

JAPAN IN WINTER TOUR REPORT 2023

19 February - 5 / 7 March 2023

by Dave Farrow

This year's Japan in Winter tour was a welcome return to this magical country, once again a wonderful journey around the Japanese archipelago. The avian spectacles are breath-taking and we were thrilled by Blakiston's Fish Owls and sunbathing Ural Owls, Red-crowned, White-naped, and Hooded Cranes, the staggering sight of hundreds of White-tailed and Steller's Sea Eagles at close range, a group of five Copper Pheasants, numerous Japanese Murrelets, Japanese Waxwings, and a flock of Lesser White-fronted Geese. On our successful extension we saw unusually large numbers of Short-tailed, Laysan and Black-footed Albatross, plus Sperm and Humpback Whales.

We gathered at Haneda airport and then travelled across Tokyo to board our Shinkansen (the famous 'bullet train') to Karuizawa, a journey that passed in a flash and soon we found ourselves in the atypically mild and snow-free mountains. Despite a day of wet weather, we began strongly with a flock of Japanese Waxwings, close to our hotel, where a flurry of activity involved Varied, Willow and Japanese Tits all coming to the feeders there, plus dapper Eurasian Nuthatch and Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, and the endemic Japanese Squirrel. The forest itself was less lively, but we found Brown Dipper and Japanese Grosbeaks, plus our first Pale Thrush.

We drove slowly down a winding forest road in the sub-zero dawn, finding several Sika Deer, White-backed Woodpecker, and a flock of Bramblings. Later we walked in the forest under blue skies and sunshine, and found two splendid Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch, a Red-flanked Bluetail, Brown-eared Bulbuls and Long-tailed Tits, and a smart pair of Falcated Duck on a forest pool. Straying further, we visited a lake where several Smew joined Goosanders, plus on the nearby river we saw two Long-billed Plovers and our first Oriental Crows, Bull-headed Shrikes, Japanese and Black-backed Wagtails. A short stop in fields on the way home produced a big flock of Rustic Buntings together with a few Meadow Buntings, plus several Dusky Thrushes.

Another early run along a mountain road produced a brief sighting of a Copper Pheasant for one of our number, however it could not be relocated. Another White-backed Woodpecker was seen well, as was a bull Japanese Serow standing on a roadside slope. Continuing our search of the forests we found a fine Japanese Accentor, then checking several sites in the foothills we saw Mountain Hawk Eagle, a quartet of shy Mandarin Ducks, smart Daurian Redstarts and dapper Varied Tits. A Japanese Green Woodpecker showed well at the roadside, yet persistent searching for Copper Pheasant failed to produce. A second Japanese Serow appeared at the roadside and was very confiding.

Early morning around our hotel produced a small flock of Japanese Waxwings, and a Hawfinch on the feeders. We hit the road northwards, and near to Nagano we turned off to the Monkey Park at Jigokudani. On my previous visit there had been no snow, and as there was a lack of snow

around Karuizawa we feared that the Snow Monkeys would be just – monkeys, so it was very pleasing to find there had been a heavy snowfall the previous day and the whole valley was a winter wonderland with thick snow coating the Japanese Cedars. Walking up to the hot spring was idyllic, and the Japanese Macaques did not disappoint as they sat enjoying the hot tub, although one wouldn't have guessed it from their expressions! The only bird of note was a single Alpine Accentor that eluded most of us, probably because it was too tame and we just walked past it!

As we paused to collect some lunch, White-cheeked Starlings fed in some berry-bearing trees, where a couple of Japanese Waxwings also appeared briefly. A long drive along the north coast followed, passing through at least 47 tunnels today, and we reached the Kamo-ike Sanctuary in time for some late afternoon birding. We had a big surprise to look out and see a flock of 13 Lesser White-fronted Geese just in front of the observatory, a rare sight indeed. Also here were Taiga and a few Tundra Bean Geese, a few Bewick's Swans, hundreds of Baikal Teal lurking at the back of the pond plus an Eastern Marsh Harrier.

