



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Japan

Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding

1st to 18th December 2014 (18 days)



Blackiston's Fish Owl by David Hoddinott

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Trip Report compiled by: David Hoddinott

Tour Summary

Our 2014 Dancing Cranes and winter birding tour proved once again to be very popular and was a remarkable success. This is a tour of real quality rather than quantity! Some of our top sightings included huge numbers of cranes (five species in all), the amazing Stellar's Sea Eagle – the largest eagle in the world, large numbers of waterfowl including Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck and Smew, vagrant and highly elusive Scaly-sided Merganser, rare Black-faced Spoonbill, Long-billed Plover, Saunders's Gull, a number of Alcids including Spectacled Guillemot, Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet, Blackiston's Fish Owl, Ural Owl, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit, Chinese Penduline Tit and Asian Rosy Finch. For a detailed report and species list, please read on ...

After an extremely successful extension to the Southern Islands of Amami and Okinawa, we all met up in Tokyo on the Island of Honshu for the start of the main tour through Japan. From Tokyo we boarded our comfortable bus and set off on the drive to Karuizawa Forest. Our time in the lovely woodlands of this area was most rewarding. It had snowed in the night and was therefore a cold start the following morning, creating some anxiety as to what we would see. However our initial explorations along the network of trails produced a number of wanted species including the tricky Japanese Green Woodpecker, Eurasian Jay, Coal Tit, family groups of Long-tailed Tit, Eurasian Wren, cute Eurasian Nuthatch, our first of several Red-flanked Bluetail, fabulous Brown Dipper, elusive Japanese Accentor, stunning Eurasian Bullfinch and both Long-tailed and the rare Pallas's Rosefinch. A good portion of our remaining time in the Karuizawa area was spent searching for the highly elusive Copper



Pallas's Rosefinch by David Hoddinott



Japanese Macaque by David Hoddinott

Pheasant and, after a great deal of searching without success, we really thought that we weren't going to find the species. It wasn't until our final morning whilst searching a new area that we actually come across this remarkably cryptic bird. A female flushed from Guna's feet and most participants got to see it flying up and over the nearby ridge where it disappeared. During our time here we also paid a visit to Lake Toden where numerous waterfowl including Mandarin Duck and Smew were seen. A juvenile Northern Goshawk was also observed hunting and flushing the duck on a number of occasions, which proved quite a site. A visit to the nearby Usui River also yielded a very confiding Rustic Bunting.

Leaving Karuizawa, we next headed to Nakano and arrived at a perfect time to observe the famous "Snow Monkeys". The Japanese Macaques are often referred to as "Snow Monkey" as they live in the forests where there is a good amount of snow. They have a habit of using the hot springs at Jigokudani to bath and are particularly confiding, giving outstanding views and great photographic opportunities. During snow storms they have been observed swimming in the hot springs, which must afford them



some shelter. It has recently become an almost daily event to see them swimming here. Sometimes they are virtually covered in snow, sporting a white cape which makes for particularly nice photos. We were treated to quite a spectacle as a large troop of one hundred animals was seen in and around the hot springs, where we were entertained by large males tussling amongst one another trying to assert dominance, and females attending their young of varying ages.

From Nakano we paid a visit to Kahokugata Lagoon and enjoyed sheltering from a strong cold wind, in the well made blind. This allowed us great views of good numbers of Black-necked Grebe and our first Baikal Teal and Falcated Duck. Nearby we notched up an Eastern Marsh Harrier and had great views of the very smart Grey-headed Lapwing and, finally, a large flock of Tundra Swan.



Hooded Crane by David Hoddinott



White-naped Crane by David Hoddinott

Yet more heavy snow fell that night and we awoke to a very white town of Komatsu, where at least a foot of snow lay on the ground. Our splendid and extremely experienced driver was not concerned by the tricky driving conditions and made sure we arrived at all our intended birding sites. A notable protected site in the area is Lake Katano Kamo-Ike and here we enjoyed a most memorable stay out of the rain, snow and wind. Taiga and Tundra Bean Goose showed well, allowing us all to see the subtle differences between the two species, two splendid male Falcated Duck gave superb views and numerous Baikal Teal were seen well through the telescopes. Nearby we found a nice flock of Greater White-fronted Goose.

