

JAPAN IN WINTER TOUR REPORT 2024

19 February - 4 / 6 March 2024

by Dave Farrow

A great trip and a very successful tour, it is always a pleasure to return to Japan, this being my twentieth visit. There is such a strong field of great birds it is almost impossible to agree on a 'Bird-of-the-trip': Red-crowned Crane, Steller's Sea Eagle, Ural and Blakiston's Fish Owls, and Pallas's Rosefinches on Hokkaido, a fine Siberian Crane with the glorious White-naped and Hooded Crane flocks on Kyushu, Japanese Murrelet and Black Wood Pigeon along the coast, and on Honshu we found Japanese Waxwing, the demure Japanese Accentor, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Brown-headed and Naumann's Thrush, Lesser White-fronted Goose, and in Tokyo a cheeky twitch for a splendid Japanese Night Heron!

We met at Haneda Airport, and after a quick transfer to Tokyo Station we boarded the Shinkansen (a tourist attraction in itself) and whizzed along to the mountain town of Karuizawa (at speeds of up to 255kph!) Piles of snow leftover from the blizzards of two weeks previous were rapidly diminishing amid mild temperatures, and after picking up our roomy minibuses we stopped off at a riverside temple. We began our birding strongly, with a flock of Japanese Waxwings feeding hungrily on the sticky mistletoe berries, and even coming down to drink in the river. Also, here we found Rustic Buntings, Bramblings and Hawfinch, all in good numbers this year. Walking through the forests we found Japanese Accentors feeding along the river, Coal, Japanese, Varied and Long-tailed Tits, Japanese Pygmy and Great-spotted Woodpeckers, Goldcrest, Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Treecreeper, Eurasian Siskin, Grey-capped Greenfinch and our first Meadow Buntings.

Along forest streams we found flighty Brown Dippers, while in other areas we saw Japanese Green Woodpeckers, Red Crossbill and Japanese Grosbeaks. A visit to the Chikuma river was productive where some sharp-eyed spotting picked out a trio of cryptic Long-billed Plovers along the shingle bank. Also, we found Japanese Wagtails, Buff-bellied Pipits, smart drake Smew and Goosanders. We explored a winding mountain road in the afternoon where the forest was notably silent, until a male Copper Pheasant was spotted! It slowly walked beneath the cedars, allowing us all to get a great view of this gorgeous and normally shy endemic. A little later we happened upon another male Copper Pheasant together with a quartet of females that took flight upon our sudden appearance. Wow! As the daylight diminished, Chinese Hwamei serenaded us from a roadside tree, and we finished up with a lovely pink-bellied male White-backed Woodpecker.

A damp and drizzly day followed, and in the gloom, we saw Japanese Squirrel and our first Sika Deer, and a pair of Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch that showed poorly. We found more Japanese Waxwings stripping the berries from the mistletoe, and large flock of Bramblings fed alongside handsome Hawfinches. Low cloud and persistent drizzle limited bird activity, but a cruise around some fields was successful in finding twelve Green Pheasants. A surprising find, usually so hard to

find at this time of year, the weather must have persuaded them to perform in the open. Meadow and Rustic Buntings joined Dusky Thrushes around the fields before we retreated to our hotel with some picnic supplies. After lunch we found a rather wet Japanese Serow standing on a wooded slope, a pair of Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch showed nicely, and further upstream while chasing Brown Dipper we found a super Solitary Snipe, bobbing in the water and allowing us lengthy looks. Not a bad day considering the weather!

As we departed Karuizawa, the branches of the trees were ice-covered after rain had frozen on contact, and rain kept falling as we left for the 'Snow Monkeys'. Fearing that we would just be seeing 'Rain Monkeys', we were pleased as the weather deteriorated into snow as we headed uphill to their home valley. As the snow fell, it perfected the scene as it covered the Japanese Macaques, and we had a great experience watching our furry cousins relaxing in the hot tub. The driving snow kept the birds down, yet at a nearby comfort stop we found a flock of Bohemian Waxwings, dropping into orchards along with a few Japanese Waxwings. We then headed away to the west along the Sea of Japan coast, (passing through 51 tunnels today!) and reached the Katano Kamo-ike duck pond in time to view the mass of wildfowl gathering on the lake. There were scores of Baikal Teal parked at the far end of the lake, both Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese were in good number, plus a flock of Bewick's Swan and a couple of drake Smew.

