



# ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Japan

### Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding

*16<sup>th</sup> February – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2018 (18 days)*

### Trip Report



Red-crowned Cranes in the snow by Erik Forsyth

**Tour Leaders: Erik Forsyth & Bryan Shirley**

**Trip Report compiled by Erik Forsyth**

## Tour Summary

*Our 2018 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, including Hooded – 11 000 birds, White-naped – 2 500 birds, and a few Common and Sandhill Crane all at the famous Arasaki area, and the much-anticipated Red-crowned Crane in snow-covered fields in Hokkaido – where several birds performed their dancing rituals. Other top sightings were held by the highly sought-after Steller’s Sea Eagle – the largest eagle in the world, and we enjoyed daily sightings – large numbers of waterfowl including Baikal Teal, Falcated Duck and Smew, Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, the rare Black-faced Spoonbill, Grey-headed Lapwing, Green Pheasant, Red-faced Cormorant, Long-billed Plover, wintering Saunders’s Gull gave us the run around but was located, a number of Alicids including Spectacled Guillemot, Ancient and Japanese Murrelets and Least Auklet, the highly impressive Blakiston’s Fish Owl hunting at a river at night leaves a huge memory, Ural Owl, beautiful Japanese Waxwings, Japanese Accentor, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Chinese Penduline Tit, Japanese Grosbeak, Snow, Yellow-throated and Rustic Buntings and the stunning Asian Rosy Finch. There were also a few unexpected species, such as Pallas’s Rosefinch, Pine Bunting, Asian Lesser Short-toed Lark, White-shouldered Starling and Naumann’s Thrush. For a detailed report and species list, please read on...*



Japanese Waxwing near Karuizawa by Erik Forsyth

For the early arrivals, we were soon catching a train to Tokyo Disneyland, not to see the sites but to visit a large park with woodland, ponds, reedbeds and seashore next door. Kasairinkaikoen Park was our destination, and it didn't disappoint. The park has various paths and the birds were plentiful. Here we found our first White-cheeked Starlings, Oriental Turtle Doves, Black-faced Buntings, Large-billed



The huge Blakiston's Fishing Owl during a blizzard at Rausu by Erik Forsyth

Crows, Brown-eared Bulbuls and Japanese Bush Warbler. Scanning the wetland and associated brush, we saw Northern Shoveler, Spot-billed Duck, Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Eastern Buzzard and Western Osprey. A number of scarcer birds were also noted and included Brown-cheeked Rail, Red-flanked Bluetail, lovely Azure-winged Magpies, Eurasian Bullfinch and Pale and Brown-headed Thrushes. This was a good introduction to Japanese avifauna, and we came away with a grand list.

After meeting up with the rest of the group joining the mainland tour at Haneda Airport, we were soon on our way to Arasaki. The area

lived up to its reputation, and produced a huge spectacle of thousands of Hooded and White-naped Cranes feeding in the fields, flocks in flight and birds calling everywhere! *Truly a wonderful experience.* Five Sandhill and one Common Crane were also noted in and among the masses. We watched the cranes over the next two days and enjoyed every minute of it. Other notable species found in this area while we searched various waterways, reedbeds and rice-fields included a confiding Ruddy-breasted Crake, Chinese Penduline Tit, Bull-headed Shrike, Common Reed, Chestnut-eared, Rustic and Meadow Buntings, Japanese and White Wagtails, White-cheeked and Eurasian Starlings, and smart Russet Sparrows. At Yutshiro Harbour, we found several of the endangered Black-faced Spoonbills, Eurasian Curlew, and Vega and Black-tailed Gulls, but none of the rare Saunder's Gull – a regular winter visitor to this site. We would have to try elsewhere.