A full day in this interesting area began with a drive around rice fields where we quickly found flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese, followed by a visit to another pond full of ducks that included a huge number of proper wild Mallards and plenty of Falcated Duck. Another visit to the Kamo-ike Sanctuary gave us better views of Baikal Teal, more Taiga Bean Geese and some fine-looking Smew, plus a big juvenile Goshawk. Switching our attention to the sea we found many fishing Divers (Loons), with a few Black-throated, Red-throated, and some flocks of Pacific. Red-necked Grebe were quite numerous, and as the light improved and we found small groups of Ancient Murrelet reasonably close to the shore. On the rocks sat our first Pelagic and Japanese Cormorants, plus a Blue Rock Thrush. Our first gulls were seen here and included Vega, Slaty-backed, Kamchatka and Black-tailed, while in inland rice fields we saw a muddy flock of Bewick's Swans. We then made a final effort to find Copper Pheasant, driving inland to a forest area for a last-ditch attempt. We drove slowly along narrow forest tracks, then something magical happened – we came round a corner and saw some lumps moving in the road – five Copper Pheasants were feeding on the track! Unexpected, yet there they were, feeding in the road like chickens! Wow! A great finish to a good day.

A day of mostly travel followed. We flew from Komatsu on a turboprop plane to Fukuoka, picked up new cars and drove southwards. En route we stopped by an expanse of mud flats just as the tide was dropping and found hundreds of Saunders's Gulls hawking over the mud, a flock of a dozen Black-faced Spoonbill, Common Greenshank, Grey and Kentish Plover, Dunlin, Falcated Duck and Common Shelduck. As the tide dropped further, the Spoonbills were much closer and gave us a great show as they marched along the creek sweeping their bills from side to side. We continued onwards, with a pause in a small town to see a flock of Asian House Martins zooming in and out of their roost in a taxi garage. Unfortunately, due to Covid restrictions this year we couldn't stay in the minshuku at the Crane reserve, so we stayed in a small hotel in the town of Izumi.

Dawn at Arasaki is a spectacle to behold. Thousands of Hooded Cranes streamed overhead to and from their feeding areas, filling the sky as the sun rises behind the hills to the east. Also going overhead were large numbers of Oriental Rook plus a good number of Daurian Jackdaws, while a flock of Brambling dropped in to feed nearby. Also, in the fields we found Buff-bellied and Red-throated Pipits, Japanese Skylarks, Northern Lapwings, a colourful flock of Russet Sparrow and our first male Masked Bunting. Along an overgrown canal we saw Warbling White-eyes, Common

Reed Buntings, a Brown-cheeked Rail popped out briefly though calling Ruddy-breasted Crakes would not show. We watched the Cranes from the Observatory tower, enjoyed the handsome White-naped Cranes plus a single Common Crane, and a flock of Eurasian Spoonbills. Many Cranes were circling up and away to the north, and it appeared that the majority of the White-naped Cranes had already departed. We explored a nearby lake among forested hills, and saw many White-bellied Green Pigeons, some Northern Goshawks, Eastern Buzzard and several hundred Mandarin Duck. At the end of the day at Arasaki we saw Japanese Bush Warblers and a Japanese Weasel, and a distinctive looking Peregrine chasing a Spotted Redshank, which just so happened to be a write-in, if not dinner.

Another dawn with the Cranes, after a clear night they streamed across an orange sky as the sun emerged for another day. New additions this morning were Chestnut-eared Buntings and a Black-crowned Night Heron, then moving on down the coast we saw several Brown Booby flying close inshore. We had a picnic lunch overlooking the cataracts in the river at Satsuma, where we revisited Japanese Wagtail and Long-billed Plover before heading to our next night stop at Mi-ike, a crater lake in the shadow of Mount Kirishima. Olive-backed Pipits and Pale Thrush hopped around on the lawns, and two Japanese Green Woodpecker put on a good show.

