



Steller's Sea Eagle (Craig Robson)

JAPAN IN WINTER

10 – 24 / 26 FEBRUARY 2017

LEADERS: CRAIG ROBSON and CHIKARA OTANI

Another winter, another fantastic tour to Japan, with its thrilling and spectacular avifauna. The weather stayed fine for the most part this year, and combined with the comfortable transport, and great local guiding and hospitality, it was another trip to remember. Bugling hordes of wintering cranes at Arasaki, a multitude of wintering waterfowl including 100s of Baikal Teal, dancing Red-crowned Cranes in snowy Hokkaido, hundreds of awesome Steller's Sea and White-tailed Eagles on the pack-ice, and the incredible Blakiston's Fish Owl were just a few of the headlines on the main tour. The extension brought great views of three

species of albatross, including the regionally endemic Short-tailed. Among the many other avian highlights this time were: Mandarin and Harlequin Ducks, Copper and Green Pheasants, Japanese and Red-faced Cormorants, Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunders's Gull, Ancient and Japanese Murrelets, Least and Crested Auklets, Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, Ural Owl, White-backed, Japanese Pygmy and Japanese Green Woodpeckers, Ryukyu Minivet, Azure-winged Magpie, Daurian Jackdaw, Chinese Penduline Tits, Dusky and Pale Thrushes, Japanese Accentor, Japanese Grosbeak, Asian Rosy Finch, Pallas's and Long-tailed Rosefinches, Arctic (or Hoary) Redpoll, and Grey and Yellow-throated Buntings. On the post-tour extension, we added Brown-cheeked Rail, White's and Brown-headed Thrushes and, briefly, the endemic Izu Thrush.

Once we had all assembled at Haneda airport, we made our way across town to Tokyo station where we caught a high-speed train to Karuizawa. We disembarked into the sunlit snowy uplands of central Honshu. At our nearby accommodation, we ate our lunch overlooking the hotel bird feeders that were busy with numerous Varied, Japanese and Willow Tits, and an excellent Japanese Accentor.



Japanese Accentor (Craig Robson)

The next two and a half days were spent exploring a variety of different sites and habitats in the Karuizawa area. Watching the hotel feeders was a popular pastime and, as well as the species already mentioned, they also attracted Japanese Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Long-tailed Tit, Meadow Bunting, and even 'Grey-bellied' Bullfinch. Tufty-eared Japanese Squirrels provided endless delight and entertainment.

Exploring the nearby woodlands and forest roads and tracks, we were particularly keen to find Copper Pheasant. Despite their intricate and cryptically-patterned plumage, they proved to be a tad easier to find than expected, and we had some nice views. The roadsides attracted mixed flocks of Grey-capped Greenfinches, Bramblings, Japanese Grosbeaks and Hawfinches, and there were plenty of cute Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers and Eurasian Jays of the local race *japonicus*. A single soaring Mountain Hawk-Eagle was a bit distant. Sika Deer were not uncommon, and on one morning we were very fortunate to see a superb Japanese Serow at very close range.

In the village, we found a very confiding male Long-tailed Rosefinch, and some smart Rustic Buntings, as well as Brown-cheeked Bulbul, White-cheeked Starling, Dusky Thrush and Daurian Redstart. Further afield,

at Toden Reservoir a male American Wigeon was unexpected, along with the more typical Smew and large numbers of Eastern Spot-billed Ducks. Along the adjacent river, we enjoyed good looks at Long-billed Plover, Green Sandpipers, Japanese Wagtail, and Bull-headed Shrike. A couple of Azure-winged Magpies showed all too briefly along the way.

The rising slopes of Mount Asama provide a magnificent backdrop, and when we explored them briefly on one afternoon, we were very fortunate to run-into a feeding flock of about 20 Pallas's Rosefinches - one of the trickier species that we don't always see on this tour. One or two Eastern (or Japanese) Buzzards were perched-up by the road.



Long-tailed Rosefinch (Craig Robson)

The furthest point that we reached during our stay at Karuizawa was the famous Snow Monkey Park in the hills not too far to the north. After slithering along the snowy trail, we enjoyed the curious spectacle of the monkeys in the hot tub - surrounded by an array of almost equally curious tourists. This attraction has become very popular in recent years and at times there are now many more tourists than monkeys! Few birds persisted in this cool snow-bound valley.

The following morning, after a further fruitless search of numerous mistletoe clumps for attendant waxwings, we headed off to the west coast. We spent some time getting better views of Azure-winged Magpie along the way, and reached the city Kanazawa by mid-afternoon, hoping to find a male Scaly-sided Merganser that has over-wintered in recent years on the Saigawa River. Unfortunately, it was not to be this year, even with two lengthy searches of the area, as the bird was rarely visiting the site after its initial re-appearance earlier

in the winter. The best we could manage was good numbers of Brown Dippers, another Long-billed Plover, Blue Rock Thrush, and our first Pale Thrush and Black-faced Bunting.

We had one full day to explore the Kaga area. Recent and on-going snowfall hampered our efforts a bit, but things came good in the end. Scanning a multitude of fields, we eventually spotted three male Green Pheasants picking through the snow, and a small flock of statuesque Grey-headed Lapwings. A large gathering of 100s of Tundra (or Bewick's) Swans sheltered a single rare Snow Goose. A small lake was jam-packed with waterfowl, including about 100 Falcated Ducks, and multiple flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese skeined overhead. Scanning the Sea of Japan from a prominent spit of land known as Kasa Point was very productive. We estimated about 50 each of Pacific Loon and Ancient Murrelet, and 40 Japanese Cormorants, and we also picked-out Red- and Black-throated Loons, Red-necked Grebe, lots of Pelagic Cormorants, Vega and Slaty-backed Gulls, and a flyby Rhinoceros Auklet. We ate lunch at the duck observatory at Katano Kamo-ike, where we watched good numbers of Baikal Teal and Taiga Bean Goose, amidst more hordes of waterfowl.



