fields near Karuizawa, many on Hokkaido. See note.



Latham's Snipe, Kushiro



Spectacled Guillemot, Shiretoko

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* A few seen in the Narita area.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Seen near Narita, on Ishigaki and Amami.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* A single on Amami, heard on Hokkaido.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* A single on Ose beach on Amami on both our visits.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Several on the beaches on Ishigaki and Amami.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* Nice views of these on Ishigaki and Amami

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Two seen on the river by Lake Toden.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Breeding plumage birds seen on Ishigaki and Amami.

Red-necked Stint (Rufous-n S) *Calidris ruficollis* Singles seen the beaches on Ishigaki and Amami

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* A single was found on Ose beach on Amami island.

Black-tailed Gull ◇ *Larus crassirostris* A few dapper individuals seen on Miyakejima, common on Hokkaido.

Kamchatka Gull ◇ *Larus kamtschatschensis* Two birds seen on the east coast of Hokkaido

Glaucous-winged Gull ◇ *Larus glaucescens* An immature seen near Rausu on Hokkaido.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* A very white immature seen at Lake Toden on Hokkaido.

Slaty-backed Gull ◇ *Larus schistisagus* Very numerous along the coasts of Hokkaido. Fond of crisps.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* A few seen along the Hokkaido coast.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* A single immature seen at Rausu on Hokkaido.

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* A handsome gathering of 35+ by a fish farm on Ishigaki.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* Good close looks at flocks feeding in the shallows on Okinawa, 150+ here.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* Some nice looks on Ishigaki, a little more distant on Okinawa and Amami.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A couple picked out from the flocks mentioned above, on Okinawa.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* Seen in several locations, around the Ryukyu islands and also near Narita.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* A couple seen on both visits to Ose beach on Amami.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* A single seen from the Izu ferry.

Spectacled Guillemot ◇ *Cephus carbo* A single on Hokkaido's east coast, close views of several on the north coast.

Rhinoceros Auklet ◇ *Cerorhinca monocerata* Like the above, several seen on the north coast of Hokkaido.

Rock Dove (feral) *Columba livia* Available.

Black Woodpigeon ◇ (Japanese W) *Columba janthina* Nice looks at a couple on Miyakejima, also on Okinawa.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* Common throughout.

Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* Three seen on Ishigakijima where they were rather vocal.

White-bellied Green Pigeon ◇ (Japanese G P) *Treron sieboldii* Quite a few seen around Mi-ike.

Ryukyu Green Pigeon ◇ *Treron permagnus* Good views on Ishigaki and Amami.

Northern Hawk-Cuckoo ◇ *Cuculus hyperythrus* Brief looks of vocal birds at Karuizawa and Mount Fuji.

Eurasian Cuckoo (Common C) *Cuculus canorus* Heard in various locations, seen on Hokkaido.

Oriental Cuckoo ◇ *Cuculus optatus* Heard on Miyakejima, a couple seen on Hokkaido.

Lesser Cuckoo ◇ *Cuculus poliocephalus* Rather elusive at Karuizawa, common on Miyakejima but always airborne.

Japanese Scops Owl ◇ *Otus semitorques* A brief look at Ada on Okinawa, before it was flushed by car. See Note.

Oriental Scops-Owl ◇ *Otus sunia* (H) One heard distantly at Oketo.

Elegant Scops Owl ◇ (Ryukyu S O) *Otus elegans* Stunning views on Ishigakijima, also seen on Okinawa.



Blakiston's Fish Owl, Rausu

Blakiston's Fish Owl ◇ *Bubo blakistoni* Two showed magnificently on the river at Rausu. Awesome

Northern Boobook ◇ *Ninox japonica* Multiple views, on Miyakejima, Ishigaki and Okinawa. See note.

Grey Nightjar ◇ *Caprimulgus jotaka* A great look at one at Oketo on Hokkaido, both perched and flying.

Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris* A surprise vagrant seen well over the forest on Amami. See note.

White-throated Needletail ◇ *Hirundapus caudacutus* Good looks at several low-flying birds at Aizanke on Hokkaido.

