



Red-crowned Crane on Hokkaido – Bird of the trip (Hannu Jännes).

JAPAN IN WINTER

18 FEBRUARY– 4 / 6 MARCH 2019

TOUR LEADER: HANNU JÄNNES

Another fantastic winter tour to see Japan's and spectacular avifauna. This year the weather stayed mostly fine, and this, combined with comfortable transport, expert local guiding and great hospitality, made it a trip to remember. Bugling hordes of wintering cranes at Arasaki, multitudes of wintering waterfowl including hundreds of Baikal Teal and tens of the handsome Falcated Teals, 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 highlights of the main tour, whilst the extension provided 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, Hazel Grouse, Green Pheasant, Japanese and Red-faced Cormorants, Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunders's Gull, Ancient and Japanese Murrelets, Least, Crested and Rhinoceros Auklets, Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, Solitary Snipe, Ural Owl, White-backed, Black, Japanese Pygmy and Japanese Green Woodpeckers, Ryukyu Minivet, Azure-winged Magpie, Daurian Jackdaw, Chinese Penduline Tit, Dusky and Pale Thrushes, Japanese Accentor, Japanese Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Asian Rosy Finch, Japanese Waxwing, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Grey and Yellow-throated Buntings. On the post-tour extension Brown-cheeked Rail, Ruddy-breasted Crake and a brief endemic Izu Thrush were added on the list.



Dusky Thrush was a common sight on this tour (Robert Atkinson).

Once we had all assembled at Haneda airport, we made our way across town to Tokyo station by two different local trains, a task that sounded pretty challenging especially considering the approaching rush hour and the amount of luggage we had, but thanks to Otani's knowledge and experience, it all went well. From Tokyo station we boarded the Hakata Super Express bullet train to Karuizawa seeing the snow topped mountains of central Honshu, dominated by Mount Fuji, as we travelled. After leaving our luggage at the hotel and stop for food at a local 7-11, we headed out birding at Toden Lake, where we saw a number of wintering ducks, including two Baikal Teals and Smew. The surrounding area held Japanese Wagtail, one of the few Long-tailed Rosefinches of the trip. and commoner Bull-headed Shrike, Dusky Thrush, Japanese Tit, Brown-eared Bulbul, Daurian Redstart, Brambling, Hawfinch and Meadow Bunting, all species which we would see many times during the coming days. Then we visited the Yukawa River, stopping briefly on route for a fine male Green Pheasant, where we saw two Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, the only Azure-winged Magpies of the tour, the second, and last, Long-tailed Rosefinch of the trip and three Rustic Buntings.

Whilst exploring the nearby woodlands and forest roads and tracks during the next couple of days, we were particularly keen to find Copper Pheasant, which was unfortunately missed despite tweaking the itinerary to give us three mornings, instead of the scheduled two, in the key area for this cryptically-patterned bird. During our searches for the elusive pheasant we found a number of other interesting target species with Japanese Green Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian Wren, Red-flanked Bluetail, Japanese Grosbeaks, Eurasian Jays of the local race *japonicus*, two Japanese Accentors, Yellow-throated Bunting and, on the mammal front, a very confiding Red Fox, Japanese Squirrel, Sika Deer, and great views of Japanese Serows. During one afternoon we drove to 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 around the hot tub, surrounded by an array of almost equally curious foreign tourists. This attraction has become very popular in recent years and at times there are now many more tourists than monkeys!



We had great views of Falcated Ducks in the Kaga area (Robert Atkinson).

Next on the tour agenda was a drive to the Kaga area, where we visited the Katano Kamoike reservoir with its impressive birdwatching center during the afternoon. The lake was thronged with wintering wildfowl including Taiga Bean Geese (of the form *middendorffi*) and Tundra Bean Geese (of the form *serrirostris*), 300 Baikal Teals, and we also saw several Ospreys and one Northern Goshawk. Time also permitted us to scan the nearby tiny Mikuni lake, which rewarded us with fantastic views of many Falcated Ducks. In Kaga city, where we stayed for two nights, we enjoyed dinner at Coco's, a local steak house, a welcome change to all the traditional Japanese dinners on the tour.

