



Blakiston's Fish Owl (all photos by Dave Farrow)

JAPAN

18 MAY – 3/8 JUNE 2015

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This year's tour of Japan was once again a real delight, a wonderful island-hopping extravaganza around the Japanese archipelago. In the mountain forests on the island of Honshu we saw Japanese Green Woodpecker, Ural Owl, Rufous Hawk Cuckoos, Japanese Grosbeak, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Chestnut-eared Bunting, Japanese Accentor, Brown-headed and Japanese Thrushes, Siberian Blue Robin, Narcissus and Blue-and-white Flycatchers, Eastern Crowned, Sakhalin Leaf and Japanese Leaf Warblers, while in lowlands and wet areas we saw Japanese Reed Bunting, Marsh Grassbird, Japanese Green Pheasant,

Japanese Wagtail, Chestnut-cheeked Starlings, and Yellow and Eurasian Bitterns. On the delightful island of Miyakejima we saw Styan's Grasshopper Warblers, Ijima's Leaf Warbler, Izu Thrush and Owston's Varied Tit, plus Japanese Robins, Japanese Woodpigeon and Northern Boobook, Tristram's Storm Petrel and countless numbers of Streaked Shearwaters from the ferry. Down in the exotic Ryukyu Islands we found a suite of island endemics and other great birds, starting on Ishigakijima where we saw Ryukyu Serpent Eagles, Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Ryukyu Flycatcher, Ryukyu Scops Owls in the daytime, Ryukyu Minivets and Ishigaki Tit, Ruddy Kingfisher and Malayan Night Heron. On Okinawa we found many Okinawa Rails scuttling along the roadsides, Okinawa Woodpeckers with an active nest, lovely Okinawa Robins, Japanese Scops Owl, some fine Black-naped and Roseate Terns, and Black-faced Spoonbill. On Amami Island we enjoyed the superb Amami Woodcock, Lidth's Jay, Amami Woodpeckers, Amami Robins, and Amami Thrush. We had an wonderful tour extension to Hokkaido where we saw many wonderful birds including Red-crowned Cranes, Hazel Grouse, Spectacled Guillemot, Rhinoceros Auklets, displaying Latham's Snipe, and had a great session with Blakiston's Fish Owls. Passerines were notable and included Lanceolated Warbler, Middendorff's and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warblers, Grey Bunting, Siberian Thrush, Siberian Rubythroats, Japanese Robin and Long-tailed Rosefinches. In addition to the birds we saw some exciting Killer Whales, Dall's Porpoise, Short-finned Pilot Whale, Japanese Serow, Raccoon Dogs, Siberian Flying Squirrel, Siberian Chipmunk and Amami Black Rabbit. The food, as always, was exceptional!

Our tour began once we had gathered together at our Narita hotel on a warm and sunny morning, and we set off immediately for our first Japanese birding, to the Tonegawa River. Despite it being the middle of the day, plus rather windy and warm, as we walked along a raised bank through the river plain we were able to find some dapper male Japanese Reed Buntings sitting up and singing. Our other target Marsh Grassbird also decided to put on a show, with several birds visible as they launched themselves from the reeds in vertical song flights. Also here we saw Eastern Marsh Harrier, Intermediate and Great Egrets, migrant Eurasian Whimbrels standing in a paddyfield, our first White-cheeked Starlings, many noisy Oriental Reed Warblers and some Japanese Skylarks. We shifted to nearby area further upriver, and found a fine male Japanese Green Pheasant, more Japanese Reed Buntings and Oriental Reed Warblers, and a random Ruddy-breasted Crake flying over the reedbed. As we left we stumbled upon a surprise flock of shorebirds in the rice paddies, with many Grey-tailed Tattlers, Ruddy Turnstones, Pacific Golden Plovers, a Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, a Dunlin and two Red-necked Stints. A fine start to our tour.



Siberian Blue Robin



Ural Owl

The next day we made an early morning visit to a nearby lake, where under leaden skies we enjoyed great views of a Eurasian Bittern sitting high in the reeds, and several Yellow Bitterns were flying around over the reedbeds, flapping slowly as they chased each other around in nuptial display. Heavy rain started so we headed back to our hotel for breakfast, checked out and began our long journey through the heart of Tokyo, and towards the mountains and our destination of Karuizawa. A detour along a scenic mountain road

produced the prize of a roadside Japanese Serow, then we walked in the verdant woods finding a gorgeous Narcissus Flycatcher, Blue-and-white Flycatchers, Eastern Crowned Warbler and Japanese Tit. We headed to an area of open fields in the late afternoon, where we enjoyed Stejneger's Stonechats and Black-browed Reed Warbler, Eastern Buzzard, Peregrine Falcon, and many beautiful Chestnut-eared Buntings. A banquet awaited us at our hotel, but few of us were able to devour all 13 courses!



Japanese Accentor

An early walk in the woods was a little quiet at first (it seems that weeks of fine weather have resulted in spring coming ten days early), but we found Brown Dippers, Meadow Buntings and had a brief view of Yellow Bunting, and a prolonged look at a singing Siberian Blue Robin high in a tree. Another Japanese Serow appeared, and from the very top of a conifer a male Japanese Thrush sang strongly. Japanese Varied, Coal and Willow Tits also featured, and after breakfast we visited another forested area where a Mandarin Duck drake was much appreciated, and we eventually found a pair of Yellow Buntings that performed well. A speculative play of a recording of Ural Owl had the effect of making one fly in, sitting in broad daylight and studying at us for a while. After this we explored some high altitude areas where we saw Japanese Leaf Warbler and Red-flanked Bluetail, then we headed down to the hot plains to pick up some picnic lunch. We searched up and down a large river, unsuccessful in our quest for Long-billed Plovers, however many Little Ringed Plovers were here, plus a slightly damaged Smew, more Mandarin Ducks, Japanese Green Pheasants and Asian House Martins swirling around a large bridge. Back at our hotel we were treated to another massive banquet, with even more dishes than the previous day!

We made a drive along forest tracks in the early morning in search of Copper Pheasant, but only found yet another Japanese Serow. We crept through the woods, finding another Siberian Blue Robin, Japanese Grosbeaks, and Eurasian Wren of the dark *fumigata* race. We returned to our hotel for breakfast, as did a pair of Japanese Grosbeaks that came to the feeders, then we hit the road for Mt Fuji several hours to the south of us. We arrived at 2100m on its high slopes in the early afternoon, and soon had good looks at three Japanese Accentors in the stunted conifers, plus a confiding male Red-flanked Bluetail, and numerous Coal Tits. Lower down on the great mountain we glimpsed a Brown-headed Thrush, had a good view of a

Japanese Green Woodpecker, and finished up with a beautiful Narcissus Flycatcher. We headed on to our night stop in Gotemba, lying at the foot of the conical peak.

