



ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Japan

Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding

14th February to 3rd March 2017 (18 days)

Trip Report



Blakiston's Fish Owl by Dennis Braddy

Tour Leaders: Glen Valentine & Bryan Shirley
Trip Report compiled by Glen Valentine

Top 10 Birds as voted by the tour participants:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Blakiston's Fishing Owl | 6) Japanese Murrelet |
| 2) Steller's Sea Eagle | 7) Japanese Accentor |
| 3) Red-crowned Crane | 8) Japanese Green Woodpecker |
| 4) Hooded Crane | 9) Chinese Penduline Tit |
| 5) White-naped Crane | 10) Brown-cheeked Rail |

Top 5 mammals as voted by the tour participants:

- 1) Japanese Macaque (Snow Monkey)
- 2) Japanese Marten
- 3) Japanese Squirrel
- 4) Red Fox
- 5) Sika Deer



Steller's Sea Eagle by Dennis Braddy



Tour Summary

The wondrous winter wonderland of Japan once again revealed its beauty and superb birds during our eighteen-day, comprehensive tour of this unique, vibrant, ultra-modern and hi-tech, scenically spectacular, friendly, hospitable and bird-rich country. Japan, especially during the winter months, is a birding trip like no other and the avian highlights experienced during this tour were quite simply unrivalled. Of the many fantastic species encountered, we were especially thrilled with the five species of crane (dancing Red-crowned Cranes in the snow, thousands of Hooded Cranes, hundreds of White-naped Cranes and several Common and Sandhill Cranes), the magnificent Blakiston's Fish Owl, hundreds of regal Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles littered across the pack-ice at Rausu, around a thousand



Hooded Cranes flying in at dawn by Sue Walsh

Baikal Teal, the spectacular Falcated and Mandarin Ducks, the elegant Smew, a glorious male Baer's Pochard, the stunning and endemic Copper and Japanese Green Pheasants, the scarce Brown-cheeked Rail, Long-billed Plover, Saunders's Gull, 8 species of auk (that included Least and Crested Auklets, Japanese Murrelet and Spectacled Guillemot), White-bellied Green Pigeon, Japanese Green and White-backed Woodpeckers, Chinese Penduline Tit, White's Thrush, Japanese Accentor, Japanese Grosbeak, Grey Bunting and Long-tailed Rosefinch. *Phew, what a selection of mega-species!* This was our adventure...

On a crisp February evening, we landed at Kushiro Airport in southern Hokkaido, Japan's northern-most island, where our comprehensive birding adventure around Japan began. A little sprinkling of snow filled the air and settled on the frigid ground. Our fantastic driver, Sesake San, was there to meet us, and soon we had all the bags and participants (this is an important one) bundled into the spacious bus and were heading towards our accommodation in downtown Kushiro. Our arrival at our hotel was in the early evening and after a delicious dinner at a nearby restaurant, we were all settled in for a good night's rest in preparation for the many wonderful birds and experiences in store for us over the next two and a half weeks.

Our first full day on Hokkaido began with the most beautiful day imaginable. It was bright, sunny, still, crisp and clear. *Absolutely stellar!* Before departing our hotel for the Red-crowned Crane grounds a little further north, we decided to have a quick look at the nearby river and here we found several common and widespread, but still enjoyable, new trip species such as Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, Slaty-backed Gull and Common Golden-eye. Departing



Red-crowned Cranes by Dennis Braddy



Kushiro, we made our way north towards Tsurui, where our first stop was at a small river where around eighty Red-crowned Cranes had gathered in the gorgeous, golden light of the early morning. *What a spectacle and the perfect way to begin our birding tour through Japan!* We admired these handsome birds for some time before continuing to our next crane site. A short, unexpected stop en route had us piling out of the bus for a Crested Kingfisher perched at the edge of a stream, which we admired in the



Sika Deer by Dennis Braddy

scopes. This is a fairly localised and scarce species throughout Asia and especially so in Japan! After enjoying the kingfisher, we arrived at our second Red-crowned Crane area for the morning and were not disappointed, as around fifty cranes were milling around the snow-covered fields. Several more flew in soon after we arrived and performed their neck-stooping and wing-mantling displays as they did so. Others danced and pranced around each other while bugling all the while – *an experience like no other and one that we will no doubt all cherish forever!* A pair of the striking, white-headed race of Long-tailed Tit fed in the nearby trees along with several Marsh Tits, providing good views.

Thereafter, we drove for several hours through snow-covered plains and forests with the most spectacular background scenery imaginable before ducking into a convenience store for our first of many on-the-go lunches. The food selection at these truly convenient and abundant stores is quite impressive indeed and there is always a range of items for everyone, and most importantly, hot coffee! A short while later, we'd arrived at our scheduled birding site for the afternoon: the Notsuke Hanto peninsula. Here we stopped at several vantage points and scanned out across the open ocean and managed to find Black and White-winged Scoters, Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, Red-necked Grebe, several Spectacled Guillemots, Ancient Murrelet, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Golden-eye, as well as Glaucous, Slaty-backed and Glaucous-winged Gulls.

In the mid-afternoon, we left the peninsula and continued the journey north towards the small, coastal village of Rausu and our base for the next two nights. On the way, we added Brown Dipper to the ever-growing list and also made a stop at the edge of town to admire the dozens of Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles that were sitting out on the pack-ice that had built up offshore. *What an incredible spectacle this was and no doubt one of the absolute highlights of the trip!* Upon arrival in town, we still had about twenty minutes of birdable light left in the late afternoon and so we decided to pull into the harbour to admire the eagles from a different angle and to see what else might be sheltering in the protected waters of the



Spectacled Guillemot by Glen Valentine



harbour. This proved to be a magical move, as almost immediately upon scanning, we picked out several tiny birds bobbing up and down on the water. They were auks, but were the size of sparrows...Least Auklets! *Unreal!* There turned out to be at least two hundred of these miniscule *alcids* all decked out across the harbour. They were rather flighty, though, and swarms of up to 60 at a time would rise into



Brown Dipper by Dennis Braddy

pull an all-nighter to see this once mythical beauty. Fortunately, we were in luck this evening as within an hour of waiting, a handsome, adult Blakiston's Fish Owl appeared right at the edge of the small pond in the spot-lights and stayed around for several minutes, thereby affording us unbeatable and breathtaking views of this magnificent species. This had to be the most incredible day's birding either Bryan or I have ever had in Japan and one that we'll never forget! On an all-time high, it took us all ages to fall asleep due to the adrenalin levels that had built up over the past few hours!

the air and then crash back into the water a few hundred meters away. As if this wasn't enough, there were also three Crested Auklets, an even rarer winter visitor to north-eastern Japanese waters and a lifer for both of the leaders! *Wow, what an amazing day and it wasn't over yet!*

After checking into our lovely, warm and comfortable hotel at the edge of town, we enjoyed a mind-blowing Japanese feast before heading off to the nearby guest house where our Blakiston's Fish Owl stake-out would begin. Sightings of the owls at this world-famous site had become rather erratic and unpredictable over the past two years, and we were all well aware that there was the potential of having to

The next day, we woke up to another gorgeous day, beginning with a pre-breakfast outing back to Rausu Harbour just after dawn to admire the Sea Eagles once again and see what else might be hanging out at this bird-rich and rarity-producing site. The Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles were just spectacular in the morning light, with around two hundred Steller's and a hundred or so White-tailed Sea Eagles decked out across the ice just off the pier at the edge of the harbour. The photographic opportunities were superb and the supporting cast of Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Common Golden-eye, Black Scoter, Glaucous, Vega, Slaty-backed and Glaucous-winged Gulls, Carrion and Large-billed Crows and Whooper Swans were wonderful too.