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* Seen at various locations, most numerous on Hokkaido.
House Swift *Apus nipalensis* Five seen in a mixed flock on Amami.
Ruddy Kingfisher ◇ *Halcyon coromanda* Nice views at Mi-ike, even better on Ishigaki. See note
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* A few noted on Okinawa and Amami.
Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker ◇ *Yungipicus kizuki* Frequent encounters with this delightful fellow.
Pryer's Woodpecker ◇ (Okinawa W) *Dendrocopos noguchii* Multiple encounters, 6 in one day, but oh so nervous!
White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* Fairly poor looks in the rain at Mi-ike, great views on Hokkaido.
Amami Woodpecker ◇ (Owston's W) *Dendrocopos [leucotos] owstoni* Multiple, very satisfying, encounters.
Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* Several seen and heard at Karuizawa.
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* Four in a day at Oketo including a pair excavating a nest, also seen at Akan.
Japanese Woodpecker ◇ (J Green W) *Picus awokera* Seen well around our hotel at Karuizawa, also at Mi-ike.
Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* (H) Heard only on Hokkaido.
Ashy Minivet ◇ *Pericrocotus divaricatus* Numerous encounters at Karuizawa, almost always above the canopy!
Ryukyu Minivet ◇ *Pericrocotus tegimae* Our first at Mi-ike, then commonly in the Ryukyu islands.



Ryukyu Minivet, Ishigaki



Japanese Varied Tit, Karuizawa

Bull-headed Shrike ◇ *Lanius bucephalus* Several seen on Honshu and Kyushu, one on Hokkaido.
Japanese Paradise-Flycatcher ◇ *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* Eventually, great views of a male on Amami!
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Several seen on Honshu of *japonicus* race, a few *brandtii* race on Hokkaido.
Lidth's Jay ◇ (Ryukyu J) *Garrulus lidthi* Although unexpectedly shy, we all got a good look at these on Amami.
Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* A couple of noisy examples high on Mount Fuji.
Oriental Crow ◇ *Corvus orientalis* A scattering of sightings, overshadowed perhaps by the following species.
Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis* Common throughout with some odd races encountered. See note
Eastern Great Tit (Japanese T) *Parus minor* Common in the woods at Karuizawa, a few elsewhere such as Okinawa
Ishigaki Tit ◇ *Parus [cinereus] nigriloris* A striking contender for species status, we found several songsters there.
Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Seen in the higher forests on Honshu, also on Hokkaido.
Japanese Varied Tit ◇ *Poecile varius* Widely scattered sightings, from Amami to Hokkaido.
Owston's Varied Tit ◇ (Izu T) *Poecile owstoni* Another convincing taxon, fairly common on Miyakejima.
Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Just a couple seen, at Oketo in Hokkaido.
Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* A few seen, at Karuizawa and Mt Fuji.
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* A couple in a mixed flock on Amami, more numerous on Hokkaido.
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Seen commonly except for in the Ryukyu Islands.
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* Seen on all of the Ryukyu Islands.
Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* Seen near Karuizawa and on Amami, more commonly in Hokkaido.
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Several with a mixed flock over the forest on Amami.
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* A few seen in the woods on Honshu and Kyushu.
Japanese Skylark ◇ *Alauda japonica* Fairly numerous on Honshu and Hokkaido.
Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* Many around Narita, on Ishigaki and Okinawa. Odd vocalisations from this race.
Chinese Bulbul ◇ *Pycnonotus sinensis* A few on Ishigakijima, also seen on Okinawa
Brown-eared Bulbul ◇ *Hypsipetes amaurotis* Common mostly, except for the Ryukyus and Hokkaido. See note

Marsh Grassbird ◇ *Megalurus pryeri* At least five birds seen song-fighting from the reeds near Narita, despite rain.
Asian Stubtail ◇ *Urosphena squameiceps* A glimpse of one at Mi-ike, otherwise frustratingly elusive!
Japanese Bush Warbler ◇ *Cettia diphone* Commonly heard and sometimes seen, except on Ishigaki and Amami.
Lanceolated Warbler ◇ *Locustella lanceolata* Stunning views of singing birds sat up for us at Kiritappu.
Middendorff's Warbler ◇ *Locustella ochotensis* Great looks at several around the Kiritappu area on Hokkaido.
Pleske's Warbler ◇ *Locustella pleskei* Great views of confiding songsters on Miyakejima.