We were able to enjoy fine weather throughout the following day on the mountain, and began with a pre-breakfast drive up the eastern side. Rufous Hawk Cuckoos were vocal in the early morning, though getting a good look was rather trickier, but at least one was seen well perched atop a conifer. Olive-backed Pipits were singing from the treetops, and several Japanese Leaf Warblers were in good voice at the higher levels, the end of the road offering superb views of the top third of the mountain. Further explorations around the southern side produced a fine Sakhalin Leaf Warbler, and on a walk through some beautiful old growth woodland we saw Japanese Green Woodpecker, Eastern Crowned Warbler and had glimpses of Brown-headed Thrushes. We headed towards Tokyo, and joined ever more busy highways until we arrived by the port of Takeshiba. After a tasty dinner in a popular Chinese restaurant, we eventually boarded the ferry for Miyakejima in the late evening and got our heads down for a short night in our luxurious cabins.



Styan's Grasshopper Warbler



Japanese Woodpigeon

The island of Miyakejima hove into view at dawn, and we were hurried off the ship and onto the jetty. We dragged our luggage a short way up to our hotel where breakfast was waiting for us, and once new vehicles were acquired we began our hunt for the islands specialities. First up was Styan's Grasshopper Warbler, and we found several chirping away from the tops of bushes in the coastal scrub. We saw our first Izu Thrushes sitting up on dead snags, and noisy Lesser Cuckoos sat on the roadside wires. At the forested crater lake of Tairoike we saw Japanese Robins hopping along the roadside, here of a resident subspecies endemic to the Izu Islands. Ijima's Leaf Warblers sang noisily from the stunted trees, and richly coloured Owston's Varied Tits appeared around us. All this activity meant we were in danger of running out of birds to find! We walked down to the crater lake, and in the larger trees found a calling Northern Boobook although it didn't want to pose for long. After a midday pause we headed back out to the lake, and on the forest edge we could hear Japanese Woodpigeons uttering their curious growling sounds from the dense trees. In the late afternoon they emerged onto dead snags and we had superb views of several sitting out, a rare look at this often shy species. After dinner we returned to the lake for some owling, where a Japanese Scops Owl called briefly but would not show itself. A vocal Northern Boobook that showed very well in the hotel car park was some consolation.

Having seen almost all our diurnal targets, a fairly leisurely morning followed. We began by scanning the sea where numerous Streaked Shearwaters could be seen in the distance. On land in light rain we saw a migrant Oriental Pratincole, many Lesser Cuckoos that were remarkably noisy and obvious, a showy singing Owston's Varied Tit, Styan's Grasshopper Warblers singing from exposed perches, and more Japanese Woodpigeons sitting out and enjoying the light drizzle. Around the crater lake we enjoyed further views of all the local favourites such as Japanese Robin, Izu Thrush and Ijima's Leaf Warbler, then it was time to leave this enchanted island and catch the ferry back to Tokyo. On a calm crossing we saw many more Streaked

Shearwaters, a few Short-tailed Shearwater, a handful of Tristram's Storm Petrels and a splendid pod of Short-finned Pilot Whales. Mt Fuji was visible from afar as we headed northwards towards Tokyo, the ship reached the port in the evening, and we squeezed into taxis and headed to our hotel.

An early flight from Haneda airport took us into Kagoshima airport in Kyushu where we picked up new vehicles, and headed up the lanes to Mi-ike. We paused at a viewpoint over the lake where a Mountain Hawk Eagle was spotted soaring over the distant volcano, the only one of the tour. Also we saw a fine Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, Long-tailed Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch and Japanese Varied Tit. We took a picnic down to the lakeside, where a vocal Ruddy Kingfisher taunted us unseen from the top of a huge tree. We then plodded along the trails through a mostly silent forest, managed a brief look at a singing Asian Stubtail, and had more views of Japanese Green Woodpecker. A Japanese Badger was a lucky find, and it stayed in view for several minutes seemingly unconcerned by its audience. Our hotel, a famous onsen, serves some of the tastiest food on the tour and did not disappoint us on this occasion!



Northern Boobook



Ryukyu Scops Owl

The forests here also hold a population of Copper Pheasant, and at dawn we were driving slowly along forest tracks in an attempt to find one. They remained aloof and unseen, but a couple of Japanese Martens scampering along the road were a great find. A jaywalking Chinese Bamboo Partridge gave good views as it trotted along the track, and a Ruddy Kingfisher responded strongly to our invitation but only gave us a trio of flight views. We headed back into the forests above Mi-ike lake, creeping along the trails there. Japanese Varied Tits and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers showed well, and a White-backed Woodpecker was glimpsed. In the afternoon we returned to the forest tracks, finding an obliging Asian Stubtail and a few White-bellied Green Pigeons. There was not a sniff of Fairy Pitta, and it seems likely that this site is no longer any good for this species. We tried driving the forest tracks again in the early morning in a last attempt to find a Copper Pheasant but alas saw nothing, then it was time to say goodbye to our delightful hostesses and head for Kagoshima airport.

Now it was time to focus our attentions on the Ryukyu Islands, and we flew to Ishigakijima, lying close to Taiwan and having a decidedly more tropical climate. Arriving in the afternoon heat, we picked up new vehicles and headed to the nearest patch of forest to begin our birding. The small local *osai* form of Large-billed Crow are found everywhere, we managed a couple of glimpses of Ruddy Kingfisher and had our first looks at the dusky Ishigaki Tit. Before the day was over we located a charming little Ryukyu Scops Owl, roosting close to the trunk of a tree. We cancelled our proposed nocturnal sortie and went for dinner!