Japanese Wagtail by Dennis Braddy

We then travelled to Lake Mi-ike for two nights. Birding the forest along the lake gave us fabulous close looks at at least eight Yellow-throated Buntings, White's Thrush, Olive-backed Pipit, Japanese Grosbeak, both White-backed and Japanese Green Woodpeckers, a pair of Red-flanked Bluetail and, at a nearby river, a huge Crested Kingfisher which showed well. We also visited the nearby Kagawa Dam on a beautiful blue-sky day, which gave us fabulous views of up to two hundred Mandarin Ducks and several Baikal Teal. We enjoyed fabulous scope views of this amazingly plumaged species. Also of note were a pair of Mountain Hawk-Eagle which soared straight overhead, and looks at a mobile Red-flanked Bluetail and Common Kingfisher. At a nearby river, we also lucked into a pair of Long-billed Plover. Good scope looks were had while we noted Asian House Martins and Barn Swallows overhead. Just before we left our lodge, a flock of smart Japanese Waxwings made a surprise visit. *Wow!* Our next destination was Hyuga Harbour, where a pelagic tour in the bay, in pleasant sea conditions, gave us fantastic close looks at two pairs of the endemic Japanese Murrelet alongside the boat. *We were very lucky indeed!* After Hyuga, we visited Hitose Harbour, where we found both Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills and, best of all, two Saunder's Gulls – *much to everyone's delight!* We also had a fine male Green Pheasant alongside the vehicle, and a very unusual sighting was a huge Turkey Vulture sitting on a telegraph pole and then flying overhead – *presumably an escapee!*



Green Pheasant, Miyazaki by Erik Forsyth

The area was blanketed in snow and was beautiful to look at. We stopped at a large shop and kitted ourselves out with Yak tracks, which gave us steady feet on the icy roads and trails. We had two full

days in this wonderful area and eventually tracked down two stunning male Copper Pheasants, the drumming of their wings giving away their presence. Other good birds seen from our hotel feeders and in the woodlands included Japanese Accentor, Japanese Green, Great Spotted and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Japanese Wagtail, Brown Dipper, Winter Wren, Varied, Japanese and Willow Tits, Japanese Grosbeak, Brambling, Eurasian Siskin, Eurasian Jay, and a flock of White-bellied Green Pigeons were a surprise! At the nearby Toden Lake, we saw our first male Baikal Teal, male and female Smew and a flock of Long-tailed Rosefinch were much admired. A visit to a nearby park gave us fabulous close looks at a small group of Japanese Waxwings offering splendid photo opportunities. Moving on to Nagano, we enjoyed our walk to see the “Snow Monkeys” at their thermal pools in the mountains. In the Komatsu area, we found hundreds of Tundra Swans (of the *bewicki* race and regarded as Bewick’s Swans), a perched Merlin seen harrying the finch flocks, especially the Eurasian Skylarks, a lone pair of Grey-headed Lapwing and small flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese.



The endangered Oriental White Stork by Erik Forsyth

A visit to Lake Katano Kama Ike produced great scope looks at our first Tundra and Taiga Bean Geese, as well as Smew and Northern Pintail. Later in the morning, a visit to the Sai River at Kanazawa gave us fantastic looks at a pair of Crested Kingfisher, as well as Asian House Martin and Barn Swallow overhead. At the end of the day, we did a seawatch from coastal headland near Komatsu, which proved successful with good views of Red-throated and Pacific Loons and a Red-necked Grebe. While in this area, we also visited a known site for the endangered Oriental White Stork and were not disappointed. We were delighted to see one free-flying bird roosting at the conservation centre. This is a very rare bird in Japan, with a population of approximately 120 birds. The population crashed because of hunting, changing farming practices and a lack of feeding areas in winter. Now, conservationists are working with farmers to keep the rice paddies flooded in winter – a feeding area for the storks. Most of the population are free-flying and the rest are in captive breeding.