The remainder of the day saw us birding Notsuke Hanto again and today we had the time to venture all the way to the visitor's centre at the end of the road. We encountered many of the same species as seen the previous afternoon, but were rewarded with



Spotted (Largha) Seal by Dennis Braddy



better, closer views of Spectacled Guillemot and Ancient Murrelet. Flocks of Grey-capped Greenfinches and Eurasian Siskins brought some excitement on the passerine side of things but we were, unfortunately, unable to find the flock of Snow Buntings that had been reported by a group of Japanese photographers and birders that were there at the same time as us. We did also encounter several of the very cute and



Steller's Sea Eagle by Dennis Braddy

endearing Red Fox (native here!) and large herds of Sika Deer standing out in the snowy fields. With the Fish Owl under the belt, we managed to have an earlier night this evening and were able to utilise and enjoy the wonderful onsen at our delightful hotel.

After another elaborate and tasty breakfast, we departed the tranquil little town of Rausu and began making our way south towards Nemuro, where we had a midday date with a pelagic boat trip outing. Our three-hour boat trip offshore proved extremely productive, as we managed to obtain excellent, close views of many different species of auk that included more Least Auklets, Ancient Murrelets and Spectacled Guillemots, as well as Common

and Thick-billed Murres and Pigeon Guillemot. We also found our first of many eye-catching Falcated Ducks of the trip, while several Spotted (Largha) Seals were seen on a rocky island offshore. Almost as soon as we returned to the mainland, we were greeted by a light sprinkling of rain and this continued for most of the rest of the afternoon.

The next day, we journeyed south towards Cape Kiritappu. The weather had unfortunately changed for the worse overnight and we were greeted by a strong, icy wind and intermittent rain throughout the day. Our morning's quest for Asian Rosy Finch proved fruitless and extremely hard work on the Kiritappu headland in the howling wind. We did, however, enjoy our closest views of White-winged Scoter, while a large flock of Brant Goose sheltering in a secluded bay was a great bonus. We decided to cut our losses at Kiritappu in the late morning, and instead had a look at a hide/feeder area near Lake Furen. This short detour proved rewarding, as an array of woodland species were watched coming into the feeders from the hide, and included several boldly patterned Hawfinches, Marsh and Japanese Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch and a family group of the very attractive Eurasian Bullfinch.

In the afternoon, we pushed through to Cape Nosappu to do a sea-watch and target the rare and range-restricted Red-faced Cormorant. Scanning out to sea in some fairly choppy ocean produced a lovely Black-throated Loon that performed well for all, as well as Red-necked Grebe, large numbers of Ancient Murrelet and Spectacled



Red Fox by Dennis Braddy



Guillemot, one Pigeon Guillemot and good numbers of the other more common and familiar oceanic species. Finally, in the late afternoon, after waiting for quite some time in the frigid wind, a single Red-faced Cormorant flew in for all to admire at close range. *Happy days!* With our main target for the peninsula in the bag and in the dwindling light and increasing cold, we departed Nosappu for the warmth and comfort of our hotel in Nemuro town and another fine dinner (or supper, late high-tea or even early midnight feast depending on where you're from).

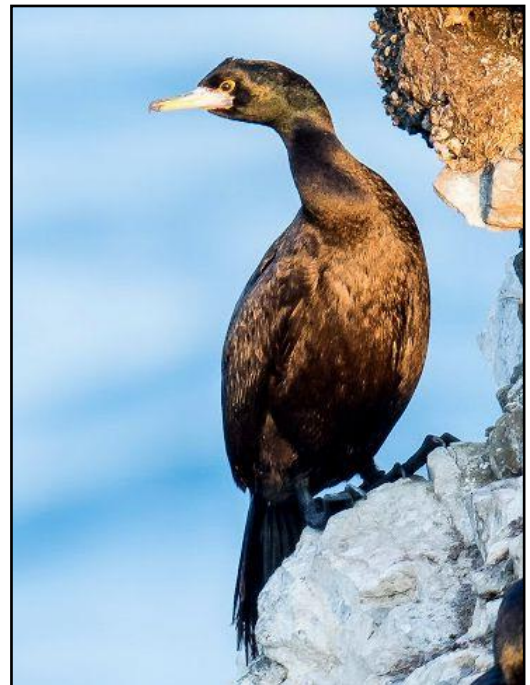


White-tailed Eagle by Glen Valentine

Sadly, it was time to leave behind the beautiful, snow-covered Hokkaido and continue our epic Japan adventure with a flight to our next island, the largest of Japan's several thousand islands, the island of Honshu. Our morning's flight took us into Haneda and from there we hastily departed the sprawling city of Tokyo and began the scenic drive inland, towards our destination for the next three nights, a wonderful onsen hotel in the small mountain village of Karuizawa. We arrived at our

accommodation in the late afternoon and immediately had a look at the feeder, where we were blown away to find a pair of the rare and often elusive Japanese Accentor hopping on and around the feeders along with the immaculate Varied, Japanese, Willow and Long-tailed Tits, Grey-capped Greenfinch, Meadow Bunting, Pale Thrush, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and the distinctive *japonicas* subspecies of Eurasian Jay. After enjoying this initial flurry of wonderful bird activity that would be a constant feature of this fantastic venue, some of us decided to embark on a short, pre-dinner stroll around the surrounding wooded suburb, and this proved most worthwhile, as we located and enjoyed superb scope views of a handsome male Japanese Green Woodpecker that can sometimes be a tricky species to find.

Our two full days in the Karuizawa area were punctuated with many fabulous sightings as we birded a range of habitats and areas in and around the town, as well as surrounding sites that were only several minutes' drive away. The Toden area proved, as usual, to be worthwhile and an afternoon visit there yielded three female Smew (Redheads), a male Japanese Green Pheasant, a female Long-tailed Rosefinch, Japanese Wagtail and the rare and erratic Long-billed Plover, as well as many more common and widespread but no less enjoyable species, such as Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, Common Merganser, Little and Great Crested Grebes, Great Cormorant and Bull-headed Shrike.