At first light we returned to the forest and had a superb encounter with a Ruddy Kingfisher, perched in the open for a prolonged period allowing for excellent viewing. The birds found here on the Ryukyu Islands are of the *bangsii* race that has a lovely mauve bloom to its rufous plumage. In addition, we had a great look at another Northern Boobook in full daylight, and saw several more Ruddy Kingfishers as we drove slowly along forest roads. Not far from the forest edge we found a Ryukyu Serpent Eagle perched on top of a phone pole, his eyes fixed on where a local farmer was working in the fields. We edged closer carefully, not wanting

to disturb from its perch, and eventually were able to walk right underneath it! It eventually took off and began soaring overhead, a rare sight in itself! Next we visited a couple of beaches and found numerous shorebirds, such as Grey-tailed Tattlers, Terek and Curlew Sandpipers, Greater and Mongolian Sandpipers, Kentish Plovers, Pacific Reef Egrets in both colour morphs, plus some Black-naped Terns offshore. We found a couple of surprises inland; a Caspian Tern flying across the fields, and a Red Collared Dove sat on a wire. Also sitting on roadside wires were Ryukyu Green Pigeons and Light-vented Bulbuls, and White-breasted Waterhens scuttled off the roadsides. In the afternoon we headed along the coasts, finding another Japanese rarity in the form of an immature Lesser Frigatebird, which gave us several fly-bys, passing low over our heads. We also found several Greater Crested Terns, before heading back in to the forest for the late afternoon. A Slaty-legged Crake was heard but could not be located, and we found a damaged Ryukyu Scops Owl lying prostrate on the ground with a broken wing, under attack from the ubiquitous Crows. Another roosting Ryukyu Scops Owl was found nearby and showed really well, they seem to be at a very high density in this forest! We still had not been able to find any Malayan Night Herons, so we checked some paddocks at dusk and were thrilled to find one that emerged to feed in the open. Hurrah! A splendid day.



Ruddy Kingfisher



Ryukyu Serpent Eagle

Our last morning of birding on Ishigaki took us to another rich forest patch where a fine Ryukyu Flycatcher showed well, plus Ryukyu Green Pigeons, Ruddy Kingfishers, and in more open areas we found more Ryukyu Serpent Eagles, sat on telephone posts and flying around. In some wet paddies we found a Cinnamon Bittern, several Black-winged Stilts and Common Greenshank. Then it was time to leave this very birdy island and take a flight to Naha on Okinawa, from where we embarked on a long drive to the forested northern end of the island. A brief stop at a pond a short way out of town provided an unexpected trio of Spoonbills feeding close to the road, which on closer inspection were discovered to be two Black-faced and a single Eurasian Spoonbill. We paused at a harbour en route just as rain came in, and as we sheltered under the tailgate of our vans we had some fine views of Roseate and Black-naped Terns, plus single Common and White-winged Terns. We completed our journey to our hotel in mist and drizzle, and further heavy rain meant we had to abandon any nightbirding plans.

Early the next morning we had gone just a few hundred metres from our hotel when a leggy shape was seen trotting across the tarmac – Okinawa Rail! We drove slowly along the highway, finding several more Rails at the roadside, at least one of them walking right past the cars at close range. We walked a little into the forest on the edge of the village, and found a vocal and eventually obliging adult and juvenile Okinawa Robin. After breakfast we headed deeper into the Okinawa jungles, and along forest tracks we found an Okinawa Woodpecker attending a nest hole with a large and ready-to-fledge juvenile poking his head out. We waited here a while and saw the adult come in to feed the youngster a couple of times. Here too were many Okinawa Robins, mostly seen flicking off the side of the track, but we had some very good looks at a pair, and further into the hills we found another Okinawa Woodpecker that also had a nest hole. In the afternoon we revisited these birds; eventually the Robins allowed some photography, another Woodpecker was found, and a couple of Japanese Paradise Flycatchers were found but they wouldn't stay still for long. After nightfall

we went out once more, and eventually found a rusty-coloured Japanese Scops Owl that flew in silently under a very bright moon, and sat on a bare branch for all to see.



Amami Robin



Black-faced Spoonbill

Our last few hours on the island, before we had to head back to the airport, were spent finding more Okinawa Rails. A total of 19 of these charismatic birds were seen between our two vehicles, with one feeding on some flattened invertebrate on the road that allowed a prolonged close view. Its amazing to think that these were not known to exist prior to 1978! Then it was time to hit the road once more, with another brief harbour stop providing some nice close fly-bys of Whiskered and Roseate Terns, and on the pond near the airport we revisited the trio of Spoonbills, still here and feeding actively. Also we found Common Kingfisher, Great Egret, Common Redshank and Grey-tailed Tattler. We then flew to Amami-Oshima, and on arrival headed for the 'Amami Natural Forest' where we found our first endemics in the form of Lidth's Jays, plus Ryukyu Minivets and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers. Along a forest road we found a fine pair of Amami Woodpeckers that showed well, before we headed to Naze town and our hotel. After some supper it was time to head out once more, to drive slowly along some of the forest tracks that criss-cross the island in search of the nocturnal delights that reside here. We quickly found the endemic Amami Black Rabbits, a good sign that the introduced Javan Mongooses were under control here. After driving around a bit we found our target, the Amami Woodcock, sat on the roadside and allowing a prolonged look. We found four in total, and even had a sighting of a Ryukyu Scops Owl before heading home for the night.

No rest for the wicked, and we were out again after a few hours rest, driving up a very narrow jungle track in search of the elusive Amami Thrush. A couple were seen shooting off the track in front of us never to be refound, then we found a bird singing high in some tall trees, and he responded to our invitation by shooting back and forwards through the canopy before disappearing. Returning to the foot of the hill we had a nice view of Amami Robin and a Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, then we headed home for a welcome break. In the afternoon we explored a different forest area along forest tracks, finding another fine Amami Robin, had good looks at Amami Woodpeckers, Ryukyu Minivets, and yet another roosting Ryukyu Scops Owl. A final morning on the island took us to some of the richest forests at the far end of the island. We found several Lidth's Jays, a Ryukyu Flycatcher that showed well at close range, more Amami Woodpeckers with a juvenile being fed by a female, before it was time to head off. Close to the airport we explored a beach where we found a Far Eastern Curlew, two Great Knot, Black-faced Spoonbill, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Kentish Plover with small chicks, Marsh Sandpiper and some nice Blue Rock Thrushes. After an airport lunch we flew back to Haneda, and made our way to our Tokyo hotel, the last night of the tour for some of us, the rest of us heading for Hokkaido the following morning for the tour extension.

We took a flight to Asahikawa in Hokkaido, and then drove towards the forested mountains, seeing two Eurasian Hobby en route. We drove up to 800m, where the snow had very recently retreated and exotic flora was emerging after the long winter. In the lush mixed forest we found a Grey Bunting that flew in circles

around us but refused to pose, however the many Black-faced Buntings were more obliging. Sakhalin Leaf Warblers and Eastern Crowned Warblers sang all round us, along with Japanese Robins that somehow stayed hidden. It became rather windy and we retreated downhill, heading into rain as we passed through the Sounkyo gorges, towards our hotel situated near Lake Oketo in the centre of the island.