The following day was a multi-stop safari around the surrounding area of Kaga. Just outside town we saw the first flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese heading out to feed, so we hurried after them. In an extensive area of rice fields, they were swarming in great flocks, and we watched the nervous birds from a safe distance. After a while we managed to find a single Lesser White-fronted Goose hiding among them, which conveniently became the last bird standing as the rest of the flock thinned out. Our next stop was at another 'duck pond' crowded with hundreds of Mallard (so nice to see such numbers of *proper* wild ones) among which were 120 handsome Falcated Duck. In the fields opposite were many Oriental Crows, a few Oriental Rook and some Daurian Jackdaws including a single pied adult. At our next stop we scanned the sea, finding a raft of Black-throated Divers plus a few Red-throated, many Red-necked Grebes and several small flocks of Ancient Murrelet. At random roadside stops we found smart Grey-headed Lapwing, and a dense pack of Black-necked Grebes. We scanned from a headland, finding a few Vega and Slaty-backed Gulls, mewing Black-tailed Gulls around a harbour, Pelagic Cormorants on the rocks plus a Blue Rock Thrush. As a sleet and hailstorm rolled in off the sea, we scuttled away and ended our day back in the comfort of the Katano Kamo-ike observatory, watching Bewick's Swans, Taiga Bean Geese, Slavonian Grebe, Bull-headed Shrikes and an Eastern Marsh Harrier.

Leaving Honshu behind, we flew to Fukuoka, in a propeller aircraft on a sunny day, so it was a strange feeling to see Hiroshima below us as we went. Glad to meet fine weather and a warm sun, we headed southwards along the highway to a large area of mudflats near Kumamoto. It was low tide, and we found notably large numbers of Northern Pintail, hundreds of Baikal Teal, many Common Shelduck, a score of Black-faced Spoonbills, while hundreds of Saunders's Gull patrolled the distant mud. We found Siberian Sandplover with Kentish and Grey Plovers, a lone Red-necked Stint with hundreds of Dunlin, Common Greenshank, Spotted Redshank, Northern Lapwings, Heuglin's Gulls, Ospreys, Daurian Redstart, Japanese Bush Warbler and Common Starlings. Onwards and southwards, we found Asian House Martins and House Swifts along our route and arrived at Arasaki in time to see our first Hooded Cranes in the twilight.

On a damp and dark morning, as we stood watching the Cranes fly in from their roosting area, we could see a big white one approaching – Siberian Crane! Hurrah! It landed nearby with its three

White-naped Crane companions, to join the swarms of Hooded Cranes, two Sandhill Cranes, two Common Cranes plus many White-naped Cranes. What a beauty! Also, we found Eurasian Goshawk, Japanese Skylarks, Buff-bellied Pipits, clouds of Oriental Rooks that included many Daurian Jackdaw, with smart adults standing out among the dark juveniles. Hundreds of Russet Sparrow were lined up on wires outside our guesthouse, and we spent some time watching the Cranes and other birds around the Crane Observatory. Further out into the surrounding area we had a good look at Brown-cheeked Rail in the reeds, Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills on shallow pools, Green and Wood Sandpipers and a single Pied Avocet. In rough fields we found Chestnut-eared Buntings, and a small reedbed produced a busy flock of Chinese Penduline Tits.

Moving inland into the hills we had good looks at a pair of Crested Kingfisher along a rushing river, a Mountain Hawk Eagle sailed over us, and in dark cedar woods we found a smart Ryukyu Minivet though the White-bellied Green Pigeon were less obliging. Back at Arasaki we had another great look at the Siberian Crane, and even managed four species in one frame when three Sandhill Cranes appeared nearby.

A final morning at Arasaki, with clear skies, an orange dawn and a full moon. The Crane flocks streamed overhead on their way to feed, the Siberian Crane dutifully flew past with his White-naped escort and was admired further as it fed in the fields. Some smart Daurian Jackdaw adults showed well, and in a nearby wooded area we found a single Brown-headed Thrush together with furtive Pale Thrushes. An Asian Stubtail sang from a fern-clad gully and popped out furtively. At the coast we saw our first Japanese Cormorants perched on the rocks, while many Streaked Shearwaters could be seen far out to sea. Crossing the island of Kyushu, in the woods around the crater lake of Mi-ike we saw White-backed and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Daurian Redstarts and Olive-backed Pipits, and two flocks of Japanese Waxwings were a surprise.