The new morning found us in yet another Copper Pheasant forest, which proved practically devoid of any birds, before heading for the famous Cape Kasa area on the coast of the Japan Sea of Honshu for a sea watch. The weather was sunny, and although the wind was relatively strong, we enjoyed a pleasant birding session seeing good numbers of Pacific Loons with smaller numbers of Black-throated and Red-throated Loons, Red-necked Grebe, Pelagic and Japanese Cormorants, a single Black-tailed, many Vega and a few Slaty-backed Gulls, some extremely distant Rhinoceros Auklets and best of all a hundred or so Ancient Murrelets, with very reasonable scope views of swimming birds. In the afternoon we searched the fields for Tundra Swans and found 100 of them, plus a big flock of Greater White-fronted Geese, Common Reed Buntings, good views of two male Green Pheasants, and, to Otani's relief, we managed to locate two Grey-headed Lapwings. In the late afternoon we were back at Mikuni Lake for more duck watching.



Green Pheasant (Robert Atkinson).



White-naped Crane is one of the most elegant of all the cranes (Hannu Jännes).

The following morning we flew from Komatsu to Fukuoka situated at the northern end of Kyushu from where we headed off down the highway southwards to Yatsushiro, on the Kuma River, arriving there in the afternoon. Our first taste of intertidal habitat was not very rewarding, possibly because of the unfavourable tide, but we managed great views of Vega, and the Heuglin's form of Lesser Black-backed Gulls in perfect light, plus a single Black-faced Spoonbill and good numbers of wintering ducks. As there was no sign of the hoped for Saunders's Gull at this spot, Otani-san reached for his mobile phone, and soon we found ourselves at a different site, where around 50 of these small, graceful gulls were seen. Other birds encountered during the afternoon, included Common Shelducks, a few hundred Dunlin, many Common Greenshank, Blue Rock Thrush and the trip's only Oriental Magpie, which is introduced in Japan. Later we continued southwards towards Arasaki, reaching our accommodation, set in the heart of the 'cranes resting area', at dusk. After Otani-san gave us a tour of the traditional family-run minshuku and carefully explained the all-important slipper, and other, rules, before we enjoyed another traditional Japanese banquet, this time with vases of sake.

The fallow rice paddies around Arasaki are the site of one of the largest winter gatherings of cranes in all Asia, making it for one of the world's top birding spectacles, and obviously we began the next day among thousands of cranes, mostly Hooded, but with a good number of the stately White-naped scattered amongst them. We were also able to pick out a handful of Sandhill and Common Cranes as they all gathered in the dawn chill to feed on the grain and frozen fish put out for them. Large numbers of 'Oriental' Rooks were gathering on the telephone wires and fields and we also managed to get views of the much wanted Daurian Jackdaw including good looks at the attractive black and white adults. The various reed-fringed pools, inlets and waterways, and a range of agricultural land in the immediate Arasaki area harboured an interesting selection of species. Chinese Penduline Tit was very much appreciated once we eventually tracked-down a flock of about 20 birds and we also saw Northern Lapwings, Eastern Marsh Harrier, Common Starlings, a few hundred Russet Sparrows, Eurasian (or Japanese) Skylarks, Buff-bellied Pipits and Chestnut-eared, Black-faced and Common Reed Buntings during the morning. The afternoon was spent in the Kogawa forest area, where the river and reservoir held around twenty Mandarin Ducks among other more common ducks, Northern Goshawk, two much appreciated Long-billed Plovers, thirty or so White-bellied Green Pigeon, our



Thousands of Hooded Cranes winter in Arasaki (Hannu Jännes).

first Common and Crested Kingfishers, handful of Ryukyu Minivets, two Brown Dippers and Pale Thrush. There were also quite a few Warbling White-eyes around (the widespread Japanese White-eye is now split into this species and Hume's White-eye, which occurs in mainland China and Taiwan). Back in Arasaki in the evening, we searched several sites for the Ruddy-breasted Crake, but only managed to hear its call.



Small numbers of Sandhill Cranes visit Arasaki every winter (Robert Atkinson).



Ryukyu Minivet at Mi-ike (Robert Atkinson).

After a photo session with 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 had a very pleasant birding session at a forest area by the lake seeing Japanese Pygmy, White-backed and Japanese Green Woodpeckers, very showy Ryukyu Minivets, Long-tailed Tits, the introduced Red-billed Leiothrix, Eurasian Nuthatch, Olive-backed Pipit, Yellow-throated Bunting and our first, unfortunately very skittish, Grey Bunting.



Varied Tit (Robert Atkinson).



Japanese Murrelet, "Sea Sparrow", in the Kadogawa Harbour (Robert Atkinson).