With dawn somewhere around 3am, it was hard to avoid being out very early, and we headed out into the lush forests along dirt tracks, following the course of streams that coursed through the mature woodland. We had a good start with a Hazel Grouse that came close but remained partly hidden, unlike the next one we encountered that flew in to our feet before realising its mistake, rapidly retreating into the safety of the trees, and sitting up on a branch in full view of us.



Japanese Robin



Siberian Flying Squirrel

We saw White-throated Needletails flying low through the forest, a handsome male White-backed Woodpecker, Grey-headed Woodpecker and Oriental Cuckoo. A Siberian Thrush male posed at the roadside, Grey-bellied Bullfinches fed along the track in pairs, and a Japanese Robin male showed extremely well, singing his heart out in a roadside tree. We saw Eurasian Red Squirrel and Siberian Chipmunk, and found a large fresh stool of a Brown Bear in the middle of the track. An evening foray provided good audio encounters with Grey Nightjars, but they never really showed and all we saw was a distant flying bird, but the roding Eurasian Woodcocks were very entertaining and gave us good looks as they kept zipping overhead. An Oriental Scops Owl was heard calling but could not be lured closer, and the mercury dipped to 7 degrees, which may have hindered the enthusiasm of the nightbirds. Numerous Red Fox cubs were scampering about on the roads, and a Raccoon-Dog was seen briefly in the car headlights before running off.

The following morning we repeated our drive along the forest tracks, finding Goosander, Brown-headed Thrush, Asian Brown and Blue-and-White Flycatchers, however the best find was a Siberian Flying Squirrel that sat calmly in a tree after flying from its roost hole. Then it was time to drag ourselves away from these lush forests and make our way down to the south-east coast. A roadside stop on our way produced some superlative views of very vocal Eastern Crowned Warblers, then once we reached Kiritappu we began searching around the bushy marshes. We had some very close views of a responsive Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler, some gorgeous Long-tailed Rosefinches circled us, and Siberian Rubythroats sat on the bushes singing. We reached our hotel in the shelter of the cape, perhaps the most elegant of the tour, with gorgeous wood and paper interiors, and a dinner table groaning with King Crab, Oysters and Sea Urchin!

The next morning we began in the coastal meadows where Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler were active and singing from the tops of the plants, Common Reed Buntings and Stejneger's Stonechat dotted the landscape, and we found a splendid Lanceolated Warbler sitting up and singing from a low bushlet. Distant white blobs materialised into Red-crowned Cranes feeding out in the marshes, and Latham's Snipe

performed their bizarre sounding aerial displays overhead. From the Cape we looked across to a colony of Japanese Cormorants, Siberian Rubythroats sang from every prominence, and a White-tailed Eagle took a hammering from the local Crows. Nearby we found a Sakhalin Grasshopper Warbler that sang loudly from the woodland edge and moved around us in circles, staying invisible except for some naked eye views at close range, while both Common and Oriental Cuckoos buzzed around.



Lanceolated Warbler

We left this area and headed northwards up the east coast, stopping around Lake Furen where we enjoyed some closer views of Red-crowned Cranes, while along the coast itself we found flocks of Black Scoter with a few Stejneger's Scoter, Greater Scaup and a Whooper Swan. Reaching Rausu we checked the harbour that was full of Slaty-backed Gulls plus a few Black-legged Kittiwake, and scanning offshore we noticed a few Rhinoceros Auklet flying past. We were then surprised to see at least ten Killer Whale just offshore, with three or four large bulls with stupidly tall dorsal fins waving about when they surfaced! A small party of Dall's Porpoise were also seen, swimming very rapidly in the opposite direction! It was time for us to get settled in to our digs for the night, the minshuku famous for its resident family of Blakiston's Fish Owl. We were required to eat before dusk, another great feast of crab and fish, then took up our positions for the evening overlooking the fast-flowing stream, waiting for the great Owl to appear. Our hosts staggered out into the fast flowing water to place fish into the midstream rock pool, and so we waited. After an hour or two an Owl began calling nearby, and then this beast of a bird flew down and landed in the middle of the river, plunging in to grab small trout and devour them on the spot before flying back into the forest. Another bird came down after another hour, and possibly a third later on. What a show!

Our plan of going up to the Shiretoko pass in the early morning was thwarted by the road being closed until later on, (quite possibly due to the grim weather visible on the mountain) so we explored the coast road to its end at Aidomari. Rhinoceros Auklets were abundant this morning, flying to feeding grounds somewhere beyond, and a cloud of Short-tailed Shearwaters could be seen far out to sea. Harlequin Ducks huddled on breakwaters, a Red-necked Grebe appeared and a single Glaucous-winged Gull was found. Another Sakhalin Grasshopper Warbler sang loudly from a roadside thicket, playing hard to get as they do, but offered itself up for some brief looks as he excitedly came close to us. After breakfast we discovered some basking Japanese Four-lined Snake outside the guesthouse, then we headed up onto the pass. It was foggy, 2 degrees Celsius, ice hung from the bushes and the wind was bitter, so we dropped down the other side

where the weather improved slightly. A male Siberian Thrush sang from roadside trees and showed well, a Grey Bunting finally made an appearance, perching up and singing after it had flown at our heads, and a Black Woodpecker briefly flopped over the road. On the north-facing coast we had some nice looks at Spectacled Guillemots close inshore, and Japanese Cormorants bathed in the shallows. It was then time to head south, so after our final 7-11 picnic lunch we headed across the island towards Kushiro. Along the way we were surprised to find two Raccoon Dogs foraging in broad daylight in a field, one of which seemed unconcerned when we drove up to it. On reaching the Kushiro area we still had a little time in hand, and along a forest road we had a good look at a female Grey-headed Woodpecker, and a flight view of a Rufous Hawk Cuckoo. Then it was time to leave this magical island and head back to Tokyo, with a late flight taking us into Haneda, and the end of our tour.

What a splendid trip this had been. 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.



Red-crowned Crane



Siberian Rubythroat



Narcissus Flycatcher

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

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

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

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader 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).

- Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus* A single at Notsuke on Hokkaido.
- Mandarin Duck** ◊ *Aix galericulata* Good close views of some in the Karuizawa area
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera* A trio seen near Kiritappu.
- Falcatid Duck** ◊ *Anas falcata* Two on paddies by the Tonegawa, another two at Inbanuma.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* A handful seen on the shore at Kiritappu.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* A couple in the Karuizawa area, another two on Hokkaido.
- Eastern Spot-billed Duck** *Anas zonorhyncha* Common on Honshu in suitable wet habitats, also on Ishigaki.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* One on the beach on Amami was a surprise.
- Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* A sizeable flock seen along the coast on Hokkaido.
- Harlequin Duck** ◊ *Histrionicus histrionicus* Some nice examples seen basking on rocks on Hokkaido.
- Stejneger's Scoter** ◊ *Melanitta stejnegeri* Quite a few seen from Notsuke on the Hokkaido coast.
- Black Scoter** ◊ *Melanitta americana* Still quite a number of these about on Hokkaido.
- Smew** *Mergellus albellus* An injured immature male seen on the river by Lake Toden.
- Goosander** *Mergus merganser* A couple seen around Lake Oketo, a quartet seen at Kiritappu.
- Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* A single bird seen at Rausu.
- Hazel Grouse** ◊ *Tetrastes bonasia* Great views of four on one day at Lake Oketo, one to within 2m momentarily!
- Chinese Bamboo Partridge (introduced)** *Bambusicola thoracicus* A rare view of one jaywalking at Mi-ike

Ring-necked Pheasant (introduced) *Phasianus colchicus* Several seen on Ishigaki.

Japanese Green Pheasant ◇ *Phasianus versicolor* Several seen around the Narita and Karuizawa areas.

Indian Peafowl (introduced) *Pavo cristatus* Several seen on Ishigaki.

Pacific Loon ◇ *Gavia pacifica* A single seen along the Hokkaido coast, also others not identified to species.

Streaked Shearwater ◇ *Calonectris leucomelas* Very numerous over the seas between Miyakejima and Tokyo.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus* A single seen from the Miyakejima ferry, identified from a photo!

Short-tailed Shearwater ◇ *Puffinus tenuirostris* A few from the Miyakejima ferry, also 100s offshore at Rausu.

Tristram's Storm-petrel ◇ *Oceanodroma tristrami* At least six seen from the Miyakejima ferry, probably more.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Singles seen at Inbanuma and Ishigaki.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* One in breeding dress on the sea near Rausu.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* One with the following birds at Naha.

Black-faced Spoonbill ◇ *Platalea minor* Two seen near Naha airport on two occasions, also two at Ose on Amami.

Eurasian Bittern ◇ *Botaurus stellaris* Great views of one clambering about in the reeds near Narita.



Eurasian Bittern



Yellow Bittern

Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* Nice views of several birds in nuptial chases over the reeds near Narita.

Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* A couple seen on Ishigaki were a nice addition to our Japan lists.

Malayan Night Heron ◇ *Gorsachius melanolophus* A single feeding in a paddock on Ishigaki.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* A few seen, at various points on Honshu and on Ishigaki.

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus* Singles on Miyakejima, quite numerous on Ishigaki.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Seen in good numbers on Honshu and on Hokkaido, a few elsewhere.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* A couple seen on Ishigakijima.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Scattered sightings of small numbers along our route.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia* A few seen on the Tonegawa, and also on Ishigakijima.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* Small numbers encountered along our route.

Pacific Reef Heron *Egretta sacra* A few seen in the southern islands, some white morph ones on Ishigaki.

Lesser Frigatebird *Fregatta ariel* A big surprise to find one of these flying around on Ishigaki.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Two seen from the Miyakejima ferry.

Pelagic Cormorant ◇ *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* A few seen around the coasts of Hokkaido.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* Numerous along the Tonegawa, others noted long the way.

Japanese Cormorant ◇ *Phalacrocorax capillatus* A colony at Kiritappu, and more seen around Shiretoko.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* Several seen on Ishigaki.

Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis orientalis* A single seen en route to Mount Fuji.

Ryukyu Serpent Eagle ◇ *Spilornis perplexus* A good showing on Ishigaki, five or more seen, mostly on poles.

Mountain Hawk-Eagle ◇ *Nisaetus nipalensis* A single distant bird seen soaring at Mi-ike.

Japanese Sparrowhawk ◇ *Accipiter gularis* (LO) A single seen on Ishigaki.

Black-eared Kite *Milvus migrans* A scattering of birds on Honshu, more commonly on Hokkaido.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Quite a few seen on Hokkaido, mostly along the coasts.

Eastern Buzzard ◇ *Buteo japonicus* A few on Honshu, often while travelling, plus a couple more on Hokkaido.

Slaty-legged Crake ◇ *Rallina eurizonoides* (H) Heard in the forest on Ishigaki.

Okinawa Rail ◇ *Gallirallus okinawae* Nine on our first morning at Ada, 19 seen on our second morning! See note

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* Not uncommon on Ishigakijima.

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* Bizarrely, twice seen in flight over reedbeds around Narita.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* A few scattered sightings along our route.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* Two seen at Inbanuma and a single on Amami.

Red-crowned Crane ◇ *Grus japonensis* A small number seen on all three days around eastern Hokkaido.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Eleven seen on Ishigakijima.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* A flock of seven near Omigawa, a single on Ishigaki.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Several seen on rivers near Karuizawa, a single on Ishigaki.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* A few seen on the Ishigaki beaches, on Amami they had small chicks.

Mongolian Plover *Charadrius mongolus* Some nice examples on the beach on Ishigaki.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* Four at least with the above on Ishigaki.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* Four or more gave a good show at Oketo, roding over the trees

Amami Woodcock ◇ *Scolopax mira* At least four showed well on our Amami nightdrive.

Latham's Snipe ◇ *Gallinago hardwickii* Good looks at several displaying birds on Hokkaido.



Latham's Snipe



Okinawa Rail

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Five seen in flight at Omigawa.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* 20 inland migrants at Omigawa, another 2 on Ishigaki.

Far Eastern Curlew ◇ *Numenius madagascariensis* A nice surprise on the beach on Amami.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* Singles on Okinawa and Amami.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* A single on the beach on Amami.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* A couple of birds on fresh water on Ishigakijima.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Tringa brevipes* A flock of 30 on paddies near Omigawa, plenty on Ishigaki, single on Okinawa.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* A single near Omigawa, another on the beach on Amami.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A single near Karuizawa, another two on Amami.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Flocks on paddies at Omigawa, a few on Ishigaki, another flock on Hokkaido.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* Two on the beach on Amami, one with half a leg missing! A write-in.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* Two on paddies near Omigawa, singles on Ishigaki and Amami.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata* A single on paddies near Omigawa, two on the beach on Amami.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* A breeding plumage bird on the beach on Ishigakijima.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* A single on paddies near Omigawa was the only one of the trip.

[Phalarope sp: Four seen from the Miyakejima ferry]

Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* Singles seen on Miyakejima, Ishigaki and Amami.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* Not uncommon along the Hokkaido coasts.