Driving to the east coast of Kyushu, we explored an area of woodland and fields where we found a fine pair of Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit and Masked Buntings, while an invisible and inaudible Asian Stubtail hid in the undergrowth. On a nearby pond, we found a Ferruginous Duck (another write in), a smart male Baikal Teal, and a male Baer's Pochard appeared at the back of the pond and performed for a while in the sunshine. It had been reported here three weeks previously, and was a nice surprise given the global rarity of the species!

Further up the coast we took a fishing boat out into the bay, and found no fewer than nine Japanese Murrelet, giving some stunning views as they swam close to the boat. Also, on our 'mini-pelagic' we saw Black-tailed and Vega Gulls, Pacific Reef Heron, and Black-necked and Great Crested Grebes. On the way home we paused among some fields and enjoyed a mixed flock of buntings, finding Rustic, Yellow-throated and Masked hiding in the tall grass. The next day we had an early sortie into the surrounding area, finding a handsome flock of Japanese Grosbeaks, and a stunning cock Green Pheasant creeping along a hoar frosted bank, and another look around the lakeside camp produced a group of Red-billed Leiothrix and a drumming Japanese Green Woodpecker.

We drove to Kagoshima airport and began our next part of our journey, flying first to Tokyo and then on to snowy Kushiro, arriving at our onsen hotel in time for another tasty dinner. An early start in sub-zero temperatures followed, to the renowned bridge over the Setsuri river where we stood watching Red-crowned Cranes rousing themselves for another day in this frozen landscape, dancing and trumpeting in the unfrozen shallows. A trio of noisy Crested Kingfishers were a surprise, a few Goosander swam on the river and a male Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch popped up. Nearby we visited a well-known tree to see a roosting Ural Owl, peering frostily out of its cosy hole. We spent time with a field full of Red-crowned Cranes, larking about and calling noisily in the bright winter sunshine, then we visited our second Ural Owl of the day, sat ghost-like in an almost monochrome forest. We reached the coast just as a flock of Asian Rosy Finch swarmed along the roadside, and along the Notsuke peninsula we saw our first Black Scoters and Harlequin Ducks, White-tailed and Steller's Sea Eagles, Spectacled Guillemots plus Sika stags standing around on the snow. We hurried up the coast to our lodgings in Rausu, not wanting to be late for our early dinner that preceded our vigil for the target here, Blakiston's Fish Owl. Once fed we

retreated to our rooms, watching the small stream out in front and waited. Sure, enough the Owl appeared, first sitting in a tree where after an hour it was joined by a second, before taking a fish and returning to the snowy forest. Hurrah!

Another day, another spectacle, and after our breakfast we headed down to the port to board our 'nature cruise'. The pack ice that had been here just days previously had now disappeared, so in rather foggy conditions we needed to travel 10km out to sea. We found the ice; however, it was clear that the Eagles hadn't! Back to port we went, and it soon became evident that all the Eagles (in their hundreds) were all still sat up in the trees on the mountainside or stood on the harbour wall! Then the boat crew began the show. First, they selectively threw fish to Eagles that were waiting upwind, which then swooped down and snatched the fish from the surface alongside the boat. Next, we moved alongside the snow-covered harbour wall, where we caused chaos by throwing fish to the waiting Eagles who bounced and jostled as they squabbled over the goodies. Mostly Steller's Sea Eagles, there was also no shortage of White-tailed Eagles too. Slaty-backed and Glaucous-winged Gulls also joined the party, before it was time to go ashore. Next, we travelled southwards scanning the seas as we went, we found many flocks of Black and Stejneger's Scoter, with a great close view of the latter. In shallower waters we found Brant Geese and Whooper Swans, before we reached our hotel in Nemuro where a fine (if rather complex!) feast of Hanasaki Crab awaited us!

An early session at a local harbour produced great close views of Harlequin Ducks and Long-tailed Ducks, then we headed for Cape Nosappu. Unfortunately, the unpredictable pack ice was rammed close inshore and the birds were mostly elsewhere. We found Spectacled Guillemots feeding around the edges of the ice, hundreds of Harlequin Duck and a scattering of Pelagic Cormorants. On the south side of the Nemuro peninsula we had a fine boat trip on kind seas and saw many Least Auklet at close range plus many Spectacled Guillemots. A Sea Otter and some Harbour Seal added to the fun, and Whooper Swan in the harbour posed elegantly in the afternoon sun. The day ended with a splendid sunset over ice-filled Nemuro harbour.