Bathing Japanese Macaques (Craig Robson)

It was time to move on again, this time south to Fukuoka in northern Kyushu, where the temperature was in double figures! We picked up new vehicles and headed off down the highway southwards to Yatsushiro on the Kuma River. Our first taste of intertidal habitat was most rewarding, fronted by good numbers of Black-faced Spoonbill and Saunders's Gull. Gulls were much in evidence generally, and we also found Black-headed, Black-tailed, Vega, and the Heuglin's form of Lesser Black-backed. Shorebirds were rather distant but in quite good numbers; Red Knot and Red-necked Stint being quite noteworthy. Other good birds were Eurasian Spoonbill, Daurian Redstart, and Buff-bellied Pipit. A write-in Caspian Tern was a Japan tick for Otani-san. We continued southwards towards Arasaki, reaching our family-run minshuku soon after dark, set in the heart of the 'cranes resting area', and enjoyed another Japanese banquet.

We began the next day among thousands of cranes, mostly Hooded but with a good number of the stately White-naped scattered throughout. We were able to pick out a handful of both Sandhill and Common Cranes as they all gathered in the dawn chill to gobble up the grain that was put out for them. A distant Northern Goshawk was scoped, and there were more Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills on a pool. A nearby muddy inlet produced a few unexpected Lesser Sand Plovers. Large numbers of 'Oriental' Rooks were gathering on the telephone wires and fields as we returned for breakfast, and we managed to get some initial views of the much wanted Daurian Jackdaw before having more success with the species later in the day. After a very well-prepared breakfast and a leisurely look around the main crane sanctuary, we headed off to explore various other habitats in the immediate Arasaki area. Reed-fringed pools, inlets and waterways, and a range of agricultural land harboured an interesting selection of species. Chinese Penduline Tit was high on the want-list and was very much appreciated once we eventually tracked-down a flock of about 20 birds. Ruddy-breasted Crake gave excellent views, we had good numbers of Daurian Jackdaws in the end, with many adults, and even a few rarities in the form of Wood Sandpiper, Greater Short-toed Lark and Richard's Pipit. Also of note were: Hen Harrier, Japanese Bush Warbler, 25 Common Starlings, around 200 Russet Sparrows, and good numbers of Eurasian (or Japanese) Skylarks, Buff-bellied Pipits, and Chestnut-eared, Black-faced and Common Reed Buntings.



White-naped Crane with Hooded Cranes at Arasaki (Craig Robson)

After another look at the cranes massing in the early morning hours, we travelled across Kyushu, to Mi-ike and its attractive crater lake nestled among the volcanoes of the Kirishima range. During the afternoon, we birded various points around the lake. We scoped our first Mandarin Ducks roosting on branches, a highly responsive male White-backed Woodpecker entertained us, and we got multiple views of the localised Ryuku Minivet. Much of our time was taken-up trying to get good views of a foraging group of secretive Grey Buntings - without much success. On this occasion, we made do with Japanese Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Nuthatch, Red-flanked Bluetail, lots of Pale Thrushes, and Olive-backed Pipit. Returning to the

forest during the night, we soon heard the distinctive hoots of a Ural Owl and before long, we were enjoying some stunning views of the bird on an exposed snag - the sooty-plumaged *fuscescens* race.

We began the following day nice and early, in order to reach the east coast of Kyushu in good time, and began our birding in an area of fields and wooded copses near Kota Shrine. A couple of White-bellied Green Pigeons flew past us and, as we approached the head of small valley, we found good numbers of lovely Yellow-throated Buntings. More Grey Buntings were located by a small reservoir, but continued to frustrate us. A well vegetated lake held more Mandarin and Falcated Ducks, and a superb Northern Goshawk was watched preening by the shore. Fleeting views of a displaying Japanese Sparrowhawk meant another tour write-in. We headed up the coast to Kadogawa Harbour and, after enjoying lunch in some comfy armchairs, we set off in our charter-boat across the harbour in search of Japanese Murrelets. So small and sprightly, they certainly earn their Japanese name of 'Sea Sparrow'. Otani-san soon spotted a couple, and the skipper skilfully manoeuvred around them for superb views. Also here, were Great Crested Grebes, a few Japanese Cormorants, Western Osprey, a slaty-plumaged Pacific Reef Heron, and Black-tailed, Vega and Slaty-backed Gulls. On our way back to Mi-ike we tried another trail near Kota Shrine, and this time succeeded in getting excellent views of Grey Bunting for everyone, when a calling male suddenly decided to perch right up in front of us.



Japanese Murrelet in Kyushu (Craig Robson)

Another early start, and we were bound for Kagoshima Airport; that would be the end of the double-digit temperatures! Just a few hours later, after a connection in Tokyo, we stepped down in snowy Kushiro, Hokkaido. We still had enough time to see our first wonderful Red-crowned Cranes at one of their feeding stations, and we were not disappointed. We made our way towards our nearby hotel, and settled-in for the night.