Soon after sunrise we were standing in a cold valley near the east coast of Kyushu watching various Buntings waking and seeking the sunshine, with several smart Yellow-throated Buntings, plus a few Chestnut-eared, Masked and Meadow. Daurian Redstarts were numerous, and on the nearby lake we found a quartet of Mandarin Duck (scarce so far on this trip), plus a 'write-in' Medium Egret. We headed north to a small fishing port, and boarding a fishing boat we bumped our way into Kadogawa Bay. Just offshore is the island of Birojima, where the largest known colony of Japanese Murrelets are breeding. Luckily sheltered from a boisterous northerly wind, we found a total of 15 of these 'Sea Sparrows', some so close to the boat we could hear them cheeping. Also, we saw Pacific Reef Herons, Japanese Cormorants and Great Crested Grebes, Black-tailed Gulls and Ospreys. Once ashore, we had just enough time to try a nearby wooded headland for Black (or Japanese) Wood Pigeon, and despite low expectations of finding this bird (normally restricted to offshore islands) we actually had one fly over us! That rounded off our day nicely and we returned to our delightful hotel, for another top-quality feast produced by their award-winning chef.

Our last morning in the area was productive with Russet Sparrows and Japanese Grosbeaks, another group of Japanese Waxwings, and in the fields, we found two male Green Pheasants beneath the song-fighting Japanese Skylarks. Little stirred in the woods apart from Ryukyu Minivets, and then it was time to say goodbye to Kyushu and head to the airport for the next part of our adventure. We flew via Haneda to Kushiro in eastern Hokkaido, arriving in the evening to a temperature of -13C!

Our first day on Hokkaido was a full one, starting pre-dawn on the Otawabashi bridge with a crowd of photographers, all waiting for the show by the Cranes that stood in mid river. Today the show

was rather muted, possibly due to the biting sub-zero wind, however we enjoyed Common Redpoll, two Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch in the herbage, and a couple of *brandtii* race Eurasian Jays. Nearby we visited a well-known Ural Owl at its roost and were surprised to find two birds sat in the hole! After breakfast at our hotel, we found a Grey-bellied Bullfinch looking pretty in the snow, and a frosty *clara* Eurasian Nuthatch. Along a nearby roadside, we found a trio of gorgeous pink Pallas's Rosefinch, that performed for us in the winter sunshine. Hurrah! At the town of Tsurui we watched the Red-crowned Cranes bugling and dancing on the snow, and we found some confiding Marsh Tits and white-headed Long-tailed Tits ('snow angels') that were drinking from icicles.

Arriving at the coast, we could see the sea ice was rammed up to the beach by the recent gales. In a large harbour we found Red-breasted Mergansers, Harlequin Duck and Glaucous-winged Gulls together with numerous Slaty-backed. We reached our pleasant hotel that towered over the sea, and after another elegant dinner we headed out to our rendezvous with Blakiston's Fish Owl.

We took our positions overlooking the stream outside the small guesthouse, and waited, hoping it wouldn't be too long a night! The Owls do not keep to a regular schedule, sometimes not coming until the early hours of the morning. After a couple of hours of waiting we could hear them calling nearby, and with the thermal camera we were able to locate two Owls perched side by side, in a tree high up on the valley side. Before very long, one of the pair flew down to the floodlit stream in front of us to take a fish. It then remained nearby in the shadows, returning to the stream once more before choosing to hunt from a low perch in a nearby tree, just visible in the reflected light while its mate kept watch from a tree on the hillside. What a great show!