Black-tailed Gull ◇ *Larus crassirostris* A few around the Miyakejima's coast, not again until we reached Hokkaido.

Kamchatka Gull ◇ *Larus [canus] kamtschatschensis* Two seen at Rausu.

Glaucous-winged Gull ◇ *Larus glaucescens* A single adult seen at Aidomari near Rausu.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* A couple of singles at Rausu and Aidomari.

Slaty-backed Gull ◇ *Larus schistisagus* Very common along the coasts of Hokkaido.

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Three seen on Ishigakijima.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* One flew over the second car on Ishigakijima, apparently a Japan rarity!

Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* At least 15 or more seen on Ishigakijima.

Little Tern *Sternula albifrons* Quite a few seen on Ishigaki and Amami, a couple also on Okinawa.

Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* A couple on Ishigaki, then more on Okinawa giving 'unforgettable' views!

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana* Lovely views of these on Okinawa, also seen at range on Ishigaki.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* A single with the Tern flocks on Okinawa.

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* Quite a few seen on Ishigaki, singles on Okinawa and Amami.

White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* A single bird with the Tern flocks on Okinawa.

Spectacled Guillemot ◊ *Cephus carbo* Lovely close-ish views at Oketo on Hokkaido.

Japanese Murrelet ◊ *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* A couple seen from the Miyakejima ferry, not great views!

Rhinoceros Auklet ◊ *Cerorhinca monocerata* Scores of these seen on the seas around Rausu.

Rock Dove (feral) *Columba livia* Available.

Japanese Wood Pigeon ◊ *Columba janthina* Great views of many of these on Miyakejima, with great calls.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* Common throughout.

Red Turtle Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica* A female on Ishigakijima was unusual

Common Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* Good views of a couple on the roads on Ishigakijima.

White-bellied Green Pigeon ◊ *Treron sieboldii* Good views of some on Mt Fuji, more seen around Mi-ike.

Ryukyu Green Pigeon ◊ *Treron permagnus* Good views of birds sitting on wires on Ishigaki, also on Amami

Rufous Hawk-Cuckoo ◊ *Hierococcyx hyperythrus* Three on Mt Fuji, one seen on Hokkaido, heard more often.

Lesser Cuckoo ◊ *Cuculus poliocephalus* Multiple sightings of vocal active birds on Miyakejima, another at Mi-ike.

Oriental Cuckoo ◊ *Cuculus optatus* Three seen on Hokkaido, heard more often.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* A couple seen on Hokkaido.

Japanese Scops Owl ◊ *Otus semitorques* Heard on Miyakejima, one seen on Okinawa in the moonlight. See note.

Oriental Scops Owl ◊ *Otus sunia* (H) Heard at Lake Oketo on Hokkaido.

Ryukyu Scops Owl ◊ *Otus elegans* Four daytime sightings, three on Ishigaki and one on Amami. See note.



Ryukyu Scops Owl – Ishigaki



Ryukyu Scops Owl - Amami

Blakiston's Fish Owl ◊ *Bubo blakistoni* Great looks at Rausu, with up three birds coming to take fish. See note.

Ural Owl *Strix uralensis* A great view of one in daytime at Karuizawa, race *hondoensis*.

Northern Boobook ◊ *Ninox japonica* Two seen on Miyakejima, one on daytime on Ishigaki. See note.

Grey Nightjar ◊ *Caprimulgus jotaka* A poor view at Lake Oketo on Hokkaido, at least two birds singing.

White-throated Needletail ◊ *Hirundapus caudacutus* Many seen around Oketo, in the forest where they breed.

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus* Numerous on Miyakejima and on Hokkaido.

House Swift *Apus nipalensis* A single seen on Ishigakijima.

Ruddy Kingfisher ◊ *Halcyon coromanda* Great views on Ishigakijima, at Mi-ike, Okinawa and Amami. See note.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* Odd birds seen on Okinawa and Amami.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker ◊ *Dendrocopos kizuki* Regularly encountered, absent on Ishigakijima.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* One in flight at Mi-ike, better views of one at Oketo.

Amami Woodpecker ◊ *Dendrocopos [leucotos] owstoni* Multiple sightings, noisy and obvious.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A couple of sightings at Karuizawa, a couple on Hokkaido.
Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* Heard at Oketo, a fly-over single at Shiretoko.
Japanese Green Woodpecker ◇ *Picus awokera* Seen well on Mt Fuji and at Mi-ike, also one at Karuizawa.
Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* A flighty one at Oketo, prolonged looks at a female at Akan.
Okinawa Woodpecker ◇ *Sapheopipo noguchii* Several good sightings, an active nest found complete with juvenile.
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* One at Gotemba.
Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* Nice views of a pair near Asahikawa on Hokkaido.
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Singles near Karuizawa and Mt Fuji.
Ashy Minivet ◇ *Pericrocotus divaricatus* Poor flight views only, at Karuizawa.
Ryukyu Minivet ◇ *Pericrocotus tegimae* Frequent sightings from Kyushu southwards.
Bull-headed Shrike ◇ *Lanius bucephalus* Regular sightings on all the main islands, a nest at our Mi-ike hotel.



Grey-headed Woodpecker



Bull-headed Shrike

Japanese Paradise Flycatcher ◇ *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* Good views at Mi-ike, also on all the southern islands.
Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* A few of the *japonicus* race seen on Honshu, a few *brandtii* race on Hokkaido.
Lidth's Jay ◇ *Garrulus lidthi* Furtive, but several seen well, the juveniles were most obliging.
Azure-winged Magpie ◇ *Cyanopica cyanus* Three in total seen on Honshu, all while driving!
Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes* A single on Mt Fuji was the only sighting.
Oriental Crow ◇ *Corvus orientalis* Seen in small numbers on Honshu, more on Hokkaido.
Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* Seen throughout. **See note.**
Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Plentiful on Mt Fuji, a few at Karuizawa and in higher forests on Hokkaido.
Japanese Varied Tit ◇ *Sittiparus varius* Seen at Karuizawa, Mi-ike, and a few on Okinawa and Amami.
Owston's Varied Tit ◇ *Sittiparus owstoni* Nice views of several examples on Miyakejima.
Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* A couple of sightings on Hokkaido.
Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* A few at Karuizawa, more seen in the higher forests on Hokkaido.
Japanese Tit *Parus minor* Frequent on Honshu and Kyushu, also small numbers seen on Amami and Hokkaido.
Ishigaki Tit ◇ *Parus [cinereus] nigriloris* Several nice examples of these dusky fellows seen on Ishigakijima.
Japanese Skylark ◇ *Alauda japonica* Many seen on our first day at Omigawa, also near Karuizawa.
Light-vented Bulbul ◇ *Pycnonotus sinensis* Not uncommon on Ishigakijima, also seen on Okinawa.
Brown-eared Bulbul ◇ *Hypsipetes amaurotis* Seen on all islands except Hokkaido. **See note.**
Sand Martin *Riparia riparia* Not uncommon on Hokkaido.
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Seen commonly on Honshu and Kyushu.
Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* Frequently seen on Ishigaki, Okinawa and Amami.
Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* Seen around bridges near Karuizawa, also on several days on Hokkaido.
Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* (LO) One seen on Miyakejima.
Japanese Bush Warbler ◇ *Horornis diphone* Heard often on the main islands, a few seen well.
Asian Stubtail ◇ *Urosphena squameiceps* Two seen around Mi-ike, one eventually performed well for us.
Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Small flocks at Karuizawa, also at Mi-ike.
Kamchatka Leaf Warbler ◇ *Phylloscopus examinandus* (H) A singing bird at Oketo.