From Komatsu we took a flight to Fukuoka on the Island of Kyushu and then drove to Yatsushiro mudflats. The tide was out but we still managed to find Black-faced Spoonbill, peak numbers for the trip of a dozen Western Osprey, Marsh Sandpiper alongside Common Greenshank, and Saunders's and Black-tailed Gulls, before pressing on to the town of Izumi.

There was a buzz of excitement in the air at breakfast the following morning as we were in the heart of "Crane Country". After getting some warm clothes and our cameras, we set off to the Ijumi Crane Sanctuary and were delighted to find that this year they had recorded their largest number of cranes, in excess of 14000!!!! The cacophony of cranes calling was something special as were the large flocks flying in to feed in the surrounding fields. This was a



Sandhill Crane by David Hoddinott



marvellous spectacle and we enjoyed this on a number of occasions over the next two days. Four crane species were in attendance – Sandhill, White-naped, Common and Hooded – with the latter in the largest numbers, approximately 12000!

Other species seen during our time here included a juvenile Whooper Swan, a flock of



Saunders's Gull by David Hoddinott

handsome Common Shelduck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Merlin – hunting typically at high speed and very low to the ground, Northern Lapwing, better views of Saunders's Gull, Daurian Jackdaw amongst large flocks of Rook, Chinese Penduline Tit giving great scope views for all, Japanese Bush Warbler, vagrant Red-billed and Common Starlings, numerous Dusky Thrush, Russet Sparrow, Buff-bellied Pipit, Chestnut-eared Bunting and Pallas's and Common Reed Buntings.

A visit to nearby Lake Miyama netted great views of Mandarin Duck, superb scope views of Japanese Cormorant, White-bellied Green Pigeon and House Swift.

From Arasaki we travelled to the Sendai River, where we scored with fabulous views of the endemic Green Pheasant, a female of the much wanted Scaly-sided Merganser, several Long-billed Plover, a magnificent Crested Kingfisher, Asian House Martin, late Red-rumped Swallow, superb Japanese Wagtail and flocks of Japanese Grosbeak. In the late afternoon we travelled to Miike where we enjoyed a wonderful traditional Japanese stay with the most delicious cuisine. This was certainly yet another highlight!



Falcated Duck by David Hoddinott

At Lake Miike we found a Eurasian Sparrowhawk having a tussle with a Carrion Crow, several Ryukyu Minivets, beautiful Varied Tit, a fleeting flock of Red-billed Leiothrix, Pale Thrush, Olive-backed Pipit and Grey Bunting. En route to Hyuga we stopped at Hitose where we notched up a good selection of species including superb views of Black-faced Spoonbill, a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron,



Ural Owl by David Hoddinott

Common Snipe, Eurasian Curlew, Sanderling, Dunlin and, most notably, a striking juvenile Greater Spotted Eagle.

From Hyuga we then drove to Miyazaki where we boarded a flight to Tokyo and then continued on to Kushiro on the Island of Hokaido. On arrival we travelled to the Ito Crane Sanctuary where we were entertained with wonderful views of Red-crowned Cranes displaying in the snow – quite a sight to behold. The bird feeders nearby held Marsh Tit, Eurasian Nuthatch and Great Spotted Woodpecker.



Our first destination early the following morning was a day roost for Ural Owl. Fortunately the bird was still there and we had magnificent views of this equally magnificent owl. Next we headed for the Notsuke Peninsula where we found Brant Goose, delightful Harlequin Duck, White-winged and Black Scoters, Long-tailed Duck, Common Goldeneye, several Red-throated Loons and our first Stellar's and White-tailed Eagles. In the evening we visited a local birder's guest house where we were treated to what can only be described as phenomenal views of Blackiston's Fish Owl – the largest owl in the World. What a cracker!!! (See first photo.)