The next day it was time for the spectacle of the Eagles, and luckily there was still pack ice nearby. Departing from Rausu harbour, we travelled 12km offshore to where the ice was, pursued by a swarm of Slaty-backed Gulls. We were treated to a stunning panorama of the snowy mountains of Shiretoko in the crystal-clear air, a perfect backdrop to the hordes of Steller's Sea Eagles and White-tailed Eagles that greeted us. We spent a couple of hours watching these great birds, perching on the ice floes and tussling and squabbling over the handouts of fish, before it was time to head back to port with full memory cards and depleted batteries! Our brief stay in Rausu over, we drove southwards along the coast. At a stop in some sparse coastal vegetation, we found a flock of Pine Buntings that showed briefly before flying high and far. We surveyed the duck flocks along the coast finding Black and Stejneger's Scoter, Brant Geese and Whooper Swans, before reaching our pleasant hotel in Nemuro, our base for two nights.

Exploring the Nemuro area, we had to contend with strong winds and a significant windchill which cancelled our planned boat trip in search of Auks. We explored harbours along the coast, and squeezed into sheltered corners at Cape Nosappu which fortunately has a small seawatching hide. We were able to catch the tail end of a large Crested Auklet passage that occurred in previous days, with many birds feeding offshore, Spectacled Guillemots were joined a single Pigeon Guillemot, and we managed to see some tiny Least Auklets ping-pong about. A Sea Otter appeared, and in the late afternoon a single Red-faced Cormorant appeared on 'Cormorant rock'.

After another splendid seafood meal (this is Hokkaido, after all!) we headed along the south coast, starting in a small harbour where we found some lovely Asian Rosy-Finches and a pair of handsome Grey-bellied Bullfinches. At Cape Kiritappu we found another two Asian Rosy-Finch obligingly confiding in the windswept car park, and Eastern Buzzards hung in the wind. Once again, we shivered in the icy blast as we scanned the seas, finding many Spectacled Guillemot, Red-

necked Grebe and Red-throated Diver, and several Sea Otter. We then headed cross-country to the Yoroushi Onsen, for our final night on Hokkaido. This lovely hotel has a splendid array of bird feeders just outside the lounge window, where we saw Long-tailed Tits, Marsh Tits and *clara* Eurasian Nuthatches, plus a cheeky Sable that was feeding on the spilt bird seed. On the river just outside the hotel a Solitary Snipe was bobbing up and down as it fed in the shallows, despite the -10c air temperature the warm water was keeping the river ice-free. A great meal followed, and we spent a while waiting by the window in hope of the Blakiston's Fish Owl making an appearance but having already seen one so well we drifted off to bed without it showing – at least not until the early hours when none of us were watching!

Our final day on Hokkaido began with watching the bird feeders, where numerous *brandti* Eurasian Jays, the coldest Brown-eared Bulbuls in the world, and a Red Squirrel, all joined us for breakfast. We headed on to Lake Kussharo where many Whooper Swans were paddling around in the ice-free shallows, noisily waiting for someone to buy them popcorn. Around the car park we saw a lovely Grey-headed Woodpecker, the first on any of my winter visits here. Along the roadsides we found a large but flighty flock of frosty-looking Common Redpolls, and after some lunch we revisited the Red-crowned Cranes. They bugled and danced in the afternoon sunshine, always a joy to behold. Some more Pallas's Rosefinches were found feeding along a roadside, a Crested Kingfisher showed well as he fished along a snowy stream, and a flock of Bohemian Waxwing appeared in a small village on our way to Kushiro airport. It was time to say goodbye to wonderful Hokkaido and return to Haneda for an overnight stay.

Unusually, a Japanese Night Heron had taken up residence for the winter in a Tokyo park, an opportunity too great to pass up so we set off across town. After three trains and a bus ride, we found the place easily enough, and there were already some local photographers watching the bird. It stayed under the trees, walking about slowly and feeding just a few metres from us. What a great bird! Normally a summer visitor, scarce, secretive and nocturnal, rarely seen by visiting birders, this one was a gift. There were plenty of other birds in this park, and we found Brown-headed Thrush, plenty of Dusky Thrush and White-cheeked Starlings feeding on the wet lawns, Hawfinches and a big flock of Azure-winged Magpies. We were rather damp from the persistent rain, so retreated to a nearby coffee shop. After another series of train rides, dinner, and provisioning for our pelagic voyage ahead, we splashed our way down to the port of Takeshiba. It was only then that we found that our ship had been cancelled due to bad weather! Ouch! Something of a disappointment for all. We headed back to Haneda for the night and planned alternative activities for our extension.