Pleske's Warbler, Miyakejima



Japanese Bush Warbler, Hokkaido

Gray's Warbler ◇ *Locustella fasciolata* Three birds seen on Hokkaido, noisy and eventually showing well.
Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis* Very noisy and visible in the Narita area.
Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* A couple seen near Karuizawa, also available on Hokkaido.
Japanese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthodryas* Nice views of this distinctive bird on Mt Fuji
Sakhalin Leaf Warbler ◇ *Phylloscopus borealoides* A single at Mt Fuji, found commonly on Hokkaido.
Eastern Crowned Warbler ◇ *Phylloscopus coronatus* A few at Karuizawa, abundant on Hokkaido.
Ijima's Leaf-Warbler ◇ *Phylloscopus ijimae* Fairly common in the woods on Miyakejima.
Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) *Leiothrix lutea* Good looks at two on Mt Fuji.
Japanese White-eye ◇ *Zosterops japonicus* Encountered throughout except for on Hokkaido.
Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* Seen on Mt Fuji and Hokkaido.
Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* A few seen and heard on all three main islands.
Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Seen at Karuizawa, Mi-ike and on Hokkaido. See note.
Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* Some seen on Hokkaido, also one at Mt Fuji.
Chestnut-cheeked Starling ◇ *Sturnus philippensis* Some good looks at a family party or two at Karuizawa.
White-cheeked Starling ◇ *Sturnus cineraceus* Numerous on Honshu, also noted elsewhere.
Siberian Thrush ◇ *Zoothera sibirica* A superb prolonged encounter with a pair on Mt Fuji. Awesome.
Amami Thrush ◇ *Zoothera major* (H) A couple of distant songsters heard was as close as we got.
Japanese Thrush ◇ *Turdus cardis* At Karuizawa we had splendid encounters with several, also on Hokkaido
Brown-headed Thrush ◇ (Brown T) *Turdus chrysolaus* Several on Mt Fuji, also on Hokkaido.
Izu Thrush ◇ *Turdus celaenops* Multiple encounters on Miyakejima – a smart fellow indeed.
Japanese Robin ◇ *Luscinia akahige* One on Mt Fuji, several on Miyakejima, more seen on Hokkaido.
Amami Robin ◇ *Luscinia [komadori] komadori* Several good looks at this wonderful songster in the Amami forests.
Okinawa Robin ◇ *Luscinia [komadori] namiyei* Several seen in the Okinawa forests.
Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* Many seen on Hokkaido, typically singing from exposed perches.
Siberian Blue Robin *Luscinia cyane* Seen well at Karuizawa, also performing on Mt Fuji and on Hokkaido.
Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanura* Not uncommon on Mt Fuji, a single seen on Hokkaido though others heard.
Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* A few near Karuizawa, common on Hokkaido. See note.
Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius* Rather common on the islands, this taxon is *philippensis*.
Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica* Odd birds, on Mt Fuji and Hokkaido.
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* A couple at Karuizawa, plenty seen on Hokkaido.
Narcissus Flycatcher ◇ *Ficedula narcissina* A joy to behold – common at Karuizawa, a few on Mt Fuji and Hokkaido

Ryukyu Flycatcher ◇ *Ficedula owstoni* Some great looks at this on Ishigaki, also seen on Amami.
Blue-and-white Flycatcher ◇ *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* A few at Karuizawa singing from the treetops, also at Rausu.
Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* Great views of these at Karuizawa, another three seen on Hokkaido.
Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* Some smart males cheeping away on Hokkaido
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Common throughout though not noted on Amami.
Japanese Accentor ◇ *Prunella rubida* Point-blank views of a confiding individual high on Mt Fuji.
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Scattered sightings along our route.
Black-backed Wagtail ◇ *Motacilla lugens* A few seen on Honshu, more commonly on Hokkaido.
Japanese Wagtail ◇ *Motacilla grandis* Only seen around the Chikuma river and Karuizawa area.
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* A couple of singing birds in Mt Fuji, one on Hokkaido.
Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica* Fairly common on all three main islands.
Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus* Heard at Karuizawa, a fly-over seen on Hokkaido.
Long-tailed Rosefinch ◇ *Uragus sibiricus* Several encounters on Hokkaido, with rather lovely vivid pink males.
Grey-bellied Bullfinch ◇ *Pyrrhula griseiventris* A nice long look at a pair at Oketo on Hokkaido



Grey-bellied Bullfinch, Hokkaido



Ishigaki Tit

Japanese Grosbeak ◇ *Eophona personata* Only seen at Karuizawa where we found several.
Meadow Bunting ◇ *Emberiza cioides* Common on Honshu, also seen on Kyushu and Miyakejima.
Chestnut-eared Bunting ◇ *Emberiza fucata* Multiple splendid males in fields near Karuizawa only.
Japanese Yellow Bunting ◇ *Emberiza sulphurata* A nice look at a songster at Karuizawa.
Black-faced Bunting ◇ *Emberiza spodocephala* Abundant on Hokkaido, singing everywhere.
Grey Bunting ◇ *Emberiza variabilis* A fine songster showed well at Oketo, another on the Shirotoko peninsula.
Japanese Reed Bunting ◇ *Emberiza yessoensis* Smart males seen at two localities near Narita.
Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Not uncommon on Hokkaido.