Red-faced Cormorant by Dennis Braddy

We also ventured down to the Myogi Lake area in search of Mandarin Ducks, but these seem to have left this area that



used to be a famous site for them. However, the surrounding scrub and bamboo did give us Rustic Bunting, more Long-tailed Rosefinches and a furtive covey of Chinese Bamboo Partridge.



Varied Tit by Dennis Braddy

The wooded trails and roads in and around Karuizawa were, however, the main focal points of our stay in this beautiful, tranquil and scenic area; and while birding these areas, we managed to turn up most of Karuizawa's specialities. Japanese Pygmy and Green Woodpeckers were encountered again, along with numerous Great Spotted Woodpeckers. Several female Red-flanked Bluetails flitted about the stream edges, along with the occasional pair of Long-tailed Rosefinch and another pair of Japanese Accentor. Small mixed feeding flocks held every species of tit for the area, as well as Eurasian Wren, Eurasian Treecreeper and Eurasian Nuthatch. The area's main target, though, the beautiful and endemic Copper Pheasant, proved elusive as always and it took several searches along icy trails and roads and in the freezing, early morning before we finally encountered two females that flushed from a snow-caked side-track and flew past us before alighting on a nearby slope, affording everyone with good binocular or scope views. *Fantastic, and what a huge relief!* Back at the hotel feeders, we were thrilled to find a group of four Japanese Grosbeaks, as well as fairly large numbers of Eurasian Siskin.

After a delightful stay at Karuizawa, we drove into the Nagano prefecture and spent the afternoon admiring and enjoying the Snow Monkey (Japanese Macaque) spectacle at Jigokudani. This was certainly a highlight for many of the group and we watched them cavorting in the snow, while others jumped in and out of the steamy hot springs. Being surrounded by over two hundred of these endearing creatures as they go about their business completely unperturbed by one's presence, all the while surrounded by some of Japan's most beautiful and scenic landscape, really is a fabulous and unforgettable experience.

Our final area of interest on this trip on the island of Honshu was the western coastline of Kaga, near the city of Komatsu on the Sea of Japan side of the island. This area harbours many permanent lakes and wetlands, as well as extensive fields that are all regular wintering grounds for many species of migrant waterfowl, and the likes of Katano Kamo Ike and Kaho Kugata Lake literally teem with waterbirds during the winter months. Our first port of call in this area was the latter lake, and here we were delighted to find a gorgeous male and female Smew, along with fair numbers of Falcated Duck and many of the usual suspects. We also enjoyed excellent, unobstructed views of a stunning male Japanese Green Pheasant feeding



Meadow Bunting by Dennis Braddy



at the edge of the reedbeds. Several visits to the Sai River in Kanazawa city failed to turn up the Scaly-sided Merganser that had been reported several weeks prior to our trip, but we did find more Japanese Wagtails and Brown Dippers here, as well as several species of more common waterfowl, including many Common Merganser, the very attractive Daurian Redstart, flocks of Meadow and Rustic Buntings, Grey-



**Japanese Macaque (Snow Monkey) by
Dennis Braddy**

capped Greenfinches and White-cheeked Starlings, Long-tailed Tit, Dusky Thrush, Japanese Bush Warbler, Hawfinch, Peregrine Falcon overhead, two Azure-winged Magpies and a surprise Long-billed Plover. We also spent one early morning scanning out to see along the Kaga coastline, where we managed to spot two Red-throated Loons (Divers), Black-tailed Gull and an unexpected White-tailed Eagle.

Thereafter, we drove the short distance to the Katano Kamo Ike Observatory, where we spent a very productive hour marvelling at the thousands of waterfowl crammed onto the small lake. Staggering numbers of Baikal Teal, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Teal and Mallard were present, along with smaller numbers of Taiga and Tundra Bean Goose, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, Tufted Duck, two pairs of Smew and a pair of Falcated Duck. The extensive fields around Komatsu held several hundred Tundra Swans comprised mostly of the *bewickii* subspecies (Bewick's Swan) with

one *coloumbianus* (Whistling Swan) bird also being present. Here we also managed to connect with Grey-headed Lapwings and Eastern Buzzard; while a short stop at another nearby lake gave us a handsome male American Wigeon, as well as two Eastern Marsh Harriers in flight high overhead.

After a very rewarding time on Honshu, we made our way to Komatsu Airport to connect with our flight back to Haneda and then onto Fukuoka, a large city in north-western Kyushu. Upon arriving in Fukuoka, we boarded our third and final bus of the tour and began the drive south towards Yatsushiro. Unfortunately, our flight had been delayed by an hour and we therefore had minimal time at the mudflats in order to search for Saunders's Gulls and other goodies, so we made a cursory stop at the estuary, but vowed to return the next afternoon. From Yatsushiro, we drove through the early evening to arrive at our hotel in Izumi in time for dinner.



Japanese Macaque (Snow Monkeys) by Glen Valentine

The next two days saw us venturing out into the fields and crane feeding area at Arasaki, as well as visiting the Sendai Power Plant Lake and returning to the Yatsushiro mudflats. These two days provided us with some of the best general birding of the entire trip and also showcased the remarkable Hooded and White-naped Crane spectacle that did not disappoint and was, as always, truly jaw-dropping to witness and experience.





Japanese Wagtail by Dennis Braddy

Arriving at the extensive, fallow agricultural fields at Arasaki, we were greeted by the bugling and swarming of thousands of Hooded Cranes and hundreds of White-naped Cranes as some pranced around, calling and feeding, while others were seen flying in across the gorgeous, orange sunrise. *What a sight! What an experience! Birding in Japan at its best!* After being completely satiated with the cranes, we ventured deeper into the fields where we encountered a wealth of other great species, as well as more cranes that included both Common and Sandhill Cranes, both of which are now regular, annual visitors here in very small numbers. Other highlights included several Daurian Jackdaws with one adult in

classic black-and-white plumage, flocks of Rooks, Russet Sparrows and Northern Lapwings, Buff-bellied Pipit, singing and displaying Eurasian Skylarks, Common Reed, Meadow and Black-faced Buntings, Japanese Bush Warbler and a further three Japanese Grosbeaks drinking at the edge of a small, tree-fringed pond. We were also thrilled to find several of the region's scarcer winter visitors like Merlin, Northern Goshawk, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Hen Harrier and Short-eared Owl; while at a nearby, reed-fringed river, we encountered a mixed flock of Black-faced and Eurasian Spoonbills, Common Kingfisher, Common Snipe, several Chestnut-eared Buntings, a few wonderful male Daurian Redstarts and also finally managed to find the scarce and shy Brown-cheeked Rail and the wintering reed-specialist, Chinese Penduline Tit. *Fantastic!*