Back onto Tokyo's fabulous transport system once more, we visited the Rikugien Gardens where we watched a smart Naumann's Thrush hopping around on the grass. Next, we travelled to Meiji Jingu, a patch of forest in the heart of the great city, where we found a Grey Bunting posing for us in the undergrowth. Exploring the wooded groves further we found Red-flanked Bluetail, Ryukyu Minivet, and a Varied Tit that came to eat out of my hand. Travelling out beyond Yokohama, first by train and then another bus, we reached Maioka Park, another peaceful wooded corner where we spent the rest of the afternoon. Alongside some wet paddies among the trees we found a sneaky Eurasian Woodcock, confiding Chinese Bamboo Partridges, two Ruddy-breasted Crake and some Masked Buntings. Vocal Chinese Hwamei sang from the bamboo and hopped along the paths, plus we saw Japanese Green Woodpecker and the introduced Pallas's Squirrel. None of which are Albatrosses, but it was a good second best with which to finish our very successful tour of Japan.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

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).

The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P. (Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.1)** (this was the current version when the checklist for the tour report was created).

Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

BIRDS

Brant Goose ◊ (Black Brant) *Branta [bernicla] nigricans* A flock of 45 off Odaito, Hokkaido, a single at Nosappu Misaki.

Taiga Bean Goose ◊ *Anser fabalis* A good number on the pond at Katano Kamo-ike alongside the following species.

Tundra Bean Goose ◊ *Anser serrirostris*

Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* Some 400 feeding on the rice fields near Kaga.

Lesser White-fronted Goose ◊ *Anser erythropus* A single bird seen well near Kaga.

Tundra Swan ◊ (Bewick's S) *Cygnus [columbianus] bewickii* Some nice flocks seen around Kaga.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus* Plenty seen in Hokkaido, including some endearingly tame ones at Lake Kussharo.

Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* A large number on the mud flats at Uki.

Mandarin Duck ◊ *Aix galericulata* A single briefly at Karuizawa, and some sneaky birds seen at Koda.

Baikal Teal ◊ *Sibirionetta formosa* A good number at Kaga, also seen at Koda.

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*

Gadwall *Mareca strepera*

Falcated Duck ◊ *Mareca falcata* An estimated 120+ on a pond near Kaga, odd birds seen elsewhere.

Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope*

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Remarkably big numbers on the mud flats at Uki.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Harlequin Duck ♦ *Histrionicus histrionicus*

Stejneger's Scoter ♦ *Melanitta stejnegeri* Some good views of these along the Hokkaido coast.

Black Scoter ♦ *Melanitta americana* Plenty around the Hokkaido coasts, their whistling calls often audible.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* A few handsome males seen well around Hokkaido, often in the harbours.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

Smew ♦ *Mergellus albellus* A good number at Lake Toden, also smart drakes on the lake at Kaga.

Common Merganser (Goosander) *Mergus merganser*

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* Pleasingly common around the Hokkaido coasts and in the harbours.

Copper Pheasant ♦ *Syrnaticus soemmerringii* An amazing total of seven seen near Karuizawa; a male briefly from the bus, a long look at a male walking beneath some cedars, and another male with four female/immature birds surprised on a roadside slope.

Green Pheasant ♦ *Phasianus versicolor* Often hard to find in winter, we saw twelve under low cloud and drizzle near to Karuizawa, with another two near Mi-ike.

Chinese Bamboo Partridge ♦ (introduced) *Bambusicola thoracicus* Some great views of these in Maioka Park on our last day.

House Swift *Apus nipalensis* At least three circling the Family Mart at Minemata.

Rock Dove (introduced) *Columba livia*

Black Wood Pigeon (Japanese W P) *Columba janthina* A speculative search produced one of these near Hyuga. A write-in.

Oriental Turtle Dove (Rufous T D) *Streptopelia orientalis*

White-bellied Green Pigeon ♦ (Japanese G P) *Treron sieboldii* Brief glimpses at Kogawa on Kyushu.

Brown-cheeked Rail ♦ *Rallus indicus* One seen well in a reedy ditch at Arasaki.

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Zapornia fusca* Heard at Arasaki, great views of two at Maioka Park.