Dawn on our first full day in Hokkaido saw the temperature drop as low as -20° C, as we headed for a bridge where Red-crowned Cranes can be viewed roosting in a misty river. Unfortunately, there were rather more

photographers than cranes, so we decided to head off to another feeding station for a more enjoyable experience. It proved to be a good move, as the Tancho (or Ito) Sanctuary had more cranes than photographers!! Although the office feeders were empty, there were a few passerines too, including the local form of Marsh Tit, and several Eurasian Siskins. Leaving the Kushiro area behind, we headed across country to the east coast of Hokkaido. Our best sighting en route was a small flock of Common Redpolls which, upon close inspection, contained a single Arctic (or Hoary) Redpoll. Once at the coast, we drove down the Notsuke Peninsula to a sea-watching spot, and also searched a nearby harbour. There were good numbers of Black Scoter, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, and both mergansers, as well as a single White-winged (or Stejneger's) Scoter, and small numbers of fancy-looking Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks. We continued up the coast to Rausu, where we had an appointment with Blakiston's Fish Owl! As we approached the town, we noticed that there was no sign of any pack-ice, and we pondered how this might affect our viewing of sea eagles on the following day.



Red-crowned Cranes show their agility (Craig Robson)

We settled in to our minshuku overlooking the narrow snow-bound river, ate a hearty dinner (fish, of course!), and then waited for the owl to come. The deep hooting call coming from the dark hillside above us added to the suspense, as we patiently waited for a good few hours. Just at the point when doubts began to creep into our minds, the owl swooped down to find its supper - what a fantastic beast! It posed for a while, lummoxed into the water to grab a fish, ate it in the snow, and then flew up behind us. It returned once or twice more, to a very awe-struck and thrilled audience!!

The following morning, as we looked offshore, we were gob-smacked to see a mass of glimmering pack-ice stretching as far as the eye could see - it had miraculously blown-in overnight like a giant raft. The sea ice is formed in the Sea of Okhotsk, and only comes south when the weather and sea conditions permit. As our boat nudged its way into the midst of the pack-ice, we could already see the magnificent Steller's Sea and White-tailed Eagles dotted about in all directions. The crew tossed fish onto the ice, and in came the eagles!! We enjoyed a magical few hours as these amazing birds provided an incredible spectacle, not to mention some fantastic photo-opportunities. We reckoned on at least 100 Steller's, and 60 White-tailed - an unbelievable sight. We said farewell to Rausu and followed the coast down to the south-east, as we journeyed to Nemuro. We called-in again at the Notsuke Peninsula and also visited a few harbours. There were large numbers of gulls, including Glaucous-winged and particularly Glaucous, a good number of Spectacled Guillemots moving offshore, a single Least Auklet, ten Crested Auklets, large numbers of Pelagic Cormorants, and similar numbers of sea-ducks to the previous day. At our hotel in Nemuro, we enjoyed a feast of Hanasaki Crab and oysters.



The awesome Blakiston's Fish Owl (Craig Robson)

Our full day based at Nemuro was spent exploring Cape Nosappu and various coastal points, including a number of harbours. Sheltered from the wind by the lighthouse at Nosappu, we were able to get endless scope views of Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, as well as Least Auklet and Ancient Murrelet. Further up the coast we also picked out a few Thick-billed Murres (or Brunnich's Guillemot), and a prominent rocky headland provided a roost-site for a single Red-faced Cormorant amidst a flock of Pelagic's. Checking more harbours, we got some much better looks at White-winged (or Stejneger's) Scoters and thanks to some sharp thinking by Otani-san, we also watched and photographed a rare 'American' White-winged Scoter. Black Scoters, Harlequin Ducks, Great Scaup and other sea ducks abounded, and we also saw Red-throated and Pacific Loons, and Red-necked Grebe. Steller's Sea and White-tailed Eagles were still our constant companions. A boat trip out of Habomai Harbour took us around Cape Nosappu, and enabled us to

get our closest views of the likes of Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemot, Thick-billed Murre, and Crested Auklet.

Our final birding day in Hokkaido took us along the coast from Nemuro back to Kushiro. Our first port of call was Cape Kiritappu. There were more good views of seabirds from the cape itself, including another Crested Auklet. Back inland a bit, in a small wooded valley, we scoped a mass of Asian Rosy Finches, as well as a rather unexpected flock of Hawfinches. At Biwase Observation Point there were flocks of wintering Brant Geese (or Black Brant), mixed with Whooper Swans. Before going to the airport, we had time for another visit to Tancho Sanctuary, where we were treated to our biggest gathering of Red-crowned Cranes during the tour. Many of the birds were performing their famous leaping dance. A small flock of lovely white-headed nominate Long-tailed Tits also appeared on-cue, and we had our best views of Asian Rosy Finch nearby. Another flight returned us to Tokyo, and we said our goodbyes to those who were not taking part in the pelagic extension.



Steller's Sea Eagle on the Rausu pack-ice, Hokkaido (Craig Robson)

After a relatively leisurely start, those of us continuing on the extension headed out on Tokyo's fascinating railway network, to the suburbs and Kasai Rinkai Park. Being a large park, with a variety of habitats, we had no problem spending the bulk of the day racking-up an excellent bird list. Highlights were several rather elusive Brown-cheeked Rails and some much more confiding White's and Brown-headed Thrushes. The best of the rest included massive numbers of Greater Scaup, Common Pochard and Great Crested Grebes, a good number of Black-necked (or Eared) Grebes, Eastern Marsh Harrier, tame Oriental Turtle Doves, Azure-winged Magpie, Japanese Bush Warbler, Japanese White-eye (of the interesting vinous-flanked

nominate race), White-cheeked Starling, Pale Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Buff-bellied Pipit, Grey-capped Greenfinch, and Black-faced and Common Reed Buntings. We did not have too far to go from the park to the ferry terminal where, after dinner in a very nice restaurant, we boarded the Hachijo Ferry. The cabins were very plush, and we settled in for a good night's sleep as the ship headed southwards into the Pacific.