On our first afternoon, we returned to Yatsushiro where the estuary and mudflats teemed with birds. We scanned over and over through the hordes of Dunlin, Mew, Vega, Black-headed and Black-tailed Gulls, Grey Plovers and Great Cormorants to try and pick out something different. Our efforts did turn up a few Kentish Plovers, two Slaty-backed Gulls, Western Osprey, another small flock of Black-faced Spoonbill, around fifty Common Shelducks and a few Eurasian Curlews. The star bird, however, was certainly the ten or so Saunders's Gulls that were watched at close range and in the scopes, where we were able to enjoy and admire them in every possible stage of plumage, from full breeding dress to non-breeding adults and juveniles. *A great afternoon and such superb views of one of the world's rarest gulls!*

Our final afternoon in the Izumi area had us visiting the deep-water lake near the Sendai Power Plant, and here we were delighted to find a loose flock of nine Mandarin Ducks that comprised both males and females. Several other more common waterfowl species were also present, but we did not find anything else too notable, other than a huge surprise in the form of a Japanese Weasel (Marten) that scurried around at the edge of the lake for a



Saunders's Gull by Glen Valentine



short while before disappearing into the woods.



Hooded Crane by Dennis Braddy

afternoon. Although we only had about two hours of birdable light, we made the most of it and managed to find several of the area's specialities that included Yellow-throated and Grey Buntings, Varied Tit, the unique *roseilia* race of Eurasian Nuthatch and a wonderful pair of White's Thrush.

The Miike area and coastline around Hyuga would be the final destination of our Japan in winter birding tour, and we undoubtedly made the most of our time here, managing to find a number of very special avian beauties. *Our day trip down to Hyuga certainly produced its share of stoking birds!* The morning kicked off with a short boat trip around Kadogawa Bay and Harbour, where we found a staggering nineteen Japanese Murrelets that all showed extremely well right next to the boat. *What a fantastic start to the day!* Thereafter, we visited the nearby Umagase Peninsula, where we managed to locate another seventeen Japanese Murrelet, as well as a single Japanese Wood Pigeon. This scarce and unobtrusive pigeon is essentially restricted to small offshore islands, but occasionally visits forested promontories, and we were thrilled and extremely fortunate to have had saturation, walk-away views of this mega near-endemic!

In the early afternoon, we departed the Hyuga area and made our way south through the intermittent rain towards the Hitotsuse Estuary in Myazaki city, where we spent the remainder of the afternoon before heading back to Miike. The estuarine mudflats produced rafts of Dunlin, a small flock of Sanderling, lots of Grey and Kentish Plovers and a single Lesser Sand Plover; while a scan of the nearby pan yielded several Common Shelduck, a number of other familiar waterfowl species and yet another flock of Black-faced Spoonbill, along with a single Eurasian Spoonbill that seemed a little confused as it joined in with the Black-faced varieties for a round of allopreening. Bull-headed Shrike, Daurian Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush and Black-



White-naped Cranes by Dennis Braddy



faced and Common Reed Buntings flitted about the edge of the wetland and when the rain set in once more in the late afternoon, we called it a day and began the drive back to our divine and homely guesthouse/onsen back at Miike. We were treated to another fabulous Japanese feast this evening and the hot water of the onsen sure felt good after a long but superb day in the field.



Red-flanked Bluetail by Dennis Braddy

Our final morning around Lake Miike ended up being a most enjoyable and bird-rich morning indeed, especially considering how the morning began with dreadfully overcast and rainy weather rolling in. It cleared beautifully by around nine o'clock, with the warm spring-like sun radiating out from behind the once grey clouds. With the delightful turnaround in weather came a flurry of bird activity that revealed the likes of Japanese Pygmy and White-backed Woodpeckers, Olive-backed Pipit, Japanese, Varied and Long-tailed Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Daurian Redstart, some really close and confiding Yellow-throated Buntings and a stunning male Red-flanked Bluetail. What a fabulous end to our time at Miike and our stay on Kyushu, and it was with rather heavy hearts that we made our way down to Miyazaki to connect with our onward flights back to Tokyo.

This evening, we enjoyed a scrumptious traditional Japanese Okonomiyaki dinner at a nearby restaurant while managing to put away several bottles of red in celebrating a most enjoyable and successful Rockjumper birding adventure through Japan.

The next morning, we bid our farewells and those with time to spare before their international flights were fortunate to be able to successfully chase the male Baer's Pochard that had been hanging out at a small pond in northern Tokyo. *What a superb end to the trip!*

Thank you to everyone involved: our wonderful and entertaining guests, excellent and friendly drivers, welcoming and hospitable hotel staff and lastly to Bryan, my good friend and colleague. We couldn't have pulled this trip off without you!



Japanese Murrelet by Dennis Braddy



Annotated Checklists of Birds & Mammals

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS

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

(96 species seen and 1 heard only on the Ryukyu Islands Extension)

(200 species seen on both tours combined)

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows the IOC List 6.4. Please cite: Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2016. Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press. Names in round brackets represent alternative names for the species. A notes section is included where recent taxonomical changes have taken place.

Key to abbreviations:

(E): an endemic species

(NE): a near-endemic species

(BE): a breeding endemic species

(I): an introduced species

CR: Critically endangered

EN: endangered

VU: vulnerable

NT: Near threatened

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

Brant Goose

Branta bernicla

Around 200 seen near Kiritappu.

Taiga Bean Goose

Anser fabalis

Around forty birds were seen at Katano Kamo Ike.

NOTE: Formerly lumped with the next species as Bean Goose.

Tundra Bean Goose

Anser serrirostris

Around sixty birds were found at Katano Kamo Ike.

NOTE: Formerly lumped with the latter species as Bean Goose.

Greater White-fronted Goose

Anser albifrons

Six seen near Komatsu and another one found at Arasaki.

Tundra Swan

Cygnus columbianus

Several flocks estimated at around 600 birds were seen in the Komatsu area.

NOTE: There are two very distinctive races of Tundra Swan: *C. bewickii* & *C. columbianus* that are sometimes split as separate species: Bewick's Swan and Whistling Swan respectively. We encountered hundreds of *bewickii* and one *columbianus* during the trip. Neither Clements nor IOC accepts this split.

Whooper Swan

Cygnus Cygnus

Small flocks were seen daily on Hokkaido.

Common Shelduck

Tadorna tadorna

Small flocks were seen around Yatsushiro and Myazaki on Kyushu.

Mandarin Duck

Aix galericulata

9 of these stunners were scoped at the Sendai Power Plant Lake with a further 50+ birds at the Satsuma River.

Gadwall

Anas strepera

One seen at Usui Lake with a few more at Katano Kamo Ike and in the Yatsushiro area.



Falcated Duck - NT

Anas falcata

These magnificent ducks were seen in small numbers at five separate localities on all three main islands.