A second trip to Cape Nosappu to try and find the elusive Red-faced Cormorant drew a blank, as the Cape was still trapped in ice, but it was quite a sight in the dawn sunshine. We moved our attention to Cape Kiritappu, where we enjoyed Pigeon Guillemots and a trio of Sea Otter, and Asian Rosy Finches zoomed about the dry slopes. A cross-country journey followed, to the Yorushi Onsen where we would spend the night. Time spent watching the feeders here produce a lot more birds than a long cold walk in the forest! The Blakiston's Fish Owl was heard but not seen, at least not until 0410, and that wasn't by any of us! Over breakfast there was a veritable storm of Eurasian Jays of the orange headed brandt race, plus Eurasian Nuthatch, Marsh Tit, Hawfinch, and finally a Sable that emerged from its hiding place to cause a commotion among the diners! After tearing ourselves away we found a restless flock of Asian Rosy Finches along the back roads, and by the popular Lake Kussharo we were entertained by the feeding time of the Whooper Swans, plus some lovely white-headed Long-tailed Tits (the 'snow-angel') and both Willow and Marsh Tits. We stopped off once again to see the Red-crowned Cranes at Tsurui, then it was time to bring our Hokkaido experience to a close and fly back to Haneda where we spent the night, prior to our extension.

Before boarding the ferry to the Izu Islands in the late evening, a walk around some of Tokyo's parks produced Pale Thrushes and tame Varied Tits, Masked, Meadow and Common Reed Buntings, and big rafts of Greater Scaup and Great Crested Grebe. At the ferry port we found we were sailing on the very new *Salvia Maru*, a well-equipped platform for our pelagic birding. We

sailed southwards into the night, passing Mikurakima and its swarms of Streaked Shearwaters at dawn, and on fine seas in sunny weather continued to Hachichojima. A short sprint onshore produced a juvenile Northern Goshawk, then it was back aboard and powering northwards. Slowly but surely birds began to appear, and we had a superb look at an adult Short-tailed Albatross that flew close to the ship. The seas between Mikurajima and Miyakajima were filled with scores of Japanese Murrelets, resting on the water and flying parallel with us, a scene perhaps induced by the fine weather. After our final stop at the island of Miyakajima we headed into the sea area known to birders as the 'Oshima triangle'. As hoped, the rate of Albatross sightings picked up, with Short-tailed, Black-footed and Laysan Albatross all present, then we had the awesome spectacle of a huge swarm of at least 120 of these giants pursuing a passing fishing boat. Wow, the numbers were unprecedented, more than doubling my previous maxima. In addition, we saw a couple of Humpback Whales, and an exciting pod of 13 or more Sperm Whales, with their distinctive angled blows and knucky backs, some seen going into a deep dive with tail flukes raised.

We headed back into port in the evening, thrilled by this exciting conclusion to a great tour, and dispersed in our homeward directions with happy memories.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

BIRDS

Brant Goose ♦ (Black Brant) *Branta [bernicla] nigricans* A good number seen at Odaito on Hokkaido.

Taiga Bean Goose ♦ *Anser fabalis* Plenty at Kamo-ike, with a handful of the following species.

Tundra Bean Goose ♦ *Anser serrirostris*

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*

Lesser White-fronted Goose ♦ *Anser erythropus* A nice surprise to see a nice close flock of 13 at Kamo-ike.

Tundra Swan ♦ (Bewick's S) *Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii* A few seen around the Kaga area.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Many seen on Hokkaido.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* A good number at Uki.

Mandarin Duck ♦ *Aix galericulata* Hundreds seen on the lake at Kogawa.

Baikal Teal ♦ *Sibirionetta formosa* At Kamo-ike Sanctuary they had counted ca.1800, with several hundred visible to us if rather distant, a closer single male seen at Koda.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Falcated Duck ♦ *Mareca falcata* Seen in number at Awara, at Ochiishi, and a close one at Karuizawa.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

American x Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca americana x penelope* One seen at Uki.