Siberian Crane ♦ ***Leucogeranus leucogeranus*** We were pleased to find the wintering adult at Arasaki was still present when we got there. Multiple views of this elegant beauty.

Sandhill Crane *Antigone canadensis* At least three showed well at Arasaki.

White-naped Crane ♦ ***Antigone vipio*** Arguably the best Crane at Arasaki, but a lone bird at Tsurui with the following species looked rather more ordinary!

Red-crowned Crane ♦ **(Japanese C) *Grus japonensis*** The greatest of them all, and a highlight of our visit to Hokkaido.

Common Crane *Grus grus* Two in the melee at Arasaki.

Hooded Crane ♦ ***Grus monacha*** The most numerous Crane at Arasaki, the official count taken on 7th January was 9583 birds!

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Horned Grebe (Slavonian G) *Podiceps auritus* One on the lake at Katoano, another in the Black-necked flock (from photos)

Black-necked Grebe (Eared G) *Podiceps nigricollis* A dense flock of 80+ at the roadside near Kaga.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta* A single at Arasaki.

Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* Quite a number seen in Kyushu.

Grey-headed Lapwing ♦ ***Vanellus cinereus*** Just two found on paddyfields near Kaga.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Long-billed Plover ♦ ***Charadrius placidus*** A trio at roost on a shingle bank on the Chikuma river.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*

Siberian Sand Plover *Charadrius [mongolus] mongolus* A single with the Kentish Plovers at Uki.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis* A single with the Dunlin at Uki.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* One hidden away under a bush at Maioka Park.

Solitary Snipe ♠ *Gallinago solitaria* One is good fortune, two is unprecedented! One at Karuizawa and one at Yoroushi Onsen.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* A flock of seven at Arasaki were unexpected at this time of year.

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus* A single at Uki was noteworthy.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Saunders's Gull ♠ *Chroicocephalus saundersi* An estimated 400+ were scattered across the distant mud flats at Uki.

Black-tailed Gull ♠ *Larus crassirostris*

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

Glaucous-winged Gull ♠ *Larus glaucescens*

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus* A scattering of adults birds seen on the Hokkaido coasts.

Vega Gull *Larus [vegae] vegae* Seen around the Honshu and Kyushu coasts

Slaty-backed Gull ♠ *Larus schistisagus* Abundant on Hokkaido.

Lesser Black-backed Gull ♠ (Heuglin's G) *Larus [fuscus] heuglini* A small number at Uki, also one at Arasaki.

Pigeon Guillemot ♠ *Cephus columba* A single off Nosappu Misaki was the only sighting.

Spectacled Guillemot ♠ *Cephus carbo* The default Alcid on Hokkaido.

Ancient Murrelet ♠ *Synthliboramphus antiquus* Several small flocks off the coast near Komatsu were close enough to get reasonable views.

Japanese Murrelet ♠ *Synthliboramphus wumizusume* At least 15 birds seen on our boat trip at Kadogawa included one sat on a fishing buoy which was a first!

Least Auklet ♠ *Aethia pusilla* A few eventually showed well enough and close enough off Nosappu Misaki.

Crested Auklet ♠ *Aethia cristatella* Only the second time I have seen them off Nosappu Misaki, we saw a few on the water, and later in the day there were larger flocks passing offshore. A few days previously there had been an epic passage of an estimated 260,000 birds!

Rhinoceros Auklet ♠ *Cerorhinca monocerata* Two seen from Nosappu Misaki.

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

Black-throated Loon ♦ (B-t Diver) *Gavia arctica* A raft of 20+ birds was a good find off the coast near Kaga.

Streaked Shearwater ♦ *Calonectris leucomelas* Many visible off the Kyushu coast near Akune.

Red-faced Cormorant ♦ *Urile urile* As we hoped, one came into its roost place at Nosappu Misaki in the late afternoon.

Pelagic Cormorant ♦ *Urile pelagicus*

Japanese Cormorant ♦ *Phalacrocorax capillatus* Good looks at these on offshore rocks at Kadogawa, also at Akune and Kiritappu on Hokkaido.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* Good numbers around Arasaki, sometimes mixed with the following species.

Black-faced Spoonbill ♦ *Platalea minor* Good numbers of these in Kyushu.