Eurasian Wigeon

Anas penelope

Good numbers were seen at most wetlands throughout the trip.

American Wigeon

Anas Americana

A single, handsome male was seen very well at a lake in the Komatsu area.

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Huge numbers were encountered at most wetlands.

Eastern Spot-billed Duck

Anas zonorhyncha

Seen in good numbers throughout the trip.

NOTE: Fairly recently split from Spot-billed Duck, along with Indian Spot-billed Duck.

Northern Shoveler

Anas clypeata

Small numbers seen at a few different wetlands.

Northern Pintail

Anas acuta

Commonly seen throughout the trip.

Baikal Teal

Anas formosa

A staggering 800+ birds, many of which were stunning males, were scoped at Katano Kamo Ike.

Eurasian (Common/Green-winged) Teal

Anas crecca

Common throughout!

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

Common Pochard

Aythya ferina

Small numbers were seen on 8 separate days.

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

Seen at most wetlands throughout the tour.

Greater Scaup

Aythya marila

Only seen on Hokkaido where it was seen daily in small numbers.

Harlequin Duck

Histrionicus histrionicus

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

White-winged Scoter

Melanitta deglandi

Two seen off Notsuke Hanto, two off Nemuro and another two off Kiritappu.

NOTE: We encountered the *stejnegeri* subspecies that is sometimes split as Stejneger's Scoter. Neither Clements nor IOC accepts this split.

Black Scoter - NT

Melanitta americana

Large numbers were encountered daily off the Hokkaido coastline. Another 10 were later seen off the Kaga coast.

NOTE: Black and Common Scoter's are now split as separate species by both Clements and IOC.

Long-tailed Duck - VU

Clangula hyemalis

This smart duck was seen in fair numbers (up to 100 in one day) on several occasions off the Hokkaido coastline.

Common Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

On Hokkaido it was seen daily in fair numbers.

Smew

Mergellus albellus

Always a crowd-pleaser! This elegant (both the male and female) duck was seen well on three dates with a total of 9 birds (3 males and 6 females)

Common Merganser (Goosander)

Mergus merganser

Seen daily off the Hokkaido coastline and on several occasions thereafter.

Red-breasted Merganser

Mergus serrator



Slightly scarcer than the previous species and more oceanic, we encountered small to large numbers on every day during our time on Hokkaido.

Pheasants, Grouse & Allies Phasianidae

Chinese Bamboo Partridge (I)

Bambusicola thoracicus

Around eight of these scarce and shy partridges were seen briefly as they scurried off the verge edge in the Myogi area of Honshu.

Copper Pheasant – NT (E)

Syrnaticus soemmerringi

After a mammoth search, we finally found two females that flushed up from next to a snow-covered track in the Karuizawa area. One of the birds landed on a snowy slope and then scurried away. Everyone enjoyed good binocular or scope views though! Fantastic!

(Japanese) Green (Ring-necked) Pheasant (E)

Phasianus versicolor

A total of five superb males and a single female were seen during our time on Honshu and Kyushu.

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

Loons Gaviidae

Red-throated Loon (Diver)

Gavia stellata

Two birds showed well in the scopes off Kaga.

Black-throated (Arctic) Loon (Diver)

Gavia arctica

A singleton was scoped at length off Cape Nosappu.

Grebes Podicipedidae

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

Seen in small numbers on 9 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 recognises one species, Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*.

Red-necked Grebe

Podiceps grisegena

A single bird was seen off Notsuke Hanto with another showing better off Cape Nosappu.

Great Crested Grebe

Podiceps cristatus

Small numbers were encountered at scattered wetlands on five days of the trip.

Black-necked (Eared) Grebe

Podiceps nigricollis

Around 15 seen at Kahokugata Lake with another bird in the Myazaki area.

Ibises & Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

Eurasian Spoonbill

Platalea leucorodia

Excellent views of several birds on four dates on Kyushu.

Black-faced Spoonbill - EN

Platalea minor

Amazing numbers and regular sightings were had of this usually rare species during our time on Kyushu with a total of 35 seen on 5 dates!

Bitterns & Herons Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Several seen on our final morning during our Baer's Pochard twitch in northern Tokyo.

Eastern Cattle Egret

Bubulcus coromandus

Two seen at a pond in the Myazaki area.



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

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Small numbers were seen daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

(Eastern) Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Small numbers were seen daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

NOTE: Sometimes split as Eastern and Western Great Egrets but neither IOC nor Clements accepts this split.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Small numbers were seen on a few occasions during the final week of the tour on Kyushu.

Cormorants & Shags Phalacrocoracidae

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Encountered daily on Hokkaido where large numbers were found. Also seen off the western Honshu coast.

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*

After a long and cold wait, we finally had a single bird flew into a cormorant roost at Cape Nosappu. We then obtained fantastic scope views in the fading late afternoon light.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen commonly at inland lakes, rivers and estuaries.

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

Japanese (Temminck's) Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

Small numbers were seen on rocky coastlines on Hokkaido and western Honshu.

NOTE: Originally lumped with Great Cormorant.

Ospreys Pandionidae

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Small numbers were seen almost daily on Kyushu. Several also seen on the Yatsushiro mudflats.

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

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Singletons were encountered during our time on Kyushu.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

We had wonderful views of an adult at Arasaki with another soaring bird at the Satsuma River.

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*

Two seen soaring high up over a lake in the Komatsu area.

NOTE: This species was formally lumped with Western Marsh Harrier as Eurasian Marsh Harrier.

Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*

A female was seen in low, quartering flight over the Arasaki fields.

NOTE: This species was formally lumped with Northern Harrier of the new world.

Black (Black-eared) Kite *Milvus migrans*

Small numbers were encountered on every single day of the tour!

NOTE: Often split into three species: Black Kite, Yellow-billed Kite and Black-eared Kite. IOC accepts the Black and Yellow-billed Kite splits but neither Clements nor IOC accept the Black-eared Kite *M. lineatus* split.

White-tailed (Sea) Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

This impressive raptor was seen daily in large numbers on Hokkaido with a peak count of 120 around Rausu. We also saw an adult high overhead at Komtasu.

Steller's Sea Eagle - VU *Haliaeetus pelagicus*



Undoubtedly one of the world's most spectacular raptors! We were delighted to find large numbers (between 10 and 260 birds daily!) on Hokkaido with peak numbers on the pack ice around Rausu.

Eastern (Common) Buzzard

Buteo japonicus

Singletons were seen on most days of the trip.

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 recognises one species: Common Buzzard *B. buteo*.

Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae

Brown-cheeked (Eastern Water) Rail

Rallus indicus

Superb scope views were had of a single bird in the early morning as it preened in the open for several minutes at the edge of a reedbed. Great spotting Ruth!

NOTE:

Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

Seen in small numbers at most wetlands on Honshu and Kyushu.