Red-crowned Crane by David Hoddinott

From Rausu we travelled to Nemuro and enjoyed birding at a number of ports and parks. During our forays we found Greater Scaup, Red-breasted Merganser, Black-throated and Pacific Loons, Horned Grebe, Pelagic Cormorant, more magnificent Stellar's Sea Eagles, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Common Murre, tiny Ancient Murrelet, Rhinoceros Auklet, Goldcrest, Eurasian Treecreeper, Brambling, Common Redpoll, a lovely flock of Snow Bunting and beautiful Asian Rosy Finch.



Stellar's Sea Eagle by David Hoddinott

From Numero we travelled back to Kushiro in order to connect with our flight back to Tokyo and our return flights home. There was however unfortunately a massive snow storm (unusual at this time of year) and this hindered our return journey to Kushiro. Whilst waiting for the road to be cleared we reminisced over

what had been a most wonderful adventure through Japan and chatted about other trips to remote parts of the world.

Fortunately the following morning we were able to fly out of Kushiro and most of us were still able to connect with our International flights home. This ended what had been a most exciting and fun trip!

Thank you to everyone for making this 2014 Rockjumper tour of Japan such an immense success and so extremely memorable and enjoyable for both Bryan and I. Until next time...



Rhinoceros Auklet by David Hoddinott



Annotated Checklists of Birds & Mammals

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS SEEN ON THE JAPAN DANCING CRANES & WINTER BIRDING TOUR

(169 species seen on the main Japan Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding tour)

(102 species seen on the Ryukyu Islands Extension)

(206 species seen on both tours combined)

Note: Names and taxonomical order of the bird species list follows that of IOC (International Ornithological congress), Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2013; Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press (version 3.5). Names in square brackets represent names given by IOC and omitted by Clements whereas names in round brackets represent names given by Clements and omitted by IOC. Names without square or round brackets represent the name given by both IOC and Clements. A notes section can be found where notably distinctive subspecies or races are concerned and where the taxonomy of a species differs between Clements and IOC. Clements names and taxonomy is derived from version 6.8.

Key to abbreviations:

E: an endemic species

NE: a near-endemic species

BE: a breeding endemic species

I: an introduced species

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

Taiga Bean Goose

Anser fabalis

Around 20 birds were seen at Katano Kamo Ike.

Tundra Bean Goose

Anser serrirostris

Four birds were encountered at Katano Kamo Ike.

Greater White-fronted Goose

Anser albifrons

A large flock of 80 birds was seen in fields south of Kaga.

Brant [Goose]

Branta bernicla

At least 500 birds were found on the Notsuke Peninsula, Hokkaido.

Mute Swan

Cygnus olor

We had superb views of one on the Sendai River.

Tundra Swan

Cygnus columbianus

A flock of 115 was seen in the Kaga area.

Whooper Swan

Cygnus Cygnus

One was seen at Arasaki and several hundred almost daily on Hokkaido.

Common Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Our first sighting was of a flock of 18 at Arasaki with a further sighting of 20 at Hitose.

Mandarin Duck

Aix galericulata

Our first sighting was of a superb male at Lake Toden and 20 at Lake Miyama.

Gadwall

Anas strepera

Seen in small numbers at scattered wetlands throughout the country.

Falcated Duck

Anas falcate

Our first sighting was of 3 males at Kahokugata Lagoon with further sightings of two males and a



female at Katano Kamo Ike and a final sighting of two males on the Sendai River.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Good numbers were seen at most wetlands throughout the trip.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Huge numbers were encountered at most wetlands.

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

Seen in good numbers throughout the trip.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Small numbers seen at most wetlands.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Commonly seen throughout the trip.

Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*

A splendid male was seen at Kahokugata Lagoon, Kanazawa then fifty were scoped at Katano Kamo Ike.