Japanese Night Heron ♦ *Gorsachius goisagi* A lovely example of this rarely seen bird showed well to us as it stalked around in a thicket at Mizumoto Park.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

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

Great Egret (Eastern G E) *Ardea [alba] modesta* A few of this smaller black-legged taxon seen on Kyushu.

Medium Egret *Egretta intermedia* A single at Koda was a write-in. Don't like the new name though...

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Pacific Reef Heron *Egretta sacra* Three seen on the fish platforms at Kadogawa.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* An immature bird came sailing over us near Lake Kogawa.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* Singles at Arasaki and Mizumoto Park, another two seen near Mi-ike.

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* A female seen soaring around over the lake at Kaga.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* One or more at Arasaki, another seen near Nemuro.

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

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* So great to see these in abundance on Hokkaido, and out-competing the following birds at snatching up the handouts!

Steller's Sea Eagle ♦ *Haliaeetus pelagicus* An awesome spectacle to see hundreds of these on pack the ice at Rausu. As good as it gets!

Eastern Buzzard ♦ (Japanese B) *Buteo japonicus*

Blakiston's Fish Owl ♦ *Bubo blakistoni* A great show by the Fish Owls of Rausu, with one of two seen coming to take fish from the pool outside the guesthouse, while its mate watched from a tree on the slope above. Also heard calling.

Ural Owl ♦ *Strix uralensis* A visit to a well-known roost hole on Hokkaido provided great views of this endearing species, however we didn't expect there to be two sat in the hole!

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris* A pair near Kogawa in Kyushu, one near Tsurui on Hokkaido posed nicely.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker ♦ *Yungipicus kizuki*

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* Lovely examples seen well at Karuizawa and at Mi-ike.

Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius* A leader-only sighting at Yoroushi.

Japanese Green Woodpecker ♦ *Picus awokera* Endemic, we had good views at Karuizawa and Maioka Park.

Grey-headed Woodpecker *Picus canus* A fine example seen at Lake Kussharo.

Common Kestrel (Eurasian K) *Falco tinnunculus*

Merlin *Falco columbarius* One at Arasaki.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Ryukyu Minivet ♦ *Pericrocotus tegimae* Found at Kogawa, also seen at Mi-ike and even one seen at Meiji Jingu in Tokyo!

Bull-headed Shrike ♦ *Lanius bucephalus*

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius* Quite numerous on Hokkaido (*brandtii*) and a few around Karuizawa (*japonicus*).

Azure-winged Magpie ♦ (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus* Some flying birds seen while driving at Karuizawa, then in the rain at Mizumoto Park in Tokyo we found a nice flock.

Daurian Jackdaw ♦ *Coloews dauuricus* Unusually we found these first in rice fields near Kaga, and a reasonable number with the following species at Arasaki.

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

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

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Bohemian Waxwing ◊ *Bombycilla garrulus* A sizeable flock near Jigokudani (55+) were a nice surprise, another 8 on Hokkaido were our last birds there.

Japanese Waxwing ◊ *Bombycilla japonica* Clearly a good winter for these beauties. We had 40 at Karuizawa in their usual places, a few mixed with the previous species near Jigokudani, and one or probably two flocks totalling 30+ birds at Mi-ike.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Varied Tit ◊ *Sittiparus varius*

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris* Fairly common on Hokkaido.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus* Seen well at Karuizawa.

Japanese Tit ◊ *Parus minor*

Chinese Penduline Tit ◊ *Remiz consobrinus* A flock of 15 in a reedbed at Arasaki were a nice find by Otani.

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

Brown-eared Bulbul ◊ *Hypsipetes amaurotis* Almost a daily bird, they thinned out on Hokkaido but were still hanging on in -13c at Yoroushi!

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* Five seen at Minemata on Kyushu.

Japanese Bush Warbler ◊ *Horornis diphone*

Asian Stubtail ◊ *Urosphena squameiceps* A high frequency song alerted us to one near Arasaki, eventually popping in and out of the ferns for brief looks.

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* Great views of the nominate white-headed birds on Hokkaido, also plenty seen on Honshu.

Warbling White-eye *Zosterops japonicus*

Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) *Leiothrix lutea* heard only, at Mi-ike.