NOTE: Common Moorhen's been recently split into two species: Common Moorhen (old world) and Common Gallinule (new world).

Eurasian (Common) Coot

Fulica atra

Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Cranes Gruidae

Sandhill Crane

Grus canadensis

A total of four birds were seen on both days in the Arasaki area. These birds probably relate to the NE Russian breeding population which are now annual in Japan.

White-naped Crane - VU

Grus vipio

Large numbers (over 150 birds daily) of this migratory species were seen during our time at Arasaki.

Red-crowned (Japanese) Crane - EN

Grus japonensis

We enjoyed superb views of around 60 dancing birds on one morning near Tsurui. A further 80 birds were seen at a nearby river just after dawn and around another 20 were found while driving along various roads in the same general area. Once a very rare species in Japan, the population has gradually increased to around 1000 birds!

Common Crane

Grus grus

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

Hooded Crane - VU

Grus monacha

Large numbers (around 9000 birds) were enjoyed during our time at Arasaki.

Stilts & Avocets Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt

Himantopus himantopus

A single bird was seen at a small wetland near Miyazaki.

Plovers & Lapwings Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing

Vanellus vanellus

Groups and pairs were encountered in the grasslands at Arasaki, including a large flock of 60.

Grey-headed Lapwing

Vanellus cinereus

We were thrilled to find a flock of 20 of these generally scarce (especially in Japan), migratory lapwings in a field near Komatsu. The following day, another 6 birds were seen in the same area.



Grey (Black-bellied) Plover*Pluvialis squatarola*

Fairly large numbers were seen at various coastal mudflat localities on Kyushu.

Long-billed Plover*Charadrius placidus*

A single bird was found and scoped at length at the Toden River near Karuizawa with another individual seen briefly at the Sai River. A rare and erratic species throughout its limited range!

Kentish Plover*Charadrius alexandrinus*

A few birds seen at Yatsushiro and Miyazaki.

Lesser Sand Plover*Charadrius mongolus*

A singleton was scoped at a mudflat in the Miyazaki area.

NOTE: Several distinctive subspecies exist that are sometimes split into separate species. At least the eastern subspecies *mongolus* and *stegmanni* and the western subspecies of *atrifrons* are often split as separate species: Mongolian and Lesser Sand Plovers respectively. Neither IOC nor Clements accepts these splits and the two subspecies, although very distinctive in breeding plumage, are indistinguishable in non-breeding plumage. All three subspecies are recorded in Japan.

Snipes, Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae**Solitary Snipe***Gallinago solitaria*

Unfortunately, this rare wader was only seen briefly by some of the group along a vegetated side-stream in the Karuizawa area. A rare and seldom-seen species throughout its range!

Common Snipe*Gallinago gallinago*

Small numbers were seen on four consecutive days on Kyushu.

Eurasian Curlew - NT*Numenius arquata*

Five birds were seen at Yatsushiro Estuary.

Common Greenshank*Tringa nebularia*

Two separate birds were seen during our time on Kyushu.

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus*

Singletons were seen daily while on Kyushu.

Common Sandpiper*Tringa hypoleucos*

Small numbers were seen daily on Kyushu.

Sanderling*Calidris alba*

Distant scope views were had of ten birds at the Hitotsuse mudflats in the Miyazaki area.

Dunlin*Calidris alpina*

Hundreds were seen at Yatsushiro with further large flocks elsewhere on Kyushu.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Laridae**Black-legged Kittiwake***Rissa tridactyla*

We were delighted to encounter a single bird in flight during our pelagic trip off Nemuro.

Black-headed Gull*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers seen on four dates on Honshu and Kyushu.

Saunders's Gull*Chroicocephalus saundersi*

We were thrilled to have excellent scope views and close fly-bys of around 10 of these scarce and localised gulls at the Yatsushiro mudflats. Every possible plumage variation was seen from juveniles to non-breeding, partial breeding and full breeding plumage individuals. Absolutely fantastic!

Black-tailed Gull*Larus crassirostris*

Fair numbers were seen on the west Honshu and Kyushu coastlines.

Mew (Common) Gull*Larus canus*

Common on Hokkaido with further large numbers at Yatsushiro and a few more in eastern Kyushu.

NOTE: Mew Gull is sometimes split into two species: Mew and Common Gulls respectively. Neither IOC nor Clements



accept these splits as yet. If split, the birds we saw on this tour refer to Common Gull and are sometimes even split further as Kamchatka Gull.

Glaucous-winged Gull

Larus glaucescens

This large, white and pale-grey gull was encountered fairly regularly on Hokkaido with our first sightings near Rausu. Up to 30 were seen daily.

Glaucous Gull

Larus hyperboreus

These large, white gulls were seen in good numbers were seen daily on Hokkaido with up to 100 in one day.

Vega (Herring) Gull

Larus vegae

First seen in Tokyo, we later found this species near Rausu and throughout Honshu and Kyushu.

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 recognises one species: Herring Gull *L. argentatus*.

Slaty-backed Gull

Larus schistisagus

Large numbers seen daily on Hokkaido with another two scoped at Yatsushiro.

Auks Alcidae

Thick-billed Murre (Brunnich's Guillemot)

Uria lomvia

A total of eleven birds seen on four dates on Hokkaido.

Common Murre (Guillemot)

Uria aalge

A total of five seen on two dates on Hokkaido.

Pigeon Guillemot

Cephus columba

Three of these scarce winter visitors were seen at close range during our Nemuro boat trip.

Spectacled Guillemot

Cephus carbo

Almost unprecedented numbers of these fairly localised and usually fairly scarce alcids were seen during our time on Hokkaido with up to 200 on one day off Notsuke Hanto and seen on four consecutive dates. Good close views were also had during our Nemuro boat trip.

Ancient Murrelet

Synthliboramphus antiquus

Seen on four dates on Hokkaido with excellent views on our Nemuro pelagic trip and at least 100 off Cape Nosappu.

Japanese Murrelet - VU (NE)

Synthliboramphus wumizusume

We enjoyed fabulous close looks at this scarce species in Hyuga harbour where we had a total of 19 birds. Another 17 were scoped off the nearby Umagase Peninsula.

Least Auklet

Aethia pusilla

Several flocks (totalling around 200 birds) of these miniscule and usually scarce (at least in Japanese waters) auks were seen on our first afternoon in Rausu Harbour. Another twenty birds showed very well at close range during our Nemuro pelagic trip. Fantastic!

Crested Auklet

Aethia cristatella

Another major surprise and a lifer for both Glen and Bryan! We were absolutely blown away to find three of these scarce and range-restricted auks sheltering in Rausu Harbour on our first afternoon in the area. Incredible!

Rhinoceros Auklet

Cerorhinca monocerata

One of these auks was spotted and scoped off Notsuke Hanto while sea-scanning.