Next day saw an early start in order to reach the east coast of Kyushu in good time, and we began birding there in an area of fields and wooded copses near the Kota Shrine. Here we had a single White-bellied Green Pigeon, a Japanese Bush Warbler showing quite well, two rather brief Asian Stubtails for some, our second Chestnut-eared Bunting and several Rustic Buntings. We then headed up the coast to Kadogawa Harbour, where, after a picnic lunch, we set off in our charter-boat across the harbour in search of Japanese Murrelet, or 'Sea Sparrow' as they are called in Japanese. We soon spotted them, seven in total, swimming in the harbour, and the skipper skillfully maneuvered around them for superb views and lots of photos. Here we also saw Great Crested Grebes, a few Japanese Cormorants, plus two new species for the trip with Black-necked Grebe and Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

Next morning we still had some time to work on the bunting at Mi-ike, and we managed to dig out two birds, including a nice male, with pretty decent views for many as it suddenly decided to perch up right up in front of us for a while! Later in the day we took a flight from Kagoshima to Tokyo and then a connecting flight to Kushiro on the northern island of Hokkaido for an overnight stay nearby. The snowy landscape with temperatures well below zero offered quite a contrast to the much warmer climate of Kyushu.



Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (Kuan Ng).



Ural Owl in Hokkaido (Robert Atkinson).

Dawn on our first full day in Hokkaido saw the temperature at minus ten centigrade, the lowest reading of the tour, I think, but perhaps this wasn't too bad when compared with the much colder temperatures (well below minus twenty centigrade) birders had experienced just a short time before. We spent our first half day in the Tsurui area, with a first stop at a site where Red-crowned Cranes can be viewed roosting along a misty river. The cranes were present, but so too were perhaps fifty photographers lined up on the bridge across the river, taking the same pictures already taken by hundreds of visiting photographers before them, but the spot is exceptionally scenic. In addition we also saw a Great Grey Shrike, apparently a difficult bird to get in Hokkaido. Later we visited a well-known stake out for a pair of Ural Owls, and obtained great views of the male bird in the snowy forest. Then we moved on to Tancho (or Ito) Sanctuary, a feeding station for the cranes. Again this is a very touristy spot, but we had a very enjoyable time with the tens of very tame cranes that came to eat the grain put out for them, and, between feeds performing their spectacular courtship dances. It is interesting to note that the Red-crowned Crane was thought to have been eradicated in Hokkaido by 1910 due to indiscriminate hunting. However, in 1924, twenty birds were discovered breeding in the Kushiro marsh, and the joint conservation program, including supplementary winter feeding, by local people and the government, has been a great success. The resident population of Red-crowned Cranes in Hokkaido now stands at around 1000 individuals. Later we visited the very tame Whooper Swans at Lake Kussharo, and birded a nearby forest, where we saw Great Spotted, White-backed and Grey-headed (a write-in) Woodpeckers, Marsh Tits, Long-tailed Tits of the rather different nominate subspecies, Eurasian Nuthatch of the subspecies *clara* and, for some of us, Eurasian Bullfinch (of the subspecies *griseiventris*). Leaving the Kushiro area behind, we headed across country to the east coast of Hokkaido stopping on route at the impressive Kawayu Volcano area, where we also had our lunch. We then continued up the coast to Rausu with its many spectacular birds. After settling into our modest accommodation, we had time for birding before dusk and saw our first Steller's Sea Eagles, Black Scoters, Pelagic Cormorants and Harlequin Ducks nearby. After a hearty dinner, we just had to sit and wait in the warmth of our cozy accommodation for the Blakiston's Fish Owl to appear and pick-up the fish put out for it in a small stream just outside the windows of our Minshuku, which it did and posed very well for us. It returned once or twice more during the night, to perform for an awe-struck and thrilled audience! What a magical bird and experience.



Blakiston's Fish Owl offered great views in Rausu (Kuan Ng).



We had great views of Black Scoter on Hokkaido (Robert Atkinson).



We encountered tens of Steller's Sea Eagles on the edge of the pack-ice at Rausu (Robert Atkinson).