As dawn broke, we all met on deck. The ship was passing Mikura-jima, and there were large numbers of Streaked Shearwaters all around. As we plied through the waves towards Hachijo-jima, the albatrosses began to appear, with small numbers of Black-footed, and the much wanted Short-tailed, which we saw in several different plumage stages during the day. The weather was fine and bright, with a fair breeze, and the sea watching comfortable and easy from such a large and sea-worthy vessel. Arriving at Hachijo, we had a little more time to go ashore than expected. A frantic 30 minutes was spent trying to find an Izu Thrush (endemic to Islands south of Tokyo). Eventually we succeeded, but to our frustration it flew into some bushes before looping out of site. Not much else was seen on the island apart from Dusky Thrush and an unexpected Buff-bellied Pipit. The return journey to Tokyo was the most productive for seabirds. All three albatrosses were noted, including adult Short-tailed and there were a large number of Laysan's as we neared the mainland. Streaked Shearwaters were also much more abundant closer to the mainland. Approaching Miyake-jima, where we docked, a small number of Japanese Murrelets were seen in flight, as well as a couple of Brown Boobies. Three surfacing Great Sperm Whales were the only mammals, but very exciting nevertheless!

As we approached Tokyo Bay, a big red sun set for the final time on our tour and, back at our hotel, we raised a toast to a marvellous adventure.



Laysan Albatross (Craig Robson)



Flights of cranes at Arasaki (Craig Robson)



Scanning the sea near Cape Nosappu, Hokkaido (Craig Robson)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

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

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

Brant Goose (Black Brant) *Branta [bernicle] nigricans* c.150 at Biwase Observation Point, SE Hokkaido.

Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens* A single bird with the Tundra Swans.

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis* About 70 at Katano Kamo-ike.

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* A total of c.350 in many flocks in the Kaga area.

Tundra Swan (Bewick's S) *Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii* Gathering of c.800 in fields SW of Komatsu, W Honshu.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*



Whooper Swans in Hokkaido (Craig Robson)

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* Seen in several places on Kyushu.

Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* Nine at Mi-ike Lake, and five in the Kota Shrine area.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata* The best count was of c.100 on a small lake near Kaga.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

American Wigeon *Anas americana* A single male at Toden Reservoir.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* Though somewhat distant, there were c.500 at Katano Kamo-ike.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

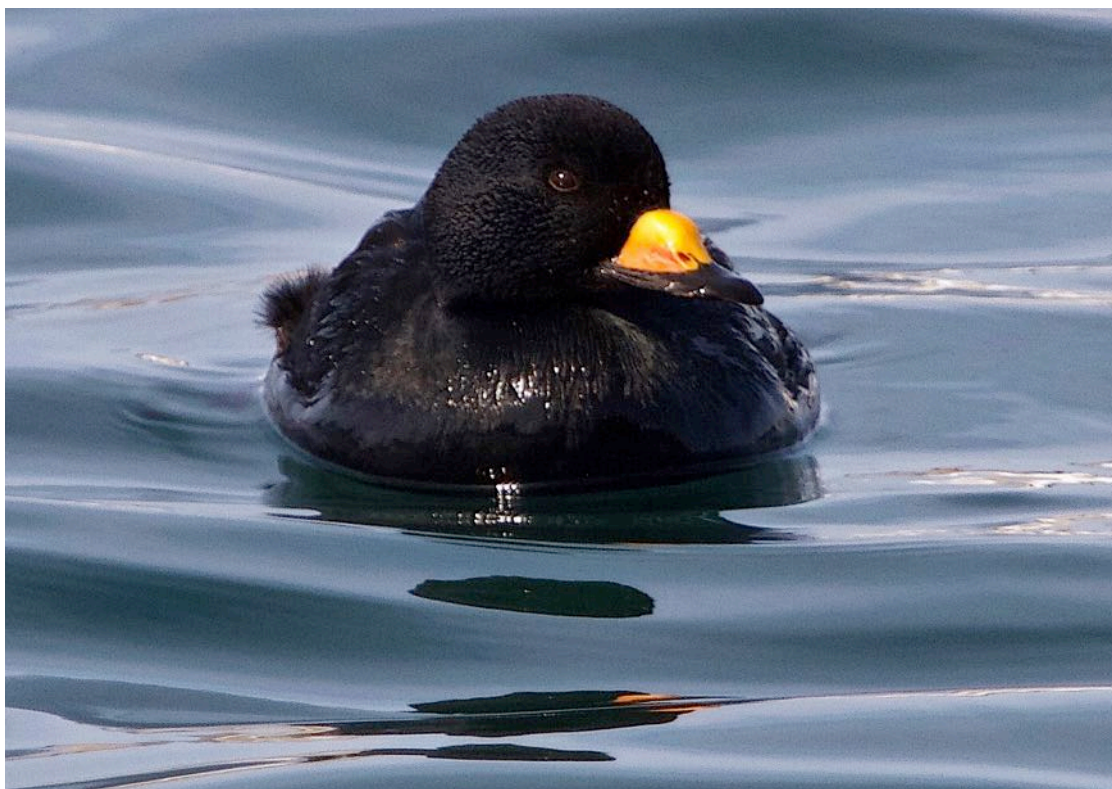
Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* <600 around the Hokkaido coast; many good views acquired.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta [deglandi] deglandi* One photographed at Hamasaki Port; identified in retrospect.