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Baer's Pochard ♦ *Aythya baeri* A male popped out at the back of the pond at Koda, still here after the initial report from 4th Feb. It showed a little bit of brown on the top of the head otherwise it looked the full ticket.

Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca* One bright male at Koda, a write-in for this tour.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Harlequin Duck ♦ *Histrionicus histrionicus* Many seen around the Hokkaido coasts, with close birds in Hanasaki harbour, and a notable concentration around the ice at Cape Nosappu.

Stejneger's Scoter ♦ *Melanitta stejnegeri* Plenty seen off the Hokkaido coasts, great views of a male close in.

Black Scoter ♦ *Melanitta americana* Commonly found around the Hokkaido coast, their wailing whistles adding to the magical atmosphere of the place.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* Some stunning close looks at males in Hokkaido harbours.

Nice to see these at Lake Toden, and at Kamo-ike.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Copper Pheasant ♦ *Syrnaticus soemmerringii* After much trying, we were rewarded with five birds feeding on a track in some forest near Komatsu. Epic.

Green Pheasant ♦ *Phasianus versicolor* A brief look at one near Komatsu, then a good view of one at Mi-ike.

Chinese Bamboo Partridge ♦ (introduced) *Bambusicola thoracicus* heard only.

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

Rock Dove (introduced) *Columba livia*

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

White-bellied Green Pigeon ♦ (Japanese G P) *Treron sieboldii* Many seen flying around Kogawa lake.

Brown-cheeked Rail ♦ (Eastern Water R) *Rallus indicus* One unexpectedly broke cover just in front of us at Arasaki.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* non-leader.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Zapornia fusca* heard-only, at Arasaki.

White-naped Crane ♦ *Antigone vipio* Unusually few left at Arasaki, we still had great looks at this stunning bird.

Red-crowned Crane ♦ (Japanese C) *Grus japonensis* Arguably the best Crane, some splendid encounters with these in snowy Hokkaido.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Hooded Crane ♦ *Grus monacha* Good to see the thousands of these at Arasaki, but sad to hear they lost 1500 to bird flu.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Horned Grebe (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus* Two seen from our little pelagic trip off Ochiishi.

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis* A couple at Kadogawa, and a couple at Kasai Rinkai Park.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* A couple on the mud at Uki.

Long-billed Plover ♦ *Charadrius placidus* A couple on the Chikuma river at Lake Toden, another seen on the rocks at Satsuma.

Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* A single at Arasaki.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* A single at Arasaki that only just escaped the attentions of a hungry Peregrine.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* About ten seen at Uki.

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Saunders's Gull ♦ *Chroicocephalus saundersi* Hundreds seen at Uki, with some nice close examples hunting crabs over the mud.

Black-tailed Gull ♦ *Larus crassirostris*

Common Gull ♦ (Kamchatka G) *Larus [canus] kamtschatschensis*

Glaucous-winged Gull ♦ *Larus glaucescens* Just a small number seen around the Hokkaido coasts.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Vega Gull *Larus [vegae] vegae*

Slaty-backed Gull ♦ *Larus schistisagus*

Lesser Black-backed Gull ♦ *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* One or two seen at Uki.

Common Murre (C Guillemot) *Uria aalge* A single only, on Hokkaido.

Pigeon Guillemot ♦ *Cephus columba* Some nice examples off Kiritappu, also one of the *snowi* race off Ochiishi.

Spectacled Guillemot ♦ *Cephus carbo* The default alcid around Hokkaido, we had some close views from our Ochiishi boat.

Ancient Murrelet ♦ *Synthliboramphus antiquus* A good number seen fairly well off the Komatsu coast.

Japanese Murrelet ♦ *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* Superb encounters this year in the bay off Kadogawa, with nine seen and close views enjoyed. Also on the Izu ferry near Miyakejima there were >50 streaming past the ship, a sight I have not seen in many sailings.

Least Auklet ♦ *Aethia pusilla* Nice to get some close views of mainly flying birds from our Ochiishi boat.