The following morning, in perfect calm and sunny weather, we boarded one of the several tourist boats in the harbour of Rausu, and sailed the short distance to the edge of the pack-ice that stretched as far as the eye could see, which was dotted with the magnificent Steller's Sea and White-tailed Eagles. The crew tossed fish onto the ice, and in came the eagles!! We enjoyed a wonderful few hours as these amazing birds provided an incredible spectacle, not to mention some fantastic photo-opportunities. There were also hordes of gulls flocking around our boat, and amongst the many Slaty-backed Gulls we found Glaucous-winged and Glaucous Gulls, both new species for us, and, in the harbor, we watched Mew Gulls, also a new bird for the list. Whilst we were out on the sea enjoying life ourselves hard-working Otani-san had been searching for new birds for us, and as soon as we were back in the harbour, he took us to see a flock of beautiful Asian Rosy Finches, and two excellent Solitary Snipe, by a nearby river. We said farewell to Rausu and followed the coast down to the south-east, as we journeyed to Nemuro. We called-in at the Notsuke Peninsula for a sea watch seeing one Pigeon, and ten Spectacled, Guillemots, Greater Scaup and Stejneger's Scoters plus many Black Scoters, and Long-tailed Ducks and Red-breasted Mergansers. We also saw a very photogenic Red Fox and a number of Sika Deer. At our comfortable hotel in Nemuro, we enjoyed a veritable feast, which included Hanasaki Crab.

The day based at Nemuro was spent exploring Cape Nosappu, where the weather during the morning was pretty miserable with strong winds and even a little snow, but fortunately the lighthouse and bird hide offered a degree of shelter during our sea watch which produced distant Brant Geese, a few Pacific and Red-throated Loons, both species of guillemot, a single Crested Auklet for some, and couple of Ancient Murrelets. Another coastal view point gave us very distant views of Rock Sandpipers on an off-shore island. As the original plan to take a boat trip off the coast at Ochiisi in the afternoon was cancelled due to high seas, we spent quite a bit of time at Hanasaki harbour, which, although it didn't produce any new birds, gave us great views and photo opportunities for Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Northern Pintail, Greater Scaup, Black Scoter and gulls. In the evening we went back to Cape Nemuro, which was a good move as we managed to locate, thanks to the sharp eyes of Robert and Barb, two Red-faced Cormorants that come to roost with Pelagic Cormorants.

Next morning saw some of the group returned to the lighthouse at Nosappu for an additional sea watch, which finally provided decent views of a Rhinoceros Auklet, while the rest of the group birded the Nemuro area with Otani-san. In the morning we had the good news that the boat trip would run, and after lunch we



Least Auklets at sea (Kuan Ng).

commenced our pelagic adventure off Ochiisi harbor. The boat took us out into the open sea, before rounding islands, that are the breeding grounds for numerous alcids during the summer months. Despite the windy conditions and rough seas, we had great time on the boat seeing Thick-billed and Common Murres, Pigeon and Spectacled Guillemots, and, most interestingly, huge flocks of Crested Auklets and the much hoped for Least Auklets. In addition, there was a group of Sea Otters on the shore of one of the islands. In the evening we drove to the Nakashibetsu area for an overnight at a rather upmarket Yoroushi Onsen. This onsen is another stake-out for the Blakiston's Fish Owl, which we saw well again just outside the windows of the lounge.



Spectacled Guillemot and Common Murre (or Common Guillemot) off Ochiisi harbor (Hannu Jännes).



Hazel Grouse, a write-in, was a nice surprise near Lake Kusshiro (Robert Atkinson).

The following morning we birded the forested surroundings of our hotel, where we encountered a Pine Grosbeak, unfortunately only seen by Otani and Kuan, our first Eurasian Treecreepers and a number of other forest species, before we had to begin our journey back to Kushiro. On the way we stopped again at lake Kusshiro, where a walk through the forest produced protracted views of a female Black Woodpecker, and a very showy male Hazel Grouse, which was a write-in! As we still had quite a bit of time on our hands before our flight to Tokyo, we revisited the crane feeding station at Tancho Sanctuary, where the sunny weather offered better photo opportunities than on our first visit. I had been following a Facebook group about Japanese birds and birding during the tour and noticed that someone had seen Japanese Waxwings just outside Kushiro airport the previous day. Obviously we had to try our luck with this highly desirable species and make sure that we have enough time to check the area before sun set. As soon as we got to the site, opposite the car rental offices, we noticed a flock of five waxwings eating berries from a few small trees just next to the road and spent a good period of time admiring these lovely birds. Then it was time to go to the airport and say goodbye to lovely Hokkaido and its amazing birds, which to me was the absolute highlight of the whole trip. On our return to Tokyo we said our goodbyes to those who were not taking part in the pelagic extension.



Female Black Woodpecker near Lake Kusshiro (Robert Atkinson).



Brown-cheeked Rail at Kasai Rinkai Park in Tokyo (Robert Atkinson).