Black Scoter (Craig Robson)



'American' White-winged Scoter (Craig Robson)

White-winged Scoter (Stejneger's S) *Melanitta [deglandi] stejnegeri* <10 around the Hokkaido coasts.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* Not uncommon around the Hokkaido coasts.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Smew *Mergellus albellus* Eight at Toden Reservoir, and five at Katano Kamo-ike.

Goosander (Common Merganser) *Mergus merganser*

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*



Copper Pheasant (Craig Robson)

Copper Pheasant *Symaticus soemmerringii* Multiple sightings at Karuizawa for all of us; at least 7 individuals.

Green Pheasant *Phasianus versicolor* Three males in the snow near Kaga.

Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata* A few off the Komatsu coast and some more off the Nemuro coasts.

Black-throated Loon (B-t Diver) *Gavia arctica* At least seven seen off the Komatsu coast.

Pacific Loon (P Diver) *Gavia pacifica* Around 50 off the Komatsu coast, and a couple more in Hokkaido.

Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis* At least 60 counted during the pelagic extension.

Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes* 13 seen on our pelagic.

Short-tailed Albatross *Phoebastria albatrus* At least six of various ages seen during the pelagic extension.

Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas* Abundant at times during the pelagic trip.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* Five off the Komatsu coast, another three seen on Hokkaido.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* 70 at Kasai Rinkai Park, during the extension.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Three at Yatsushiro, Kyushu, and 13 at Arasaki.

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* Nine at Yatsushiro and seven at Arasaki.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Stewart and Alison had one at Arasaki.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*
 Great Egret *Ardea alba*
 Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*
 Pacific Reef Heron *Egretta sacra* One dark morph at Kadogawa Harbour.
 Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* Two during our pelagic trip.
 Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*
 Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile* Just one at Cape Nosappu; but nice scope views.
 Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
 Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus* 40 Komatsu coast; 6 Kadogawa; 2 Kasai Rinkai Park; 2 on pelagic.



Short-tailed Albatross (Craig Robson)

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
 Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* One distant soaring bird near Karuizawa.
 Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis* One briefly near Kota Shrine.
 Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* Just one at Arasaki.
 Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Singles scoped at Arasaki and near Kota Shrine.
 Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* Singles at Katano Kamo-ike and Kasai Rinkai Park.
 Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* Single female-type at Arasaki.
 Black Kite (Black-eared K) *Milvus [migrans] lineatus*
 White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Multiple sightings on Hokkaido. Most numerous around Rausu (60).
 Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* A fantastic sight on Hokkaido, notably 100+ around Rausu.
 Eastern Buzzard (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus*
 Brown-cheeked Rail (Eastern Water R) *Rallus indicus* Several in Kasai Rinkai Park, during the extension.
 Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* One performed nicely at Arasaki. A couple more heard there.
 Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
 Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*
 Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* At least seven birds at Arasaki.

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* Many still at Arasaki, even though some were already departing. 200+.

Red-crowned Crane (Japanese C) *Grus japonensis* Many encounters with these special birds on Hokkaido. 200+.

Common Crane *Grus grus* Two in the Crane flocks at Arasaki, plus some hybrids with the next species.

Hooded Crane *Grus monacha* The most numerous Crane at Arasaki. 4000+.



White-tailed Eagle (Craig Robson)

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* Ten of these handsome birds seen in roadside fields near Kaga.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* 50 at Yatsushiro.

Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus* Two at Toden Reservoir, and another at Kanazawa.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* Three at Arasaki.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Lesser Sand Plover (Mongolian S P) *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus* Four at Arasaki.

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* A roding bird for some of us, en route to Arasaki.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Six at Yatsushiro, and another at Kasai Rinkai Park.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Two at Yatsushiro.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* Two at Toden Reservoir.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* A single bird at Arasaki was a write-in.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Red Knot *Calidris canutus* A single bird at Yatsushiro was a write-in.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* Two on mudflats at Yatsushiro.