Chinese Hwamei (introduced) *Garrulax canorus*

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* Race *hondoensis* on Honshu, *clara* on Hokkaido.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* Singles *japonica* seen at Karuizawa, race *daurica* on Hokkaido.

White-cheeked Starling ◊ (Grey S) *Spodiopsar cineraceus* On Honshu and Kyushu.

Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* Some small flocks seen in Kyushu.

Pale Thrush ◊ *Turdus pallidus* Shy birds seen on Kyushu, more confiding around Tokyo.

Brown-headed Thrush ◊ *Turdus chrysolais* One seen near Arasaki was unexpected, good views of two in Mizumoto.

Dusky Thrush ◊ *Turdus eunomus*

Naumann's Thrush ◊ *Turdus naumanni* A smart male seen in a Tokyo park.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* One at Meiji Jingu.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureus*

Blue Rock Thrush (Asian R T) *Monticola [solitarius] philippensis* One seen at Kasano Misaki near Komatsu.

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* Nice examples at Karuizawa and Yoroushi.

Russet Sparrow *Passer cinnamomeus* Hundreds at Arasaki lining the wires, plus a small flock by our Mi-ike hotel.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Japanese Accentor ◊ *Prunella rubida* Two seen well in the forest at Karuizawa were the only ones seen.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

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

Japanese Wagtail ◊ *Motacilla grandis* Regularly seen in good habitat on Honshu and Kyushu.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni* Three by the lake at Mi-ike.

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* Heard-only, at Arasaki.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* You can never see enough Hawfinches! A good winter for them this year.

Japanese Grosbeak ◊ *Eophona personata* Not common, found at Karuizawa and Mi-ike.

Eurasian Bullfinch ◊ (Grey-bellied B) *Pyrrhula [pyrrhula] griseiventris* A smart male near Kushiro, a pair at Konbumori.

Asian Rosy Finch ♢ *Leucosticte arctoa* It was nice to find these at Konbumori, and again at Kiritappu on the same day.

Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch ♢ *Carpodacus sibiricus* Nice examples at Karuizawa and Otawabashi on Hokkaido.

Pallas's Rosefinch ♢ *Carpodacus roseus* Much appreciated by all (but especially by Brian!), three performed beautifully for us near Tsurui, and two other groups were seen less well as we travelled along the back roads.

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

Common Redpoll ♢ *Acanthis flammea* Seen a few times in Hokkaido, including a restless roadside flock of 150+.

Red Crossbill (Common C) *Loxia curvirostra* Unusual to find these, we saw ten at Karuizawa.

Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus*

Pine Bunting ♢ *Emberiza leucocephalos* Seven found by Brian at Shibetsu, though they dispersed quickly. A Japan lifer for the leader!

Meadow Bunting ♢ *Emberiza cioides*

Chestnut-eared Bunting ♢ *Emberiza fucata* Several seen well at Arasaki, a few more at Koda.

Rustic Bunting ♢ *Emberiza rustica*

Yellow-throated Bunting ♢ (Elegant B) *Emberiza elegans* Nice examples seen at Koda on Kyushu.

Masked Bunting *Emberiza personata*

Grey Bunting ♢ *Emberiza variabilis* Finally we found them at Meiji Jingu on our last day, with good views of a male.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* Several seen on one day only at Arasaki.

MAMMALS

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Spotted Seal (Largha S) *Phoca largha* non-leader

Common Seal (Harbour S) *Phoca vitulina*

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris* One at Nosappu Misaki, four or more at Kiritappu.

Sable *Martes zibellina* One at Yoroushi feeding below the feeders.

Siberian Weasel (introduced) *Mustela sibirica*

Wild Boar *Sus scrofa*

Sika Deer *Cervus nippon*

Japanese Serow *Capricornis crispus* One of these cool mammals seen at Karuizawa.

Japanese Macaque *Macaca fuscata*

Japanese Hare *Lepus brachyurus* Two seen at Karuizawa, both located by thermal camera.

Pallas's Squirrel (introduced) *Callosciurus erythraeus* In Maioka Park.

Japanese Squirrel *Sciurus lis* Endemic, seen at Karuizawa.

Eurasian Red Squirrel (Red S) *Sciurus vulgaris* Seen at Yoroushi.