MAMMALS

Amami Rabbit *Pentalagus furnessi* An exciting find along a forest road on our Amami night drive.
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Frequent sightings on Hokkaido, some of them rather rough-looking!
Japanese Weasel *Mustela itatsi* One seen near Karuizawa, three on Miyakejima where they are introduced.
Ryukyu Flying Fox *Pteropus dasymallus* Nice daytime looks on Okinawa, also on Ishigakijima.
Northern Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata* A distant animal seen from Rausu on Hokkaido.
Sika Deer *Cervus nippon* Seen on Mt Fuji, at Mi-ike in the dark wet forest, and commonly on Hokkaido.

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

The most up to date referenced taxonomic list referred to in the Tour Report is that of the IOC World Bird Names. Gill, F and Donsker, D (Eds). 2012. IOC World Bird Names (v2.11). Available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>

Short-tailed Shearwater ◇ *Puffinus tenuirostris*

On the Hokkaido extension we witnessed a feeding flock of tens of thousands (or more – impossible to count!) swarming over a patch of the sea a little way offshore. The tour in 2007 had a similar experience on the same coast.

Okinawa Rail ◇ *Gallirallus okinawae*

Very different to how it is in the month of November, when I spent four days searching for this and only once saw a head for two seconds, despite birds calling everywhere! We saw our first within seconds of getting off the bus in Ada, then a pre-breakfast drive yielded 18 birds, waddling along the roadsides with fully grown juveniles in tow. The bird of the trip.

Red-crowned Crane ◇ *Grus japonensis*

So different to how we see them on the winter trip, we had a lovely encounter with three adults and an immature in a river bed near Kushiro, then saw pairs of trumpeting birds at Kiritappu and Lake Furen. It is the world's second rarest crane, with a total population of only 2750 birds, 900 of which are resident in Hokkaido. It is listed as 'Endangered' by Birdlife.

Amami Woodcock ◇ *Scolopax mira*

A must-see species on this tour, which requires a lot of nocturnal driving effort. Our efforts were duly rewarded with excellent looks at a bird sat on a bank beside a forest road. Listed as Vulnerable by BirdLife International, the world population is estimated at between 2,500 and 9,999. Key threats seem to be habitat loss and, perhaps more worryingly, predation from introduced predators, most notably the Javan Mongoose that was introduced for snake control!

Latham's Snipe ◇ (Japanese S) *Gallinago hardwickii*

On Hokkaido these came into their own, and we had some fantastic encounters with as many as six birds all chasing around over our heads together, listening to their strangled squeals and the thrumming of their stiff tail feathers.

Japanese Scops Owl ◇ *Otus semitorques*

An annoying experience where the bird was located then flushed by a passing car, never to return. This bird on Okinawa of the race *pryeri* is probably a good split from the mainland *semitorques*, due to morphological differences and also some vocal differences.

Northern Boobook ◇ *Ninox japonica*

Of the several that we saw, on Miyakejima they should be migrant *japonica*, on Ishigaki and Okinawa the birds we saw would refer to the resident race *totogo* that also occurs on Taiwan.

Himalayan Swiftlet *Aerodramus brevirostris*

A surprise vagrant seen well over the forest on Amami, as yet its not clear how rare this really is, but Brazil notes that 'has strayed to Taiwan, Korea and S. Japan in spring'.

Ruddy Kingfisher ◇ *Halcyon coromanda*

Nice views at Mi-ike, where they would be of the migrant race *major*, and a great look at one on Ishigaki that really showed the purple bloom on the upperparts that is typical of the resident Ryukyu *bangsi* race.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis*

On Ishigaki the Crows are of the very distinctive *osai* race of Large-billed Crow, being smaller, slimmer billed and with a different call. The taxonomy of the Large-billed Crow complex has more work to be done on it I think!

Brown-eared Bulbul ◇ *Hypsipetes amaurotis*

Various races seen, such as *stejnegeri* on Ishigaki, *pryeri* on Okinawa, *ogawae* on Amami and *matchiae* on Miyakejima.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

At Karuizawa the race is *hondoensis*. At Mi-ike it is the race *roseilia* and on Hokkaido the race is *asiatica*.

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

A further split would rename this as Stejneger's Stonechat, separated from Siberian Stonechat *S. maura*.