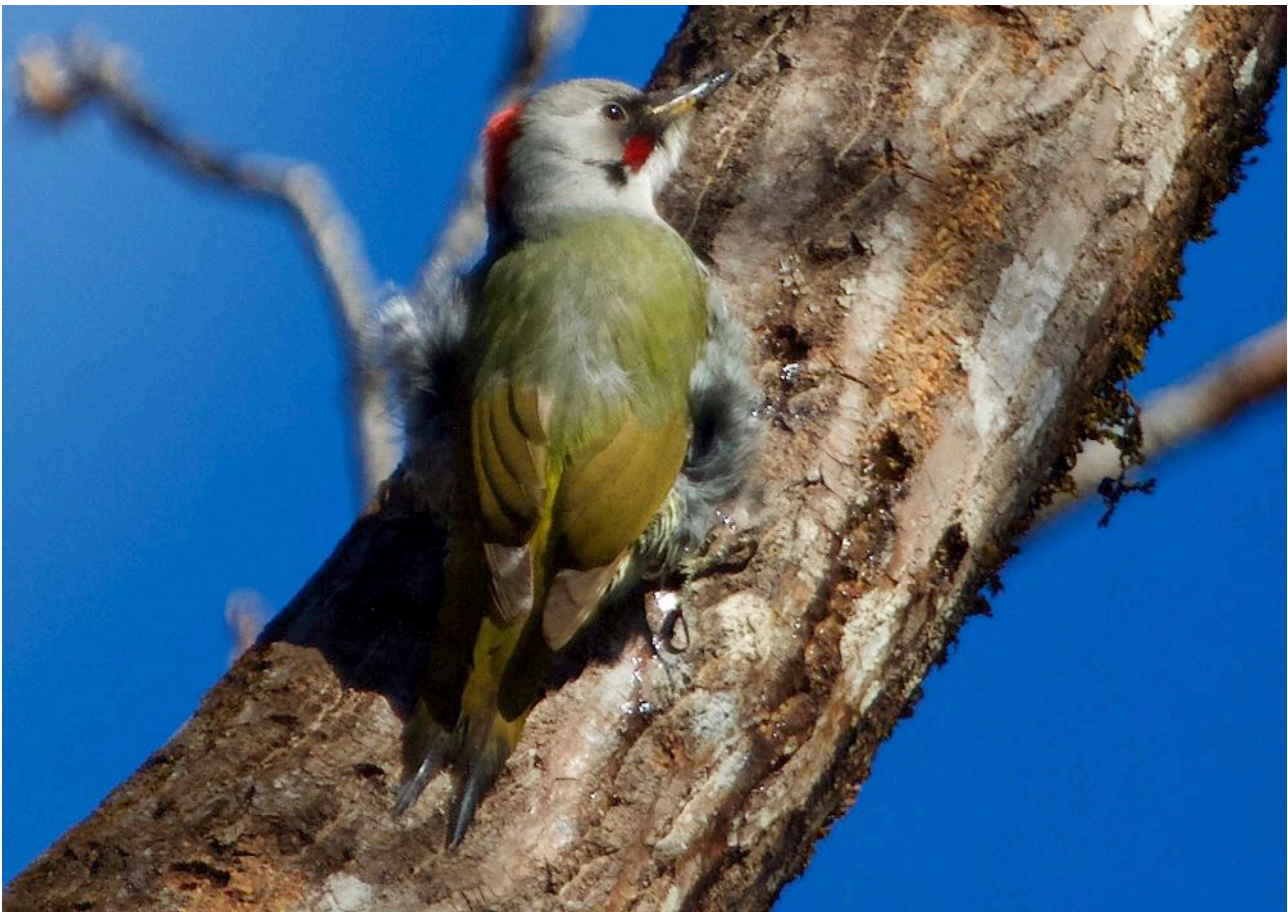
Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* c.20 during the pelagic trip.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Saunders's Gull *Chroicocephalus saundersi* 35 estimated at Yatsushiro, and some good views.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*
Mew Gull (Kamchatka G) *Larus [canus] kamtschatschensis*
Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*
Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*
Vega Gull *Larus vegae*
Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*
Heuglin's Gull *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* Ten of the yellow-legged 'taimyrensis' form at Yatsushiro.
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* A single bird at Yatsushiro. A tour write-in, and even a new bird for Otani-san.
Thick-billed Murre (Brunnich's Guillemot) *Uria lomvia* Just three in Hokkaido.
Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge* A couple seen off the Hokkaido coast.
Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba* A few seen off the Hokkaido capes, and from the Habomai mini-pelagic.
Spectacled Guillemot *Cepphus carbo* Common off Hokkaido capes, and also seen during the Habomai boat trip.
Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus* 50 from Kasa Point, near Kaga; over 100 off the Hokkaido capes.
Japanese Murrelet *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* 3 at Kadogawa Harbour; 5 off Miyake-jima during pelagic.
Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla* Over 20 of these tiny alcids along the Shiretoko coast.
Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella* 11 logged for Hokkaido, including one during the Habomai mini-pelagic.
Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata* A single flyby at Kasa Point.



Japanese Green Woodpecker (Craig Robson)

Rock Dove (introduced) (feral) *Columba livia*
Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous T D) *Streptopelia orientalis*
White-bellied Green Pigeon (Japanese G P) *Treron sieboldii* Just two flybys near Kota Shrine.
Blakiston's Fish Owl *Bubo blakistoni* A great show by an awesome individual at Rausu.
Ural Owl *Strix uralensis* Full-on views of a calling bird at Mi-ike Lake. Heard near Karuizawa (*fuscescens*).
Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*
Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos kizuki* Frequent and widespread sightings.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* Frequent Karuizawa; 1 Tancho Sanctuary, Hokkaido (*japonicus*).
White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* A superb responsive male at Mi-ike Lake (*namiyei*).
Japanese Green Woodpecker *Picus awokera* Small number around Karuizawa (*awokera*); two at Mi-ike Lake (*hori*).
Common Kestrel (Eurasian K) *Falco tinnunculus*
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Singles Kanazawa, Arasaki, Kadogawa, Cape Kiritappu. Latter potentially *pealei*.
Ryukyu Minivet *Pericrocotus tegimae* A handful in Kyushu, at Mi-ike Lake and Kota Shrine.
Bull-headed Shrike *Lanius bucephalus* Regular encounters with this smart bird on Honshu and Kyushu.