Japanese Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthodryas*
 Sakhalin Leaf Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus borealoides*
 Eastern Crowned Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus coronatus*

Good looks on Mt Fuji and at higher latitudes near Karuizawa.
 A performing songster at Mt Fuji, a couple more on Hokkaido.
 Seen well at Karuizawa, & good performers on Hokkaido.



Eastern Crowned Warbler



Siberian Thrush

Ijima's Leaf Warbler ◊ *Phylloscopus ijimae* Not uncommon in the forest on Miyakejima, many heard singing.
 Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis* Numerous, vocal around Omigawa, Narita and near Karuizawa.
 Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* Nice views near Karuizawa, a few more on Hokkaido.
 Lanceolated Warbler ◊ *Locustella lanceolata* One of several songsters at Kiritappu sat up for us nicely.
 Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler ◊ *Locustella ochotensis* Great looks of several of these on Hokkaido.
 Styan's Grasshopper Warbler ◊ *Locustella pleskei* Some nice examples performed well for all on Miyakejima.
 Marsh Grassbird ◊ *Locustella pryeri* At least six seen in the reedbeds at Omigawa, singing and songflying.
 Sakhalin Grasshopper Warbler ◊ *Locustella amnicola* Two sneaky examples seen on Hokkaido, very loud song!
 Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis* Numerous birds around Omigawa, also seen on Ishigaki.
 Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) (Pekin Robin) *Leiothrix lutea* (H) Heard a few times at Mi-ike.
 Japanese White-Eye ◊ *Zosterops japonicus* Most visible on Miyakejima and the Ryukyu Islands. **See note.**
 Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* A couple of sightings on Mt Fuji, also heard on Hokkaido.
 Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* Several sightings along our route, refer to the race *fumigatus*.
 Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Several seen; at Karuizawa, Mi-ike and on Hokkaido.
 Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* One seen on Hokkaido and a couple of others heard.
 White-cheeked Starling ◊ *Spodiopsar cineraceus* Regularly seen on Honshu, Kyushu and Hokkaido.
 Chestnut-cheeked Starling ◊ *Agropsar philippensis* A few nice examples seen in the Karuizawa area.
 Siberian Thrush ◊ *Geokichla sibirica* Great looks at two males on Hokkaido; one at Oketo, one at Shiretoko.
 White's Thrush ◊ *Zoothera aurea* At least three individuals seen flying from forest roadsides at Oketo, also heard.
 Amami Thrush ◊ *Zoothera major* Some glimpses and several flight views as one flew to and fro in the canopy.
 Japanese Thrush ◊ *Turdus cardis* Just one singing male seen at Karuizawa, an atypically poor showing.
 Brown-headed Thrush ◊ *Turdus chrysolais* Some glimpses on Mt Fuji, better looks at Oketo on Hokkaido.
 Izu Thrush ◊ *Turdus celaenops* Numerous examples seen on Miyakejima, but never tame.
 Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris* Several seen in the forests on Hokkaido.
 Blue-and-white Flycatcher ◊ *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* A handful seen; at Karuizawa, Mt Fuji, Mi-ike and Oketo.
 Siberian Blue Robin *Larvivora cyane* Great views of songsters at Karuizawa, also heard on Hokkaido.
 Amami Robin ◊ *Larvivora [komadori] komadori* Some good looks at these beauties on Amami, with a sweet song.
 Okinawa Robin ◊ *Larvivora [komadori] namiyei* Many seen along forest roads, several performed well.
 Japanese Robin ◊ *Larvivora akahige* Our first on Miyakejima seen well, then a stunning songster found at Oketo.
 Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* Many showy birds seen around Kiritappu.
 Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* Seen well on Mt Fuji, at higher levels near Karuizawa and on Hokkaido.
 Narcissus Flycatcher ◊ *Ficedula narcissina* Some beautiful specimens around Karuizawa and Mt Fuji.
 Ryukyu Flycatcher ◊ *Ficedula owstoni* A couple showed well on Ishigaki, also seen at close range on Amami.
 Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* Numerous on all the smaller islands, the red-bellied race is *philippensis*.
 Stejneger's Stonechat *Saxicola stejnegeri* Common in grassy and open country habitats on Hokkaido.

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* A few seen around Karuizawa, also near Mi-ike, at Oketo and at Rausu.
Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* A small number noted along the roadsides on Hokkaido.
Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* Seen almost daily.
Scaly-breasted Munia (introduced) *Lonchura punctulata* A few seen on Ishigakijima.
Japanese Accentor ◇ *Prunella rubida* Three showed very well, high on the slopes of Mt Fuji.
Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* Seen regularly in suitable habitat on all three main islands.
Black-backed Wagtail ◇ *Motacilla [alba] lugens* Seen frequently on Honshu, and commonly on Hokkaido.
Japanese Wagtail ◇ *Motacilla grandis* A small number seen in the Karuizawa area.
Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Two songsters on Mt Fuji, also in the Hokkaido forests.
Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Seen twice in flight only at Kiritappu.
Japanese Grosbeak ◇ *Eophona personata* Seen well at Karuizawa and also on Mt Fuji.
Grey-bellied Bullfinch ◇ *Pyrrhula griseiventris* In good number in the Hokkaido forests, mostly paired up.
Long-tailed Rosefinch ◇ *Carpodacus sibiricus* Some lovely examples showed obligingly at Karuizawa
Grey-capped Greenfinch *Chloris sinica* Frequent throughout except on the Ryukyu Islands.
Meadow Bunting ◇ *Emberiza cioides* Seen often on Honshu, Kyushu and on Miyakejima.
Chestnut-eared Bunting ◇ *Emberiza fucata* A single at Omigawa, plenty more in fields near Karuizawa.