Crested Auklet ♦ *Aethia cristatella* So far out at Cape Kiritappu it could have been a bumblebee!

Red-throated Loon (R-t Diver) *Gavia stellata*

Black-throated Loon ♦ (B-t Diver) *Gavia arctica* A few identified off the Kaga coast

Pacific Loon ♦ **(P Diver) *Gavia pacifica*** A good number off the Kaga coast, a few seen off Hokkaido.

Laysan Albatross ♦ ***Phoebastria immutabilis*** At least 45+ from the Izu ferry.

Black-footed Albatross ♦ ***Phoebastria nigripes*** At least 45+ from the Izu ferry, dwarfed by the following species!

Short-tailed Albatross ♦ ***Phoebastria albatrus*** At least 135 was my estimate, an unprecedented number, with all ages represented and multiple close views from the Izu ferry.

Streaked Shearwater ♦ ***Calonectris leucomelas***

Brown Booby ***Sula leucogaster*** Great close views of six flying close inshore in Kyushu.

Pelagic Cormorant ♦ ***Urile pelagicus***

Japanese Cormorant ♦ ***Phalacrocorax capillatus*** Seen in marine habitats near Kaga, Izumi, and around the islands on the Izu ferry trip.

Great Cormorant ***Phalacrocorax carbo***

Eurasian Spoonbill ***Platalea leucorodia***

Black-faced Spoonbill ♦ ***Platalea minor*** Splendid encounters at Uki, more seen at Arasaki.

Black-crowned Night Heron ***Nycticorax nycticorax***

Grey Heron ***Ardea cinerea***

Great Egret (Western G E) ***Ardea [alba] alba***

Great Egret (Eastern G E) ***Ardea [alba] modesta*** A few noted in Kyushu.

Little Egret ***Egretta garzetta***

Pacific Reef Heron ***Egretta sacra*** A dark morph and a light morph together sitting on buoys at Kadogawa.

Osprey ***Pandion haliaetus***

Mountain Hawk-Eagle ***Nisaetus nipalensis*** One seen near Karuizawa, another distantly at Kogawa.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk ***Accipiter nisus***

Northern Goshawk ***Accipiter gentilis***

Eastern Marsh Harrier ***Circus spilonotus*** A single at Kamo-ike.

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

White-tailed Eagle ***Haliaeetus albicilla*** With the following species at Rausu, part of an epic spectacle.

Steller's Sea Eagle ♦ *Haliaeetus pelagicus* An awesome spectacle unlike no other, watching these mighty beasts flying around us on our Rausu 'nature cruise'. Our 'bird-of-the-trip' by a long way.

Eastern Buzzard ♦ (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus*

Blakiston's Fish Owl ♦ *Bubo blakistoni* A great show by two birds at Rausu, and at a reasonable hour!

Ural Owl ♦ *Strix uralensis* Marvellous looks at two roosting birds in Hokkaido.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* Three chasing each other about at the Otawabashi were a welcome sight.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker ♦ *Yungipicus kizuki*

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* Good views of two near Karuizawa.

Japanese Green Woodpecker ♦ *Picus awokera* A little elusive around Karuizawa, great views of some at Mi-ike.

Common Kestrel (Eurasian K) *Falco tinnunculus*

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Ryukyu Minivet ♦ *Pericrocotus tegimae* A pair at Koda showed well.

Bull-headed Shrike ♦ *Lanius bucephalus*

Northern Shrike ♦ *Lanius borealis* A leader-only glimpse of a flying bird near Yoroushi.

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Daurian Jackdaw ♦ *Coloeus dauuricus* Notably good numbers at Arasaki, but no pied adults seen.

Rook ♦ (Oriental R) *Corvus [frugilegus] pastinator*

Carrion Crow ♦ (Oriental C) *Corvus [corone] orientalis*

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Northern Raven (Common R) *Corvus corax* heard-only, at Lake Kussharo.