After repositioning our luggage to another hotel at the Haneda airport we 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 much of the day there. The best birds here were the rather elusive Brown-cheeked Rail and Ruddy-breasted Crane, and we also saw a couple of thousand Great Crested Grebes, Japanese Bush Warblers, Pale and Brown-headed Thrush (for Otani only) and Black-faced and Common Reed Buntings. In the late afternoon we travelled back to our hotel to pick up gear needed for the last leg of the tour, and also had a meal and some precocious time to rest. After dinner we headed to the ferry terminal and boarded the ferry bound for the island of Hachijo. The cabins were comfortable, and we settled in for a good night's sleep as the ship headed southwards into the Pacific.



Black-faced Bunting of the subspecies personata (Robert Atkinson).



Adult Short-tailed Albatross and Streaked Shearwater (Robert Atkinson).

As dawn broke, we all met on deck. The ship was passing Mikura-jima, and there were large numbers of Streaked Shearwaters all around the vessel. As we plied through the waves towards Hachijo-jima 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 very short time ashore. A frantic 18 minutes was spent trying to find an Izu Thrush (endemic to Islands south of Tokyo) and eventually some of us succeeded in getting tickable views. The return journey to Tokyo was the most productive for seabirds. All three albatrosses Black-footed, Laysan and adult Short-tailed were noted in relatively good numbers, and Streaked Shearwaters were around in thousands. Unfortunately, one of our main target species, Tristram's Storm Petrel, was only seen by Otani-san before it disappeared for good. Back in Tokyo it was time to say our goodbyes, and to thank everyone for their great company, which, together with all the excellent birds and exciting places, made this such a memorable trip.

BIRDS OF THE TRIP' WINNERS - Main Tour:

- 1st: Red-crowned Crane
- 2nd: Steller's Sea Eagle
- 3rd: Blakiston's Fish Owl
- 4th: White-naped Crane
- 5th: Japanese Waxwing & Hazel Grouse

BIRDS OF THE TRIP' WINNERS - Extension:

- 1st: Short-tailed Albatross



Steller's Sea Eagle at Rausu (Hannu Jännes).

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF BIRD SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Number of species seen on tour: 175

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).

Brant Goose (Black Brant) ◊ *Branta [bernicla] nigricans* Four at Cape Nosappu on Hokkaido.

Taiga Bean Goose ◊ *Anser fabalis* At least thirty birds at Katano Kamo-ike [*middendorffii*].

Tundra Bean Goose ◊ *Anser serrirostris* Just 13 with the above at Katano Kamo-ike [*serrirostris*].

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* Good numbers and a good show by 500 in the Kaga area.

Tundra Swan ◊ (Bewick's S) *Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii* Hundred near Komatsu were good to see.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Regularly encountered on Hokkaido.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* 50 seen at Yatsushiro on the Kuma River.

Mandarin Duck ◊ *Aix galericulata* Twenty at Toden Lake, and one at Mi-ike.

Baikal Teal *Anas Formosa* There were c.300 at Katano Kamo-ike, two at Toden Lake and one at Mikuni Lake.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

Falcated Duck ◊ *Anas falcata* The best count was of c.100 on Mikuni Lake near Kaga.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*



Mandarin Ducks were seen at two different lakes (Robert Atkinson).

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila* Fairly common on Hokkaido.

Harlequin Duck ♦ *Histrionicus histrionicus* Noted daily around the Hokkaido coast; with many good views.

Stejneger's Scoter ♦ *Melanitta stejnegeri* Small numbers around the Hokkaido coasts.

Black Scoter ♦ *Melanitta americana* Common around the Hokkaido coasts.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* Small numbers around the Hokkaido coasts.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* Small numbers around the Hokkaido coasts.

Smew ♦ *Mergellus albellus* 15 at Toden Reservoir, and around 30 in the Kaga area.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser* Widespread in small numbers.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Widespread in small numbers on Hokkaido.

Hazel Grouse ♦ *Tetrastes bonasia* Great views of a male at Lake Kusshiro, and another bird was heard there too.

Green Pheasant ♦ *Phasianus versicolor* One male on route to the Yukawa River, and two males near Kaga.

Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata* Five off Cape Kasa and one more off the Nemuro coast.

Black-throated Loon ♦ (B-t Diver) *Gavia arctica* Five off Cape Kasa coast.