[Eurasian] (Green-winged) Teal *Anas crecca*

Abundant throughout!

NOTE: IOC splits the above species into Eurasian Teal A. crecca and Green-winged Teal A. carolinensis whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Green-winged Teal A. crecca.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

Small numbers were seen on 6 separate days.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Fair numbers were encountered on 9 separate days of the tour.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Seen almost daily on Hokkaido in small numbers in the ports.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

This stunning duck was seen daily in fair numbers off the Hokkaido coastline.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta deglandi*

Three birds were seen off the Notsuke Peninsula.

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*

Large numbers were encountered daily off the Hokkaido coastline.

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*

Seen in small numbers on a few occasions off the Hokkaido coastline.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

On Hokkaido it proved common and was seen daily in fair numbers.

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

Seen on two occasions, three females at Lake Toden near Karuizawa and two females at Katano Kamo Ike.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

Seen at Lake Toden and then daily off the Hokkaido coastline.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

Scarcer than the previous species and more oceanic, we encountered small to large numbers on a few occasions during our time on Hokkaido.

Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*

A very rare and difficult-to-find species throughout its limited range! We were extremely fortunate to learn of a single female being present at a river south of Izumi...and after chasing after it and with patience and perseverance we finally enjoyed good views. What a cracker!



Pheasants & Allies Phasianidae

Copper Pheasant (E) *Syrnaticus soemmerringi*

A superb female was seen whilst exploring the Karuizawa area.

[Green] (Ring-necked) Pheasant (E) *Phasianus versicolor*

A splendid male was seen along the Sendai River.

NOTE: IOC splits Common (Ring-necked) Pheasant P. colchicus into two species: Common Pheasant P. colchicus and Green Pheasant P. versicolor, whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Ring-necked Pheasant P. colchicus.

Loons Gaviidae

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*

Seen in fair numbers on four separate days on Hokkaido.

[Black-throated] (Arctic) Loon *Gavia arctica*

Much scarcer than the previous species, we were thrilled to find one winter-plumaged adult that showed in the scope at Onnemoto Port.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*

One bird showed particularly well at a port near Rausu.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen in small numbers on 8 separate days of the tour.

NOTE: IOC splits Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis into two species: Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis and Tricolored Grebe Tachybaptus tricolor, whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Little Grebe Tachybaptus ruficollis.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

Several were seen off the Hokkaido coastline.

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Small numbers were encountered at scattered wetlands on 5 days of the trip and a peak count of 30 were seen on Lake Shibayama.

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

One was seen near Rausu and a further dozen off Nosappu.

[Black-necked] (Eared) Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

A flock of about 50 was seen at Kahokugata Lagoon and a further 5 at Hitose.

Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*

We had superb views of 8 at Arasaki and a further one at Hitose.

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*

Two birds were seen well at Yatsushiro mudflats and a further 11 at Hitose.

Bitterns & Herons Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One juvenile was encountered at Hitose.

[Eastern] Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

One was seen near Arasaki.

NOTE: Clements lumps this species with Western Cattle Egret B. ibis as Cattle Egret B. ibis.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers were seen on almost every day during the first week.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*



Small numbers were seen daily during the first week.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Small numbers were seen on a few occasions during the first week.

Cormorants, Shags Phalacrocoracidae

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Encountered daily on Hokkaido where large numbers were found.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen commonly during the first week and a half of the tour.

NOTE: IOC splits this species into Great Cormorant *P. carbo* and White-breasted Cormorant *P. lucidus*, whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Great Cormorant *P. carbo*.

Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

Four birds were seen near Arasaki and another at Nosappu.

Ospreys Pandionidae

[Western] Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Small numbers were seen almost daily during the first week and a peak count of a dozen at Yatsushiro mudflats.