Pigeons & Doves Columbidae

Rock Dove (Common/Feral Pigeon) (I)

Columba livia

Widespread in urban areas throughout.

Japanese (Black) Wood Pigeon – NT (NE)

Columba janthina

While walking in a forested headland at Hyuga, we managed to spot one of these large and usually shy



pigeons that ended up feeding in the open on the forest floor until we eventually walked away from it!
A scarce pigeon of small, offshore islands that rarely visits coastal forests on the mainland.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

Common and seen daily throughout Honshu and Kyushu.

White-bellied Green Pigeon – NT *Treron sieboldii*

Seven seen in flight at the Satsuma River and another one seen briefly perched in the canopy at Miike.

Owls Strigidae

Blakiston's Fish Owl - EN *Bubo blakistoni*

We were delighted and quite blown away to have had amazing views of a magnificent adult for several minutes at the small river in front of Washi Noyado near Rausu, Hokkaido after only waiting for around an hour for the bird/s to come in. Sightings of this rare and once mythical owl have become a lot more irregular and infrequent at this world-renown site over the past few years and it is not unusual to have to wait from 7pm until around 3am to see one come into the viewing area.

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

A wonderful surprise! We enjoyed excellent flight views of one during the early morning over the Arasaki grasslands.

Swifts Apodidae

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

Around twenty seen at a bridge en route from Izumi to Sendai and another 6 between Miike and Miyazaki.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Singletons seen at scattered wetlands on Kyushu.

Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*

Superb scope views were had of this handsome species on a river north of Kushiro and along the Satsuma River.

Woodpeckers Picidae

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos kizuki*

Singletons and pairs were encountered throughout the Karuizawa area and around Miike.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

One seen on Hokkaido with several more around Karuizawa.

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

Fabulous views of a pair at Miike on our final morning there.

NOTE: We saw the namiyei race of White-backed Woodpecker on Kyushu, which is darker and closer in appearance to owstoni race on Amami than the races further north in Japan. Neither IOC nor Clements split any of the races of White-backed Woodpecker.

Japanese Green Woodpecker (E) *Picus awokera*

We had wonderful views of several daily at Karuizawa. Also seen in the Nakano area.

Falcons Falconidae

Common (Eurasian) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Single birds were seen on two dates on Honshu.

NOTE: Common Kestrel is usually split into two species: Common Kestrel (widespread) and Rock Kestrel of sub-equatorial



Africa.

Merlin

Falco columbarius

We enjoyed good scope views of one sitting in a field at Arasaki.

Peregrine Falcon

Falco peregrinus

Singletons and pairs were encountered on three dates on Honshu and Kyushu.

NOTE: Many distinctive subspecies of Peregrine Falcon exist, some of which have been split into separate species like Barbary Falcon. We encountered the very pale and large japonensis race on each occasion.

Shrikes Laniidae

Bull-headed Shrike

Lanius bucephalus

Seen in small numbers on most days.

Crows & Jays Corvidae

Eurasian Jay

Garrulus glandarius

Seen daily in small numbers in the Karuizawa and Nagano areas.

NOTE: We saw the distinctive japonica race of Eurasian Jay during this trip. Several visually distinctive races/subspecies occur throughout its range but none of these have been split as yet by either Clements or IOC.

Azure-winged Magpie

Cyanopica cyanus

A single bird flew past us en route to Jigokudani and we later enjoyed good views of two from the bus while driving through Kanazawa.

Daurian Jackdaw

Coloeus dauuricus

Six birds, including one classic black-and-white adult, were seen well in the scope during our first day in the Arasaki area. Another two were seen the next day. This is a scarce winter migrant to Japan from mainland China.

Rook

Corvus frugilegus

Hundreds of these crows were seen in the Arasaki and Izumi areas with a further large flock near Miike.

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

Tits & Chickadees Paridae

Coal Tit

Periparus ater

Seen commonly around Karuizawa.

Varied Tit

Poecile varius

This handsome tit was seen well on many occasions in the Karuizawa area and again around Lake Miike.

NOTE: Several distinctive subspecies exist, some of which have been split into separate species like Taiwan Varied Tit on Taiwan. We encountered the race *varius* on Honshu and Kyushu.

Marsh Tit

Poecile palustris

Several sightings were had on Hokkaido.

Willow Tit

Poecile montanus

Seen in good numbers around Karuizawa.

Japanese (Eastern Grey) Tit

Parus minor

Fair numbers were seen in wooded areas on most days of the tour.

NOTE: Both IOC and Clements now recognise 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

A small flock was finally found in reedbeds in the Arasaki area. Fantastic little birds!

Larks Alaudidae

Eurasian Skylark

Alauda arvensis

Large numbers were seen daily around Arasaki where several were singing and displaying overhead.

NOTE: The subspecies we saw on the trip refers to *A. japonica*, which is sometimes split as Japanese Skylark. Neither IOC nor Clements recognise this split.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Brown-eared Bulbul

Hypsipetes amaurotis

Good numbers were seen daily throughout the country.

NOTE: Several distinctive subspecies occur that may be split in future and we encountered *amaurotis* throughout the main tour.

Swallows & Martins Hirundinidae

Barn (European) Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Small flocks were seen in southern Kyushu.

Bush Warblers & Allies Cettiidae

Japanese Bush Warbler

Horornis diphone

Heard almost daily and seen on several occasions, especially in the Arasaki area.

Bushtits Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Tit

Aegithalos caudatus

Two of the white-headed subspecies were seen on Hokkaido, while small numbers were also encountered around Karuizawa and on Kyushu.

NOTE: The races we saw on this trip refer to *caudatus* (Hokkaido), *trivirgatus* (Honshu) and *kiusiuensis* (Kyushu). These races along with *magnus* of Korea are sometimes split off from Long-tailed Tit as Northern Long-tailed Tit. The races of *glaucoularis* and *Vinaceous* in eastern China are then split as Silver-throated Tit.

Laughingthrushes Leiothichidae

Red-billed Leiothrix (I)

Leiothrix lutea

At least two of these attractive laughingthrushes were seen briefly at Lake Miike on our final morning there.

Yuhinas, White-eyes & Allies Zosteropidae

Japanese White-eye

Zosterops japonicus

Small flocks were seen daily on Kyushu.

Wrens Troglodytidae

Eurasian Wren

Troglodytes troglodytes

Singleton's were seen daily around Karuizawa.

NOTE: Eurasian Wren was previously lumped with Winter Wren along with Pacific Wren. These splits are now recognised by both IOC and Clements.



Nuthatches Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch

Sitta europaea

Seen daily in small numbers on Hokkaido and around Karuizawa. Also seen around Lake Miike.

NOTE: We saw the races *asiatica* (Hokkaido), *amurensis* (Honshu) and *roseilia* (southern Kyushu/Miike). Although visually and seemingly vocally distinctive, neither IOC nor Clements split any of these subspecies into full species.