Pacific Loon ♦ (P Diver) *Gavia pacifica* Around 20 off Cape Kasa, and a couple more in Hokkaido.

Laysan Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria immutabilis* At least 80 counted during the pelagic extension.

Black-footed Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria nigripes* 40 seen on pelagic extension.

Short-tailed Albatross ♦ *Phoebastria albatrus* At least 20 seen during the pelagic extension.

Tristram's Storm Petrel ♦ *Oceanodroma tristrami* (NL) One for Otani during the pelagic extension.

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

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* Two off Cape Kasa, another ten seen on Hokkaido.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* Eight at Kadogawa harbour and one at Kasai Rinkai Park.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* A few at Arasaki.

Black-faced Spoonbill ♦ *Platalea minor* One at Yatsushiro, Kyushu and one 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*



Red-faced Cormorants at Cape Nosappu (Robert Atkinson).

Pelagic Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Red-faced Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax urile* Two at Cape Nosappu.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Japanese Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax capillatus* 30 at Cape Kasa, 20 at Kadogawa and 10 on the extension.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* Scattered records of small numbers.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Singles at Katano Kamo-ike and Kogawa Forest.

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* Singles at Arasaki and Kasai Rinkai Park.

Black Kite (Black-eared K) *Milvus [migrans] lineatus* Widespread, noted almost daily.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Common on Hokkaido. Most numerous around Rausu (50).

Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* A fantastic sight on Hokkaido, 250 around Rausu.

Eastern Buzzard ♦ (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus* Widespread, noted on 12 days.

Brown-cheeked Rail ♦ (Eastern Water R) *Rallus indicus* One in Kasai Rinkai Park, during the extension.

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* One in Kasai Rinkai Park. A couple more heard at Arasaki.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Only a few were noted, at Arasaki and Kasai Rinkai Park.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* At least eight birds at Arasaki.

White-naped Crane ♦ *Grus vipio* Around 400 still at Arasaki, even though some had already departed.

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

Common Crane *Grus grus* At least three in the Crane flocks at Arasaki.

Hooded Crane ♦ *Grus monacha* The most numerous crane at Arasaki, we estimated 3000.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Small numbers at Arasaki.

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

Long-billed Plover ♦ *Charadrius placidus* Two at Toden Reservoir.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina* 200 at Yatsushiro.

Rock Sandpiper ♦ *Calidris ptilocnemis* Ten very distant birds on an off-shore island at Cape Nosappu.

Solitary Snipe ♦ *Gallinago solitaria* Two at Rausu.



Glaucous-winged Gull at Rausu (Hannu Jännes).

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* Handful of birds at Arasaki.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* A few noted.
Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* A few at Yatsushiro and Arasaki.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* 25 at Yatsushiro.
Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla* Just one during the pelagic trip.
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Saunders's Gull ♦ *Chroicocephalus saundersi* 50 at Yatsushiro, with some good views.
Black-tailed Gull ♦ *Larus crassirostris*
Mew Gull ♦ (Kamchatka G) *Larus [canus] kamtschatschensis* Small numbers noted on Hokkaido.
Glaucous-winged Gull ♦ *Larus glaucescens* Small numbers noted on Hokkaido.
Glaucous Gull ♦ *Larus hyperboreus* Small numbers noted on Hokkaido.
Vega Gull *Larus vegae* Fairly common and widespread.
Slaty-backed Gull ♦ *Larus schistisagus* Hundreds on Hokkaido, a few elsewhere.
Heuglin's Gull ♦ *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* Five of the yellow-legged 'taimyrensis' form at Yatsushiro.



Slaty-backed Gull (Hannu Jännes).



Great Spotted Woodpecker (Kuan Ng).

Thick-billed Murre (Brunnich's Guillemot) *Uria lomvia* One from the boat Hokkaido.

Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge* A couple seen off the Hokkaido coast.

Pigeon Guillemot ♦ ***Cepphus columba*** Ten or so off the Hokkaido capes, and from the mini-pelagic.

Spectacled Guillemot ♦ ***Cepphus carbo*** Common off Hokkaido capes, and during the mini-pelagic.

Ancient Murrelet ♦ ***Synthliboramphus antiquus*** 100 from Cape Kasa, near Kaga; and few at Nosappu in Hokkaido.

Japanese Murrelet ♦ ***Synthliboramphus wumizusume*** Seven at Kadogawa Harbour; 30 at sea during the extension.

Least Auklet ♦ ***Aethia pusilla*** 200 of these tiny alcids from the boat on the Hanasaki mini-pelagic in Hokkaido.