Chestnut-eared Bunting



Yellow Bunting

Yellow Bunting ◇ *Emberiza sulphurata* Three birds seen at Karuizawa with nice views acquired.
Black-faced Bunting ◇ *Emberiza spodocephala* Only seen on Hokkaido where they were common.
Grey Bunting ◇ *Emberiza variabilis* Eventually showed well and at close range on the Shiretoko peninsula.
Japanese Reed Bunting ◇ *Emberiza yessoensis* Good looks at singing males around Omigawa.
Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Quite a few seen on Hokkaido in suitable habitat.

MAMMALS

Amami Rabbit *Pentalagus furnessi* A good number of these seen on our night drive on Amami. See note.
Japanese Squirrel *Sciurus lis* A couple of sightings at our Karuizawa hotel.
Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* A good look at a handsome fellow at Oketo.
Siberian Chipmunk *Tamias sibiricus* Two seen along forest tracks at Oketo.
Siberian Flying Squirrel *Pteromys volans* A very cute fellow showed well in daytime at Oketo.
Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Common on Hokkaido with many cubs seen.
Raccoon-Dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides* One at night at Oketo, two in broad daylight en route to Kushiro!
[Brown Bear *Ursos arctos* A large pile of 'evidence' indicated one was nearby at Oketo.]
Japanese Marten *Martes melampus* A rare view of two on a forest track at Mi-ike.
Japanese Weasel *Mustela itatsi* A few sightings of introduced animals on Miyakejima.
Japanese Badger *Meles anakuma* A lucky encounter with a fearless one in the daytime at Mi-ike.
Ryukyu Flying Fox *Pteropus dasymallus* Just two seen on Ishigakijima.
Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli* Four or more seen in a hurry to get away from the following at Rausu!

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca* A big thrill to see ten or more off Rausu, with three or four large bulls among them.
Short-finned Pilot Whale *Globicephala macrorhynchus* Another big thrill, ten or more from the Miyakejima ferry.
Eurasian Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* A glimpse of two on Amami.
Sika Deer *Cervus nippon* A few seen on Kyushu, commonly on Hokkaido.
Japanese Serow *Capricornis crispus* A total of three seen around Karuizawa.



Killer Whale



Japanese Serow



Amami Woodcock

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Okinawa Rail ◊ *Gallirallus okinawae*

An extraordinary bird, it seems hard to comprehend that its existence was not confirmed until 1978! On our first morning at least nine were seen, on our second morning we recorded 19 between us. We had a very different experience to my previous visit in early December last year, when it was nigh on impossible to get even a glimpse of these birds.

Red-crowned Crane ◊ *Grus japonensis*

Rather odd for me to see these without a backdrop of snow! We had several fine encounters at Kiritappu and around the back of 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*

One of the big highlights on this tour, and one that requires a lot of night driving to find it. Our efforts were duly rewarded with excellent looks at birds sat on the roadside, with at least four seen, and another was seen flushing off the roadside early one morning. 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! It does seem though that the threat is taken seriously and numbers are increasing following a campaign of Mongoose eradication.

Japanese Scops Owl ◊ *Otus semitorques*

After a no show by a briefly calling bird on Miyakejima, we were happy to see one on Okinawa. The Okinawa race *pryeri* differs slightly from the mainland form in having unfeathered tarsi, and is sometimes proposed as split from the mainland *semitorques*.

Ryukyu Scops Owl ◊ *Otus elegans*

We were most fortunate to find four in the daytime (one was a little worse for wear though!) and they were the first I've seen by day. Otani informed me that the latest and ongoing DNA work indicates that there are genetic differences between the northern population, which includes Okinawa and Amami, and the southern group that includes Ishigakijima, and also Lanyu Island in Taiwan. our daytime sightings, three on Ishigaki and one on Amami. Superb!

Blakiston's Fish Owl ◊ *Bubo blakistoni*

A splendid way to end our tour, with great looks at up to three individuals at Rausu. The first came soon after 8pm, the second came not long after, and then sat nearby for ages even while the pond was restocked. A third visit took place some time later, altogether we had a brilliant show by these awesome beasts.

Northern Boobook ◊ *Ninox japonica*

Of the birds that we saw, on Miyakejima they should be migrant *japonica*, on Ishigaki they are the resident race *totogo* that also occurs on Taiwan.

Ruddy Kingfisher ◊ *Halcyon coromanda*

At Mi-ike they would be of the migrant race *major*, on the islands they would be of the supposedly resident *bangsi* race. We had a great look at one on Ishigaki that really showed the purple bloom on the upperparts that is typical of the Ryukyu race.

Large-billed Crow ◊ *Corvus japonensis*

On Ishigaki the super abundant 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 clearly has more work to be done on it!

Brown-eared Bulbul ◊ *Hypsipetes amaurotis*

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

Japanese White-Eye ◇ *Zosterops japonicus*

Most visible on Miyakejima where the race is *stejnegeri*, and on the Ryukyu Islands where the race is *lochooensis*.

Amami Rabbit *Pentalagus furnessi*

A good number of these seen on our night drive on Amami. A fascinating species, with shorter ears and legs quite unlike 'conventional' rabbits and hares. Endemic to just two islands; Amami Oshima and Tokunoshima. A relict of a lineage of Asian rabbits that have died-out elsewhere.

REPTILES & AMPHIBIANS

Tiger Keelback *Rhabdophis tigrinus* The snake at Karuizawa.

Hime Habu *Ovophis okinavensis* The snake on the road on our Amami nightdrive.

Japanese Four-lined Snake *Elaphe quadrivirgata* The three snakes basking outside our Rausu guesthouse.

Green Sea Turtle *Chelonia mydas* One seen off Miyakejima.

Yellow-margined Box Turtle *Cuora flavomarginata* One seen on Ishigaki.

Eastern Japanese Common Toad *Bufo japonicus formosus* Common on Miyakejima.

Tago's Brown Frog *Rana tagoi tagoi* The small one at Mi-ike.

Sword-tailed Newt *Cynops ensicauda* Common in puddles on Amami.

Sakishima Tree Lizard *Japalura polygonata ishigakiensis* The lizard at Banna Park on Ishigaki.

Okinawa Tree Lizard *Japalura polygonata polygonata* The lizards seen on Okinawa.



Tiger Keelback



Hime Habu



Idea leuconoe