NOTE: NOTE: IOC recognizes two species: *P. haliaetus* Western Osprey and *P. cristatus* Eastern Osprey, whereas Clements only recognizes one species, *P. haliaetus* Osprey.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Two birds were seen near Lake Miike and another at Nosappu. On two occasions they were seen harassing carrion crows.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

We had wonderful views of a juvenile at Lake Toden and another at Arasaki. A total of four sightings during the tour.

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

One was seen at Kahokugata Lagoon.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

A single female was seen quartering the wetlands of Arasaki.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

Good numbers were encountered daily.

NOTE: IOC splits the above species into two separate species; Black Kite *M. migrans* and Yellow-billed Kite *M. aegyptius* whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Black Kite *M. migrans*.

Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*

We had wonderful views of a juvenile at Hitose. We were very lucky to see this fabulous vagrant!

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

This impressive raptor was seen daily in small numbers on Hokkaido with a peak count of 30 around Rausu.

Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*

One of the world's most spectacular eagles! We were delighted to find good numbers (around 30 birds) near Rausu and on the Notsuke Peninsula. Smaller numbers were seen daily thereafter on Hokkaido.

[Eastern] (Common) Buzzard *Buteo japonicus*

Seen in small numbers on most days of the trip with a peak count of three near Arasaki.

NOTE: IOC splits Common Buzzard *B. buteo* into 5 separate species: Common Buzzard *B. buteo*, Eastern Buzzard *B. japonicus*, Himalayan Buzzard *B. burmanicus*, Cape Verde Buzzard *B. bannermani* and Socotra Buzzard *B. socotraensis*,



whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Common Buzzard *B. buteo*.

Falcons Falconidae

[Common] (Eurasian) Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus

Single birds were seen on three days of the trip and a peak count of three near Hitose.

Merlin

Falco columbarius

We had brief views of one hunting at Arasaki.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Singletons were encountered on three separate days of the tour. We had great views of a hunting individual at Arasaki and another perched at Cape Hyuga.

Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae

Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

Seen daily during the first week of the tour.

Eurasian Coot

Fulica atra

Commonly encountered during the first week of the tour.

Cranes Gruidae

Sandhill Crane

Grus canadensis

Six birds were seen at Arasaki, where we enjoyed fabulous sightings of a group of four alongside the road.

White-naped Crane

Grus vipio

Large numbers (over 600 birds) were seen during our time at Arasaki.

Red-crowned Crane

Grus japonensis

Wonderful views were had of this species on several occasions and on five separate days of the trip. Superb views were had of dancing birds on one morning at the Ito Crane Feeding Sanctuary near Tsurui.

Common Crane

Grus grus

Three birds were seen amongst the masses of Hooded and White-naped Cranes at the Arasaki Crane Sanctuary.

Hooded Crane

Grus monacha

Astounding numbers (over 10000 birds) were enjoyed during our time at Arasaki.

Plovers Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Groups and pairs were encountered in the grasslands at Arasaki, including a huge flock of 80.

[Grey] (Gray)-headed Lapwing

Vanellus cinereus

We were thrilled to find a flock of 3 of these generally scarce, migratory lapwings in a field near Kaga. A flock of thirty was seen the following day also in the Kaga area.

[Grey] (Black-bellied) Plover

Pluvialis squatarola

6 birds were seen at the mudflats at the Yatsushiro River mouth and a further 8 at Hitose

Long-billed Plover

Charadrius placidus

One was seen at the Tedori River and a further 6 at the Sendai River where we enjoyed fabulous sightings.

Snipes & Sandpipers Scolopacidae

Common Snipe

Gallinago gallinago



Small numbers were seen perched and in flight in the Arasaki area and at Hitose.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*

One bird was seen at Hitose.

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One was seen at the Yatsushiro mudflats.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

One was seen at the Tedoru River and a further three at Yatsushiro mudflats.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

Singletons were seen in the Arasaki area and at the Komenotsu River.