Crested Auklet ♦ ***Aethia cristatella*** 2000 on the Hanasaki mini-pelagic and one at Cape Nosappu in Hokkaido.

Rhinoceros Auklet ♦ ***Cerorhinca monocerata*** 16 at Cape Kasa, two at Cape Nosappu, and six on the extension.

Rock Dove (introduced) (feral) *Columba livia*

Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous T D) *Streptopelia orientalis* Noted almost daily, except on Hokkaido.

White-bellied Green Pigeon ♦ **(Japanese G P) *Treron sieboldii*** 30 at Kogawa, one near Kota and one at Mi-ike.

Blakiston's Fish Owl ♦ ***Bubo blakistoni*** A great show at Rausu and another, equally showy bird, at Yoroushi.

Ural Owl ♦ ***Strix uralensis*** Great views of a single bird in Hokkaido.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* One at Kogawa forest and two at Yoroushi.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker ♦ ***Dendrocopos kizuki*** Small numbers noted on seven days.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* A few at Karuizawa; and ten in Hokkaido (*japonicus*).

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* Ssp *namiyei* at Karuizawa and Mi-ike, *subcirris* in Hokkaido.

Japanese Green Woodpecker ♦ ***Picus awokera*** Small number at Karuizawa (*awokera*); two at Mi-ike Lake (*horii*).

Common Kestrel (Eurasian K) *Falco tinnunculus* A handful of birds from Arasaki to Kota.

Merlin *Falco columbarius* One at Cape Nosappu, Hokkaido.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* Singles at Karuizawa, Cape Nosappu and Kasai Rinkai Park.

Ryukyu Minivet ♦ ***Pericrocotus tegimae*** 25 or so, with great views, spread over four days in Kyushu.

Bull-headed Shrike ♦ ***Lanius bucephalus*** Regular encounters with this smart bird on Honshu and Kyushu.

Great Grey Shrike ♦ ***Lanius excubitor*** One in the Tsurui area in Hokkaido.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Widespread: *japonicus* on Honshu, *hiugaensis* in Kyushu and *brandtii* in Hokkaido

Azure-winged Magpie ♦ **(Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus*** A few near Karuizawa.



The colourful Red-billed Leiothrix is introduced in Japan (Robert Atkinson).

- Oriental Magpie (introduced) *Pica serica*** One at Yatshushiro.
- Daurian Jackdaw** ♦ *Coloeus dauuricus* 11 logged at Arasaki. Some smart adults.
- Rook** ♦ (Oriental R) *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator* Abundant at Arasaki, and a big flock on the way to Kaga.
- Carrion Crow** ♦ (Oriental C) *Corvus [corone] orientalis* Frequently seen, sometimes in big numbers.
- Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos* Common throughout.
- Japanese Waxwing** ♦ *Bombycilla japonica* A flock of five at Kushiro airport on our last afternoon in Hokkaido.
- 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 and on Hokkaido (*restrictus*).
- Japanese Tit (Eastern Great T)** *Parus minor* Common and widespread.
- Chinese Penduline Tit** ♦ *Remiz consobrinus* c.20 were noted on both days in Arasaki.
- Eurasian Skylark** ♦ (Japanese S) *Alauda [arvensis] japonica* Rather common in Arasaki.
- Brown-eared Bulbul** ♦ *Hypsipetes amaurotis* Common and widespread. Noted almost daily.
- Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica* Two in the Kaga area in Honshu and 50 seen in Kyushu.
- Japanese Bush Warbler** ♦ *Horornis diphone*
- Asian Stubtail** ♦ *Urosphena squameiceps* Two at Kota, and two more were heard at Mi-ike.
- Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus* Widespread; *kiusiuensis* Kyushu, *trivirgatus* Honshu, nominate Hokkaido.
- Chinese Hwamei (introduced)** *Garrulax canorus* One in the Karuizawa area.
- Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced)** *Leiothrix lutea* Several at Mi-ike Lake.
- Warbling White-eye** *Zosterops japonicus* Small numbers noted on six days. Vinous-flanked nominate form.
- Eurasian Wren (Winter W)** *Troglodytes troglodytes* Widespread from Honshu to Hokkaido (*fumigatus*).
- Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* Widespread: *roseilia* S Kyushu; *hondoensis* Honshu, and *clara* Hokkaido.
- Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris* Four at Yoroushi on Hokkaido (*daurica*).
- White-cheeked Starling (Grey S)** *Spodiopsar cineraceus* Common and widespread, but not seen on Hokkaido.
- Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* c.25 at Arasaki. Scarce in Japan.
- Pale Thrush** ♦ *Turdus pallidus* 30 logged, in Honshu and Kyushu.
- Brown-headed Thrush** ♦ *Turdus chrysolaus* A few were sighted by some of us.
- Izu Thrush** ♦ (I Islands T) *Turdus celaenops* One, all too briefly, on Hachijo-jima.