Japanese Waxwing ♦ *Bombycilla japonica* Lovely flocks seen well at Karuizawa, also two at a 7-11 near Nagano.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Varied Tit ♦ *Sittiparus varius*

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Quite common on Hokkaido.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* Quite common at Karuizawa, with a couple picked out on Hokkaido.

Japanese Tit ♦ *Parus minor*

Eurasian Skylark ♦ (Japanese S) *Alauda [arvensis] japonica*

Brown-eared Bulbul ♦ *Hypsipetes amaurotis* The hardest Bulbul in the world!

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* Quite a few seen on Kyushu's east coast.

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* A nice show in an urban setting, gathering to roost in a taxi garage.

Japanese Bush Warbler ♦ *Horornis diphone*

Asian Stubtail ♦ *Urosphena squameiceps* A glimpse by the leader led to a session with a bird we could not see and could only 'hear' using an electronic 'ear'!

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Seen on Honshu and Kyushu, and more notably on Hokkaido where we saw the nominate white-headed subspecies, locally promoted as 'snow angel'.

Warbling White-eye *Zosterops japonicus* Used to called Japanese White-eye before recent taxonomic work, but it will always be 'Mejiro'.

Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) *Leiothrix lutea* A handful of sneaky ones at Mi-ike.

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* On Honshu we saw *hondoensis*, on Hokkaido we saw *asiatica*.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* non-leader.

White-cheeked Starling ♦ *Spodiopsar cineraceus*

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Pale Thrush ♦ *Turdus pallidus*

Dusky Thrush ♦ *Turdus eunomus*

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* A single male showed briefly at Karuizawa.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureoreus*

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

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasi* Multiple sightings, notably at Rausu.

Russet Sparrow *Passer cinnamomeus* Some smart flocks at Arasaki and at our Mi-ike hotel.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* One at Jigokudani made an appearance too late for most of us to see it.

Japanese Accentor ♦ ***Prunella rubida*** It took some finding, but we had a good look at one near Karuizawa.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

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

Japanese Wagtail ♦ ***Motacilla grandis*** Seen on the rivers around Karuizawa, near Kaga and at Satsuma.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Some streaky examples at Arasaki.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* Smart flocks seen near Karuizawa and at Arasaki.

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Thin on the ground this year, seen at Karuizawa and Yoroushi only.

Japanese Grosbeak ♦ ***Eophona personata*** Super looks at a flock in the car park of our Mi-ike hotel, also two at Karuizawa.

Asian Rosy Finch ♦ ***Leucosticte arctoa*** A nice roadside flock near Shibetsu, a mobile group at Kiritappu and a restless swarm near Yoroushi.

Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch ♦ ***Carpodacus sibiricus*** Good looks at both sexes at Karuizawa, another male popped up in front of us on Hokkaido.

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

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* heard only.

Meadow Bunting ♦ ***Emberiza cioides***

Chestnut-eared Bunting ♦ ***Emberiza fucata*** Three seen at Arasaki.

Rustic Bunting ♦ ***Emberiza rustica*** A big flock near Karuizawa, only seen again at Koda and Kasai Rinkai Park.

Yellow-throated Bunting ♦ (Elegant B) ***Emberiza elegans*** A flock of 20+ at Koda, another five at Mi-ike though furtive.

Masked Bunting ♦ ***Emberiza personata***

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

MAMMALS

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Common Seal (Harbour S) *Phoca vitulina*

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* One or two off Ochiishi, three or more at Kiritappu.

Sable *Martes zibellina* Two showings at Yoroushi, one late evening and another at breakfast.

Japanese Weasel *Mustela itatsi* A brief sighting at Arasaki.

Sika Deer *Cervus nippon*

Japanese Serow *Capricornis crispus* Good looks at two near Karuizawa.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae* Three or four seen from the Izu ferry.

Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* At least 13 counted, possibly more present, off Tokyo Bay.

Indo-pacific Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops aduncus* One close to Mikurajima.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena* One or two off Cape Kiritappu.

Japanese Macaque *Macaca fuscata* A good show by these fascinating fellows, sitting in the onsen!

Japanese Squirrel *Sciurus lis*

Eurasian Red Squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*