Common Sandpiper *Tringa hypoleucos*

Small numbers were seen daily in the Arasaki area.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

We had good scope views of a flock of 20 at Hitose.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

Seen on 5 days during the trip with a peak count of 50 at Yatsushiro mudflats and at Hitose.

Gulls & Terns Laridae

Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers were seen around Kaga and Yatsushiro and fair numbers were found daily on Hokkaido.

Saunders's Gull *Chroicocephalus saundersi*

A rather scarce and localized gull throughout its limited range! We were delighted to find at least 3 of these gulls around the mudflats at Yatsushiro where they showed well in flight and later enjoyed fabulous perched views at Arasaki and at close range.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

Fair numbers were seen on the coast at Kaga and at Yatsushiro with further sightings at Hyuga and on Hokkaido.

Mew Gull *Larus canus*

Six were seen at Rausu.

NOTE: Some authorities split Mew Gull L. canus into several different species. If split, the race or species occurring in Japan would be called Kamchatka Gull L. kamtschatschensis. However, neither Clements nor IOC recognizes any splits of Mew Gull.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

This large, light grey and white gull was encountered fairly regularly on Hokkaido with our first sightings near Rausu.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

Good numbers were seen daily on Hokkaido.

[Vega] (Herring) Gull *Larus vegae*

First seen in Tokyo, we later found this species near Kaga, at Yatsushiro, Hyuga and daily on Hokkaido.

NOTE: IOC splits Herring Gull L. argentatus into three species: European Herring Gull L. argentatus, American Herring Gull L. smithsonianus and Vega Gull L. vegae, whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Herring Gull L. argentatus.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

Good numbers were found daily along the Hokkaido coastline.

Auks Alcidae

Common Murre *Uria aalge*

2 birds were found off Cape Nossapu.



- Pigeon Guillemot** *Cepphus columba*
 Good scope views of one were had off Cape Nossapu.
- Spectacled Guillemot** *Cepphus carbo*
 Two birds were scoped off Cape Nossapu.
- Ancient Murrelet** *Synthliboramphus antiquus*
 We had great views of up to 20 off Cape Nossapu.
- Japanese Murrelet** *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*
 We had scope views of two birds off Cape Hyuga which were very distant but presumed to be this species. This was incredibly fortunate for this early in the year.
- Rhinoceros Auklet** *Cerorhinca monocerata*
 A single winter-plumage juvenile was seen exceptionally well .

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae

- Rock Dove (I)** *Columba livia*
 Widespread in urban areas throughout.
- Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis*
 Common and seen daily during the first week and a half.
- White-bellied Green Pigeon** *Treron sieboldii*
 We had brief views of two at Lake Miyama.

Owls Strigidae

- Blakiston's Fish Owl** *Bubo blakistoni*
 An absolute cracker and undoubtedly one of the major highlights of the tour! We were treated to a close and prolonged encounter with an adult and juvenile of this rare owl one evening on Hokkaido.
- Ural Owl** *Strix uralensis*
 Incredible views were had of this species during the day near Tsurui on Hokkaido.

Swifts Apodidae

- House Swift** *Apus nipalensis*
 We had good views of six whilst en route to Lake Miyama.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

- Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis*
 We had good views of several at the Sendai River and at Hitose.
- Crested Kingfisher** *Megaceryle lugubris*
 We had great views of two on the Sendai River, yet another great highlight of the trip!

Woodpeckers Picidae

- Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos kizuki*
 Singletons and pairs were encountered at Karuizawa, around Miike and on Hokkaido.
- Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major*
 Commonly seen around Karuizawa and again on Hokkaido.
- Japanese [Green] Woodpecker (E)** *Picus awokera*
 We had wonderful views of one at Karuizawa and a further two at Lake Miike.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagedae



Ryukyu Minivet (E) *Pericrocotus tegimae*
We found up to ten of these endemics at Lake Miike.

Shrikes Laniidae

Bull-headed Shrike *Lanius bucephalus*
Seen daily in small numbers during the first week and a half of the trip.