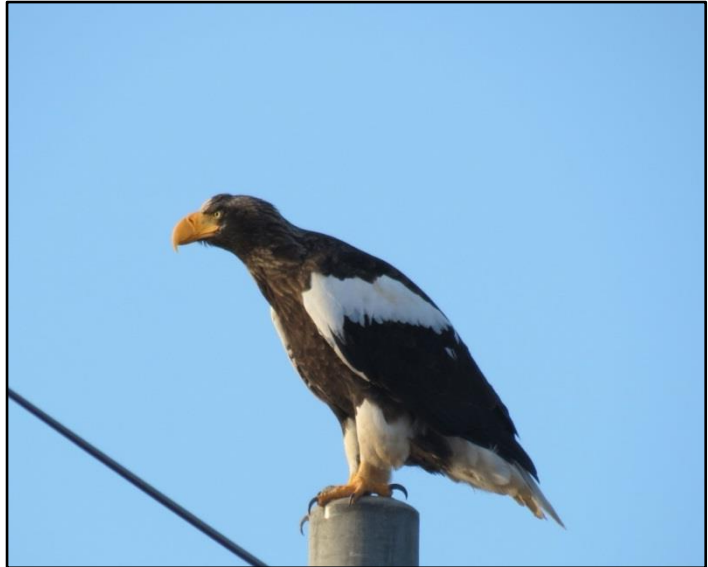


“Dancing” Red-crowned Cranes on Hokkaido by Erik Forsyth

The following morning, we flew to Hokkaido, arriving at Kushiro in the evening and settling into our hotel for the night. The following morning, the area was blanketed in deep snow and the skies crisp and clear. After a short drive, we stopped at a bridge and enjoyed fabulous looks at Red-crowned Cranes feeding at the river below. We enjoyed quality time watching these birds with several other birds flying past and also small family groups of Whooper

Cranes. A short while later, at a woodland, we were having great scope looks a Ural Owl at its day roost in a large tree. Thereafter, we drove the short distance to Tsurui, where we enjoyed a spectacle of one hundred or more Red-crowned Cranes in some fields. Quite a few of the birds were practising their “breeding dance” and we enjoyed our time here watching this spectacular sight and taking many pictures. From here, we continued our journey to Rausu. A blizzard had also started with strong winds and snow, and so we were relieved to make it to our hotel. Unfortunately, due to the blizzard, our night visit for the Blakiston’s Fishing Owl was cancelled.

The following morning, we drove down to the harbour, where we found big numbers of Steller’s Sea Eagle flying around Rausu Harbour and they roosted in numbers on the hillsides of the town. Smaller numbers of White-tailed Eagles joined their huge cousins. We then continued on to the Notsuke Peninsular, despite the wild weather that was with us. Here we saw more magnificent



**The magnificent Steller’s Sea Eagle, Notsuke Peninsular  
by Erik Forsyth**

Steller’s and White-tailed Eagles, Black Kite, Eastern Buzzard, Whooper Swan, migrating Dusky Thrush, Sika Deer and Red Fox. Scanning out to sea, birds seen included many Red-breasted and Common Mergansers, many Black Scoters, and Common Goldeneye.

This evening, despite the blizzard not abating, we went to the viewing area of the fishing owl. After a few hours of very windy weather, where visibility was minimal due to heavy snowfall, we had a break in the weather and suddenly the prize of prizes appeared! A huge Blakiston’s Fishing Owl sailed in and



**Dusky Thrush – this common winter visitor was seen  
throughout the tour – by Erik Forsyth**

landed opposite us in a tree, then flew down into the river, grabbed a fish and then flapped onto the bank. *An astonished group of birders were either stunned or took pictures frantically!* We enjoyed fabulous looks at this, the largest of all owls. A happy group of birders and relieved guides headed home afterwards. The following morning, we headed down to Nemuro, first stopping at Rausu Harbour to admire many Steller’s Sea and White-tailed Eagles collecting scraps from the fishing boats. It was here that we also enjoyed great looks at Harlequin Duck, and Glaucous, Glaucous-winged and Slaty-backed Gulls. Thereafter, we re-visited the Notsuke Peninsular, seeing the same birds as yesterday but also finding a small flock of Snow Buntings.

The following morning, we drove to another harbour to join our Och-ishi Nature Cruise boat trip. This was a very cold trip, but we were rewarded with many good looks at Spectacled and a single Pigeon Guillemot (the latter only seen by three of us), Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Pacific Diver, a flock

of mobile White-winged Scoters for a few of us, the rare Red-faced Cormorant – which was seen very well, and many tiny Least Auklet often close to the boat. Afterwards, a visit to the Nossappu Peninsular was productive, with several Ancient Murrelet, Common and Spectacled Guillemots and Japanese Cormorants. The nearby nature centre gave us Great Spotted Woodpecker, Eurasian Jay, Long-tailed, Japanese and Marsh Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch and Eurasian Bullfinch. Mike and Marianne had good, but brief, looks at four Asian Rosy Finches.

On our last morning in Hokkaido, we followed up a report and had excellent looks at three Pine Buntings, our final new birds on the main tour. From here, we headed to Kushiro to catch our flight to Haneda, where we said our farewells to those not doing the extension to the Ryukyu Islands.

Thank you all for an amazing time together!