Varied Tit (Craig Robson)

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Over 20 *japonicus* around Karuizawa, and three *brandtii* on Hokkaido.
Azure-winged Magpie (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus* Small numbers at scattered Honshu sites.
Daurian Jackdaw *Coloeus dauuricus* 23 logged at Arasaki. Some smart adults.
Rook (Oriental R) *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator* Abundant at Arasaki.
Carrion Crow (Oriental C) *Corvus [corone] orientalis* Frequently seen, in some places the most numerous Crow.
Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* Common throughout.
Northern Raven *Corvus corax* Otani-san called one at Rausu.
Coal Tit *Periparus ater* Seen in the Karuizawa area and on Hokkaido (*insularis*).
Varied Tit (Japanese V T) *Sittiparus varius* Common in Honshu and Kyushu (nominate).
Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Frequent sightings in Hokkaido (*hensoni*)
Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* Seen commonly around Karuizawa (*restrictus*).
Japanese Tit (Eastern Great T) *Parus minor*
Chinese Penduline Tit *Remiz consobrinus* A flock of c.20 were eventually tracked-down in an Arasaki reedbed.
Eurasian Skylark (Japanese S) *Alauda [arvensis] japonica*
Great Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla* Rather brief views of one with the last species in fields at Arasaki.
Brown-eared Bulbul *Hypsipetes amaurotis*
Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* 40-50 seen in Kyushu.

Japanese Bush Warbler *Horornis diphone*

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Widespread; *kiusiuensis* Kyushu, *trivirgatus* Honshu, nominate Hokkaido.

Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) *Leiothrix lutea* Three at Mi-ike Lake.

Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* Occasional sightings of vinous-flanked nominate form.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* A couple heard at the Snow Monkey Park, then several seen in Hokkaido.

Eurasian Wren (Winter W) *Troglodytes troglodytes* A few around Karuizawa and one at Mi-ike Lake (*fumigatus*).



Chinese Penduline Tit near Arasaki (Craig Robson)

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Widespread. Races *roseilia* S Kyushu; *hondoensis* Honshu, and *clara* Hokkaido.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* Heard near Karuizawa and seen by one or two of us at Mi-ike Lake.

White-cheeked Starling (Grey S) *Spodiopsar cineraceus*

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* c.25 at Arasaki. Scarce in Japan.

White's Thrush *Turdus aurea* Great views of two at Kasai Rinkai Park, during the extension.

Pale Thrush *Turdus pallidus* Nearly 60 logged, with many good views; Honshu and Kyushu.

Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus* Great looks at this handsome bird at Kasai Rinkai Park. Three.

Izu Thrush (I Islands T) *Turdus celanops* One, all too briefly, on Hachijo-jima.

Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* Scattered sightings.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* A few of the *philippensis* race.

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* Best seen at Kanazawa, where we had at least five, with very close views.

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans* Notable large gatherings at Arasaki (200) and near Kota Shrine (150).

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Japanese Accentor *Prunella rubida* A small number around Karuizawa. Best seen at the Shiotsubo Onsen feeders.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

White Wagtail (Black-backed W) *Motacilla [alba] lugens* Common and widespread.

Japanese Wagtail *Motacilla grandis* Frequently encountered from the Karuizawa area to Kanazawa.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi* Prolonged views of one in fields near Arasaki.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Small numbers in wooded parts of Kyushu.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* Plenty at Arasaki, four at Kasai Rinkai Park, Tokyo, and one on Hachijo-jima.



Brown-headed Thrush in Tokyo (Craig Robson)

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* Abundant this winter on Honshu and Kyushu. Probably over 400 seen.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Small number around Karuizawa, and a gathering of c.25 at Kiritappu.

Japanese Grosbeak *Eophona personata* A handful around Karuizawa, but seen very well.

Eurasian Bullfinch (Grey-bellied B) *Pyrrhula [pyrrhula] griseiventris* A couple at Karuizawa.

Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa* Good-sized flocks at Kiritappu and near Tancho Sanctuary. c.75 in all.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Carpodacus sibiricus* Four males and a female on Honshu. A lovely bird.

Pallas's Rosefinch *Carpodacus roseus* An excellent flock of about 20 birds at Mount Asama.

Grey-capped Greenfinch (Oriental G) *Chloris sinica*

Common Redpoll *Acanthis flammea* Flocks of six and five by the roadside on Hokkaido.

Arctic Redpoll (Hoary R) *Acanthis hornemanni* Great views of one with our first flock of the last species.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* A handful on Hokkaido.

Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*

Chestnut-eared Bunting (Grey-headed B) *Emberiza fucata* Ten near Arasaki.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* 75 or so logged on Honshu and Kyushu.

Yellow-throated Bunting (Elegant B) *E. elegans* Several good looks at these fine bunting at Mi-ike and Kota Shrine.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*



Black-faced Bunting (Craig Robson)

Grey Bunting *Emberiza variabilis* Small numbers Mi-ike and near Kota Shrine. Good looks for all in the end.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* A dozen or so around Arasaki, and three at Kasai Rinkai Park.



Eagles on the pack-ice in Hokkaido (Craig Robson)

MAMMALS

Bat sp. About eight near Mi-ike lake. Potentially something like a noctule.

Japanese Squirrel *Sciurus lis* Small numbers of this tufty-eared squirrel around Karuizawa.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Quite a few sightings, particularly in Hokkaido.

Harbour Seal (Common Seal) *Phoca vitulina* Quite a few seen around the Hokkaido coasts.

Japanese Macaque *Macaca fuscata* A great experience at Jigoku-dani, including quite a few in the hot tub!

Great Sperm Whale *Physeter catodon* Three at sea during the extension.

Sika Deer *Cervus nippon* Widespread, but most common on Hokkaido.

Japanese Serow *Capricornis crispus* Great views of one near Karuizawa.



Japanese Serow and Japanese Squirrel (Craig Robson)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Brant Goose (or Black Brant) *Branta [bernicia] nigricans*

This distinctive taxon has been recognized as a full species by some authorities in the past, and the Brant (or Brent) Goose complex may be split again in the future.

Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*

The distinctive form encountered on this tour, *middendorffii*, is placed in the taiga group of Bean Geese. Some authors still lump Tundra Bean Goose *A. serrirostris* in this species using the name Bean Goose for the enlarged species.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*

White-winged (or Stejneger's) Scoter *Melanitta [deglandi] stejnegeri*

The distinctive taxon *stejnegeri* may be worthy of specific status (under the name Stejneger's) but is currently included in White-winged Scoter *M. deglandi* of North America. In addition, some authors lump both of these forms in Velvet Scoter *M. fusca*.

Green Pheasant *Phasianus versicolor*

Some authors lump this form in Ring-necked (or Common) Pheasant *P. colchicus*.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Some authors lump Eastern Osprey *P. cristatus* (Sulawesi to Australia) in this species, using the name Osprey for the enlarged species.

Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis*

The resident form in Japan, *orientalis*, is larger than mainland birds, only shows a vestigial crest, and shows a number of plumage differences. It is likely to be treated as a separate species in the future under the name Japanese Hawk Eagle *S. orientalis*.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

Northern Harrier *C. hudsonius* of North America is sometimes lumped in this species with the name Hen Harrier (in the old world) or Northern Harrier (in the new world) being used for the enlarged species.

Black (or Black-eared) Kite *Milvus [migrans] lineatus*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities.

Eastern (or Japanese) Buzzard *Buteo japonicus*

Some authors lump this species in Common Buzzard *B. buteo*.

Lesser (or Mongolian) Sand Plover *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus*

It has recently been suggested that Lesser Sand Plover (or Mongolian Plover) *C. mongolus* should be treated as two species: Lesser Sand Plover *C. atrifrons* (including *pamirensis*) and Mongolian (Sand) Plover *C. mongolus*.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

The form concerned, *pollicaris*, shows a number of plumage and structural differences compared to nominate birds and may merit specific status as Pacific Kittiwake.

Mew (or Kamchatka) Gull *Larus [canus] kamtschatschensis*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities. Mew Gull is often known as Common Gull in the Old World.

Vega (or East Siberian) Gull *Larus vegae*

Some authors lump this species in Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini* which in turn is sometimes lumped in Herring Gull *L. argentatus* or in Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus*.

Lesser Black-backed (or Heuglin's) Gull *Larus [fuscus] heuglini*

The status of the form *taimyrensis*, which we often encounter in Kyushu, is highly controversial. It is currently most often treated as a race of Heuglin's Gull *L. heuglini*, but some authors treat it as a race of Vega Gull. Other authors believe it to be an invalid taxon or a hybrid population between Heuglin's Gull and Vega Gull. The situation is still further confused by the fact that the type specimen of the nominate form *heuglini* appears to be closer to *taimyrensis*, so in future *taimyrensis* may be renamed *heuglini* and *heuglini* would then be renamed *antelius*!

Ryukyu Minivet *Pericrocotus tegimae*

Some authors lump this form in Ashy Minivet *P. divaricatus*.

(Asian) Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*

Some authors lump Iberian Magpie or Iberian Azure-winged Magpie *C. cooki* in this species using the name Azure-winged Magpie for the enlarged species.

(Oriental) Rook *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities.

Carion (or Oriental) Crow *Corvus [corone] orientalis*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus [macrorhynchus] japonensis*

Many authors lump this (and several related forms) in Southern Jungle Crow *C. macrorhynchus* using the name Large-billed Crow for the enlarged species.

(Japanese) Varied Tit *Sittiparus varius*

Many authors lump Chestnut-bellied (or Taiwan Varied) Tit *P. castaneoventris* and Owston's Varied Tit *P. owstoni* in this species using the name Varied Tit for the enlarged species.

Japanese (or Eastern Great) Tit *Parus minor*

Some authors lump this species in Northern Great (or Great) Tit using the name Great Tit for the enlarged species.

Chinese Penduline Tit *Remiz consobrinus*

Some authors lump this species in Eurasian Penduline Tit *R. pendulinus*.

Eurasian (or Japanese) Skylark *Alauda [arvensis] japonica*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities.

White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea*

Many authors lump this form (which breeds in Siberia) in Scaly Thrush *Z. dauma*. However, it is now split off as a separate species, largely due to the very different songs. The residual *Z. dauma* is then only referred to as Scaly Thrush.

Blue (or Asian) Rock Thrush *Monticola [solitarius] philippensis*

The eastern Asian forms are sometimes collectively considered as a separate species, Asian Rock Thrush *M. philippensis*.

White Wagtail (Black-backed W) *Motacilla [alba] lugens*

Some authors treat this form as a distinct species; Black-backed Wagtail *M. lugens*.

Eurasian (or Grey-bellied) Bullfinch *Pyrrhula [pyrrhula] griseiventris*

This distinctive taxon has been suggested as meriting full species status by some authorities.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

The form concerned, *personata*, shows yellow underparts and may in the future be split off as a separate species.

APPENDIX 1 – Top five birds of the tour

1st	Blakiston's Fish Owl	48 points
2nd	Red-crowned Crane	40 points
3rd	Steller's Sea Eagle	26 points
4th	Pallas's Rosefinch	15 points
5th	Copper Pheasant	14 points

APPENDIX 2 - Other fauna & flora recorded

AMPHIBIANS

Japanese Common Toad *Bufo japonicus* One by the road at Mi-ike.

BUTTERFLIES

Green-veined White *Pieris napae* A few on the wing in Kyushu.

Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow *Colias erate* A few on the wing in Kyushu.

Dark Evening Brown *Melanitis phedima* One in the forest at Mi-ike Lake.



Red-crowned Cranes (Craig Robson)