Treecreepers Certhiidae

Eurasian Treecreeper

Certhia familiaris

Singletons were seen on two dates in the Karuizawa area.

Starlings Sturnidae

White-cheeked Starling

Spodiopsar cineraceus

Good numbers were seen daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

Common (European) Starling

Sturnus vulgaris

Small wintering flocks were found at Arasaki.

Thrushes Turdidae

White's Thrush

Zoothera aurea

A pair of these secretive thrushes showed well in the scopes at Lake Miike.

NOTE: IOC splits *Scaly Thrush* *Zoothera dauma* into five species: *Scaly Thrush* *Zoothera dauma*, *White's Thrush* *Zoothera aurea*, *Amami Thrush* *Zoothera major*, *Nilgiri Thrush* *Zoothera neilgherriensis* and *Sri Lanka Thrush* *Zoothera imbricata*, whereas Clements only recognises one species, *Scaly Thrush* *Zoothera dauma*.

Pale Thrush

Turdus pallidus

Small numbers were encountered daily throughout Honshu and Kyushu.

Dusky Thrush

Turdus eunomus

Seen on most days of the trip.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae

Red-flanked Bluetail

Tarsiger cyanurus

Females were first seen around Karuizawa and we later enjoyed superb views of a gorgeous male at Lake Miike.

NOTE: Previously lumped with *Himalayan Bluetail* as *Orange-flanked Bush Robin*. Both IOC and Clements now accept these splits.

Daurian Redstart

Phoenicurus aureus

We enjoyed regular sightings of these smart migrants throughout Honshu and Kyushu.

Blue Rock Thrush

Monticola solitarius

Small numbers were seen during our time on Honshu and Kyushu.

NOTE: Sometimes split as *Blue* and *Red-bellied Rock Thrushes* respectively. We saw the resident *philippensis* subspecies during the tour which is sometimes recognised as *Red-bellied Rock Thrush*.

Dippers Cinclidae

Brown Dipper

Cinclus pallasii

First seen on an icy river near Rausu and later seen daily on Honshu with a final sighting on the Satsuma River on Kyushu.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae

Russet Sparrow

Passer rutilans



A large flock of around 200 birds was seen at Arasaki.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

Passer montanus

Seen on virtually every day of the tour.

Accentors Prunellidae

Japanese Accentor (NE)

Prunella rubida

We were very fortunate to see this rare endemic as a pair regularly came into the feeder at our hotel in Zaruizawa. Another pair was also encountered along the main river nearby.

Wagtails Motacillidae

Grey Wagtail

Motacilla cinerea

Seen on three dates on Kyushu.

White Wagtail

Motacilla alba

Commonly seen throughout the tour.

NOTE: Both lugens and ocularis subspecies were seen during the trip. The entire White Wagtail complex may be split up in future but at the moment neither IOC nor Clements recognise any White Wagtail splits.

Japanese Wagtail (NE)

Motacilla grandis

A total of 13 birds were seen on five dates during our time on Honshu and Kyushu.

Olive-backed Pipit

Anthus hodgsoni

Up to 8 seen around Lake Miike.

Buff-bellied (American) Pipit

Anthus rubescens

Up to 40 birds were seen on consecutive days around Arasaki.

Finches Fringillidae

Brambling

Gringilla montifringilla

This was an influx year for Brambling in Japan! Large flocks of up to 300 birds were seen daily in the Karuizawa and Kaga areas. A handsome finch indeed!

Hawfinch

Coccothraustes coccothraustes

Unusually large numbers of Hawfinch were encountered during our time on Honshu. We first saw them on Hokkaido at a feeder in the Furen area. A total of 22 birds were seen over the course of 7 dates!

Japanese Grosbeak

Eophona personata

We were thrilled to find this stunner at Karuizawa where four birds were scoped above the feeder at our accommodation there. A further three birds at Arasaki was a bit of a surprise and another singing male was heard and seen by Bryan at our guest house at Miike.

Eurasian Bullfinch

Pyrrhula pyrrhula

Wonderful views were had of several males and females as they fed in the snow in the Furen area of Hokkaido.

NOTE: We saw the griseiventris subspecies of Eurasian Bullfinch that is sometimes split as Grey-bellied Bullfinch. Neither IOC nor Clements recognise this split as yet.

Long-tailed Rosefinch

Carpodacus sibiricus

Unusually large numbers were seen this year around Karuizawa and surrounds with a total of 11 birds, mainly pairs seen very well.

Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch

Chloris sinica

Large numbers were seen on almost every day of the trip.

Eurasian Siskin

Spinus spinus

It seemed to be an influx year for siskins too as we encountered large flocks on six separate dates on Hokkaido and Honshu.



Buntings & Allies Emberizidae

Meadow Bunting

Emberiza cioides

Small numbers seen almost daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

Chestnut-eared Bunting

Emberiza fucata

This scarce bunting was seen well in the Arasaki area where three were encountered.

Rustic Bunting

Emberiza rustica

Around 10 seen in the Myogi area near Karuizawa with another 10 showing very well along the Sai River in Kanazawa.

Yellow-throated (Elegant) Bunting

Emberiza elegans

This stunning bunting was seen superbly well at Lake Miike where we enjoyed great views of up to 15 birds on both visits.

Black-faced Bunting

Emberiza spodocephala

First seen in the Toden region and thereafter commonly seen around Arasaki and throughout Kyushu.

Grey Bunting (NE)

Emberiza variabilis

This scarce, shy, near-endemic bunting was seen briefly in the Miike area.

Common Reed Bunting

Emberiza schoeniclus

Unusually large numbers of this often scarce and difficult to find bunting were encountered in the Arasaki area and more were seen around Myazaki.

ANNOTATED LIST OF MAMMALS (7 Species seen)

Names and taxonomical order of the mammal species list follows that of IgoTerra (2016).

Japanese Macaque

Macaca fuscata

We enjoyed the amazing spectacle of around 200 “Snow Monkeys” at Jigokudandi as they cavorted in the snow and jumped in and out of the hot springs.

Japanese Squirrel

Sciurus lis

Several were seen around the feeders at our Karuizawa onsen.

(Hokkaido) Red Fox

Vulpes vulpes

We had daily sightings of these endearing mammals during our time on Hokkaido.

Spotted (Largha) Seal

Phoca largha

Good views were had during our Nemuro pelagic and again at Cape Nosappu.

Harbour Seal

Phoca vitulina

Fair numbers were seen daily on Hokkaido.

Sika Deer

Cervus Nippon

Large numbers were seen daily whilst on Hokkaido.

Japanese Marten (Weasel)

Mustela itatsi

A major surprise when we spotted one of these rarely seen mammals at the edge of the Sendai Power Plant Lake while watching Mandarin Ducks and waiting for White-bellied Green Pigeons to make an appearance.



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