Crows & Jays Corvidae

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*
Seen daily in small numbers in the Karuizawa area.

NOTE: We saw two distinctive subspecies of Eurasian Jay during our time in Japan. The birds seen around Karuizawa represent the race japonicas, while the birds seen on Hokkaido are of the race brandtii. Neither IOC nor Clements recognizes any splits of Eurasian Jay.

Azure-winged Magpie *Cyanopica cyanus*
A flock of twenty was seen by some of the group from one of our hotels.

Daurian Jackdaw *Coloeus dauuricus*
A total of three birds were seen well in the scope during our time in the Arasaki area.

Rook *Corvus frugilegus*
Hundreds of these crows were seen to the east of Kanazawa and again in the Arasaki area.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*
Seen daily in huge numbers.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*
As for the previous species, seen in large numbers each day.

NOTE: NOTE: Clements lumps this species with Indian Jungle Crow C. culminatus and Eastern Jungle Crow C. leuallantii as Large-billed Crow C. macrorhynchos, whereas IOC splits all three of these species into distinct species.

Tits & Chickadees Paridae

Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*
Good, close views were had of this species on most days on Hokkaido.

Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*
Seen in good numbers around Karuizawa.

Varied Tit *Poecile varius*
This handsome tit was seen well on many occasions in the Karuizawa area and again around Arasaki and Lake Miike.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*
Seen commonly around Karuizawa.

Japanese Tit *Parus minor*
Fair numbers were seen in wooded areas on most days of the tour.
NOTE: Both IOC and Clements now recognize three distinct species under Parus major Great Tit and are as follows: Parus major Great Tit, Parus minor Japanese Tit and Parus cinereus Cinereous Tit.

Penduline Tits Remizidae

Chinese Penduline Tit *Remiz consobrinus*
Two birds were seen well and scoped in reedbeds in the Arasaki area.

Larks Alaudidae

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*
Up to 50 were seen daily around Arasaki.



Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Brown-eared Bulbul *Hypsipetes amaurotis*
Good numbers were seen daily throughout the country.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
A flock was encountered at the Sendai River and several more near Miike.

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus*
One bird was seen during the drive from Fukuoka to Yatsushiro mudflats and another amongst a mixed flock of hirundines at the Sendai River.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*
We enjoyed great views of two birds flying over the Sendai River amongst a flock of barn swallows.

Cettia Bush Warblers & Allies Cettiidae

Japanese Bush Warbler *Horornis diphone*
Seen daily in small numbers in the Arasaki area.

Bushtits Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*
Small groups were encountered fairly regularly around Karuizawa and Miike.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*
A few birds were seen during our time at Arasaki.

Laughingthrushes Leiothichidae

Red-billed Leiothrix (I) *Leiothrix lutea*
Two birds were found moving quickly through the undergrowth at the edge of Lake Miike.

White-eyes Zosteropidae

Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus*
Small flocks were seen in the Arasaki area and at the Sendai River.

Goldcrests & Kinglets Regulidae

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*
Three birds were seen exceptionally well at Meiji Park, Hokkaido.

Wrens Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
Two birds were seen around Karuizawa and a further two at Miike.

Nuthatches Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*
Seen daily in small numbers around Karuizawa and again on Hokkaido.



Treecreepers Certhiidae

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*
A single bird was seen very well in Shinminnomori Park, Hokkaido.

Starlings Sturnidae

Red-billed Starling *Spodiopsar sericeus*
We had great views of one female at Arasaki.

White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*
Good numbers were seen daily during the first week and a half of the main tour including numerous sightings in the Arasaki area.

[Common] (European) Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
A singleton of this rare Japanese bird was found at Arasaki.

Thrushes Turdidae

Pale Thrush *Turdus pallidus*
Small numbers were encountered daily in the Arasaki area.

Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*
Small numbers were seen around Karuizawa, as well as at Arasaki, and daily on Hokkaido.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*
Two birds were seen very well at Karuizawa and a further one at Lake Miyama with a final sighting of two at Lake Miike.

Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus auroreus*
A male showed well at Karuizawa with further sightings around Arasaki and Miike.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Small numbers were seen around Arasaki and Miike.

Dippers Cinclidae

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*
Four birds were found on the Usui River but our best views were of one at Karuizawa and a final sighting of one on a small river near Rausu.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans*
A large flock of 100 birds was seen at Arasaki.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
Seen on virtually every day of the tour.

Accentors Prunellidae

Japanese Accentor (E) *Prunella rubida*
We were very fortunate to see this rare endemic at Karuizawa.

Wagtails Motacillidae

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*



Seen on five separate days of the tour, mainly around Arasaki.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Commonly seen during the first week and a half.

Japanese Wagtail (E) *Motacilla grandis*

Seen fairly regularly around Karuizawa and peak numbers of 8 at the Sendai River.

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

Two were seen around Lake Miike.

[Buff-bellied] (American) Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

Up to 20 birds were seen on consecutive days at Arasaki.

Finches Fringillidae

Brambling *Gringilla montifringilla*

A flock of 8 winter-plumaged birds was encountered at Shinminnomori Park, Hokkaido. A handsome finch indeed!

Japanese Grosbeak *Eophona personata*

A flock of twenty birds was seen whilst en route to the Sendai River and several more at Lake Miike.

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

We enjoyed great views of a pair and two males at Karuizawa and a further two at Shinminnomori Park, Hokkaido.

Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa*

We enjoyed excellent views of a flock of about 10 of these scarce finches on the Notsuke Peninsula and a further flock of 25 at Onnemoto.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Carpodacus sibiricus*

Several females were found in the Karuizawa area and another female was found in Shinminomori Park, Hokkaido.

[Grey-capped] (Oriental) Greenfinch *Chloris sinica*

Huge numbers were found around Arasaki and one was seen at Shinminomori Park, Hokkaido.

Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*

A flock of 30 was seen at Shinminomori Park, Hokkaido.

Buntings & Allies Emberizidae

Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*

Good numbers were seen around Karuizawa and Arasaki.

Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*

Two birds were seen briefly at Arasaki.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

We had fabulous views of one along the Usui River where we observed three birds.

Yellow-throated Bunting *Emberiza elegans*

This stunning bunting was first found at Karuizawa where we enjoyed superb views of a pair and later up to 17 were seen at Lake Miike and a final sighting of a pair at Shinminnomori Park, Hokkaido.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

Seen in reasonable numbers at Arasaki and Miike.

[Grey] (Gray) Bunting *Emberiza variabilis*

One female was seen briefly at Lake Miyama and another at Lake Miike.

Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasi*

We had good but brief views of one at Arasaki.

[Common] Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*



Good scope views were finally achieved of this species in a large patch of reedbeds at Arasaki.

ANNOTATED LIST OF MAMMALS (8 Species seen)

Names and taxonomical order of the mammal species list follows that of Garbutt, N. (1999) *Mammals of Madagascar with recent changes as adopted by Mittermeier et al (2006) Lemurs of Madagascar.*

Japanese Squirrel

Sciurus lis

We had great views of one at Karuizawa.

(Hokkaido) Red Fox

Vulpes vulpes

We had daily sightings of small numbers whilst on Hokkaido.

Largha (Spotted) Seal

Phoca largha

We enjoyed several sightings at Nosappu.

Harbour (Common) Seal

Phoca vitulina

We had good views of one along the Notsuke Peninsula.

Japanese Macaque

Macaca fuscata

We enjoyed wonderful encounters with the "Snow Monkeys" at Jigokudandi where we observed a troop of over 50 individuals.

Sika Deer

Cervus Nippon

Small numbers were seen daily whilst on Hokkaido.

Whale sp.

A whale was seen off the Nosappu point.

ANNOTATED LIST OF REPTILES (1 Species seen)

Marsh Terrapin

Siebenrockiella crassicollis

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