A small flock of Japanese Waxwings was found just outside the airport in Hokkaido (Robert Atkinson).

- Dusky Thrush** ♦ *Turdus eunomus* Widespread, noted almost daily in small numbers.
- Red-flanked Bluetail** *Tarsiger cyanurus* Scattered sightings.
- Daurian Redstart** *Phoenicurus aureus* Small numbers noted on seven days.
- Blue Rock Thrush** *Monticola solitarius* Six of the *philippensis* race.
- Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii* Two at the Kogawa forest, three at Rausu and one at Yoroushi.
- Russet Sparrow** *Passer rutilans* A few at Arasaki and near Mi-ike, and 200 near Kota Shrine.
- Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus*
- Japanese Accentor** ♦ *Prunella rubida* Only two at Karuizawa.
- Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*
- White Wagtail** ♦ (Black-backed W) *Motacilla [alba] lugens* Common and widespread.
- Japanese Wagtail** ♦ *Motacilla grandis* Small numbers encountered on four days.
- Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* A few noted in wooded parts of Kyushu.
- Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* (H) Three heard at Arasaki.
- Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens* Small numbers at Arasaki.
- Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* Abundant this winter, especially around Karuizawa.
- Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Common at Karuizawa and Hokkaido. Also two at Kasai Rinkai
- Japanese Grosbeak** ♦ *Eophona personata* Good numbers at Karuizawa, and also noted at Koguwa and Mi-ike.
- Eurasian Bullfinch** ♦ (Grey-bellied B) *Pyrrhula [pyrrhula] griseiventris* A handful of birds on Hokkaido.
- Asian Rosy Finch** ♦ *Leucosticte arctoa* Good-sized flock at Rausu. Brilliant views of this excellent bird.
- Long-tailed Rosefinch** ♦ *Carpodacus sibiricus* Two birds, one at Toden Lake and another one in Karuizawa.
- Pine Grosbeak** ♦ *Pinicola enucleator* One male for Otani-san and Kuan at Yoroushi. A write-in.
- Grey-capped Greenfinch** (Oriental G) *Chloris sinica* Common and widespread.
- Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus* Small numbers seen.
- Meadow Bunting** ♦ *Emberiza cioides* Widespread.
- Chestnut-eared Bunting** ♦ (Grey-headed B) *Emberiza fucata* Two seen.
- Rustic Bunting** ♦ *Emberiza rustica* 20 or so logged on Honshu and Kyushu.
- Yellow-throated Bunting** ♦ (Elegant B) *E. elegans* Small numbers at Karuizawa and around Mi-ike Lake.



Snow Monkeys (Japanese Macaque) at Jigoku-dani (Robert Atkinson).

Black-faced Bunting ♦ *Emberiza spodocephala* Small numbers noted on three days.

Grey Bunting ♦ *Emberiza variabilis* Small numbers at Mi-ike and near Kota Shrine. A tricky bird to see well.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Noted at Kaga, around Arasaki, and at Kasai Rinkai Park.



Confiding Japanese Serows were seen at Karuizawa Robert Atkinson).



Red Fox on Hokkaido (Hannu Jännes).

MAMMALS

Japanese Macaque *Macaca fuscata* A great show at Jigoku-dani.

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

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris* One at Lake Kusshiro on Hokkaido.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* Several sightings in Hokkaido and a few around Karuizawa.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* Nice group of five on our mini-pelagic off Ochiishi harbour in Hokkaido.

Siberian Weasel *Mustela sibirica* (NL) One at Arasaki.

Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus* One swam past Cape Nosappu in Hokkaido.

Harbour Seal (Common Seal) *Phoca vitulina* 15 or so around the Hokkaido coasts.

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa* Two at Karuizawa and two in the Kaga area.

Whale sp One from the ferry on the extension.

Sika Deer *Cervus nippon* Noted in Karuizawa and on Hokkaido, where locally numerous.

Japanese Serow *Capricornis crispus* A total of six in the Karuizawa area with great views!