## Annotated Checklists of Birds & Mammals

**182 species recorded on main tour**

**(84 species recorded on Ryukyu Island extension)**

**(212 species recorded on both tours combined, 2 heard only)**

*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

### Top Ten Birds as voted by 60% of the participants:

- |                            |                       |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1) Blakiston's Fishing Owl | 6) Japanese Scops Owl |
| 2) Red-crowned Crane       | 7) Japanese Waxwings  |
| 3) Steller's Sea Eagle     | 8) Pallas's Rosefinch |
| 4) Ryukyu Scops Owl        | 9) Amami Woodcock     |
| 5) Copper Pheasant         | 10) Japanese Accentor |

### Ducks, Geese & Swans - Anatidae

**Taiga Bean Goose**

*Anser fabalis*

Around four birds were seen at Katano Kamo Ike.

**Tundra Bean Goose**

*Anser serrirostris*

Sixty birds were encountered at Katano Kamo Ike.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*

Ten birds were at Saku Lake and many others amongst Tundra (Bewick's) Swans in fields south of Komatsu.

**Tundra (Bewick's) Swan** *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*

We had great looks at several flocks estimated at 300-350 birds were seen in the Komatsu area.

*Note: The race we saw at the sanctuary are regarded by European birding authorities as Cygnus columbianus bewickii, Bewick's Swans.*

**Whooper Swan** *Cygnus Cygnus*

Small flocks were seen daily while on Hokkaido.

**Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*

Small flocks were seen at Yutshiro Harbour on two visits.

**Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata*

Up to two hundred of these stunners were seen at Kogawa Dam.

**Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa*

Ten birds were at Kogawa Dam, a splendid male was seen at Saku Lake, Saku and then two each at Kahoku Dam and distantly at Katano Kamo Ike.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*

Small numbers seen at eight wetlands.

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

Seen in small numbers at scattered wetlands throughout Honshu, Kyushu and Hokkaido.

**Falcated Duck** *Anas falcate*

Our first sighting was of three males showing well in Yutshiro harbour. Thereafter, we enjoyed several sightings including forty birds at Kahoku Lake.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

Good numbers were seen at most wetlands throughout the trip.

**American Wigeon** *Anas Americana*

Two males were found at Kahoku Lake. This American species is a regular winter visitor to Japan.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*

Large numbers were encountered at most wetlands.

**Eastern Spot-billed Duck** *Anas zonorhyncha*

Seen in good numbers throughout the trip.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*

Commonly seen throughout the trip.

**[Eurasian] (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 seven separate days.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*

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

**Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila*

Small numbers at Tokyo and Yutshiro Harbour and larger flocks on Hokkaido.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus*

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

**White-winged Scoter** *Melanitta deglandi*

Only a few people saw a small group in flight on our Oschii Nature Cruise at Nemuro.

**Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana*

Large numbers were encountered daily off the Hokkaido coastline.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis*

This smart duck was seen in small numbers on a few occasions off the Hokkaido coastline.

**Common Goldeneye** *Bucephala clangula*

A few sightings at Kanazawa and Komatsu and daily on Hokkaido.

**Smew** *Mergellus albellus*

A pair were at Saku Lake, several at Kahoku Lake and a male and four females at Katano Kamo Ike Bird Sanctuary.

**Common Merganser** *Mergus merganser*

Seen daily off the Hokkaido coastline and then at Komatsu and Kanazawa.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator*

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

### Pheasants & Allies - Phasianidae

**Copper Pheasant (E)** *Syrnaticus soemmerringi*

We had excellent, but brief looks at a male on our first outing in the woodlands of Karuizawa. A fantastic view of a male for some, the following day.

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

A male was seen very well at the Hitose River and a pair near Komatsu.

*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** *Gavia stellata*

Up to twenty were seen very well and close to shore from a headland at Komatsu.

**Black-throated Loon** *Gavia arctica*

Up to four birds were scoped off Komatsu.

**Pacific Loon** *Gavia pacifica*

Two were seen distantly off Komatsu.

### Grebes - Podicipedidae

**Little Grebe** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Seen in small numbers on eight 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*

Great scope looks off the coast at Komatsu, with a further two of Nemuro, Hokkaido.

**Great Crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

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

**Horned Grebe** *Podiceps auritus*

Three were seen near off Nosappu and a further bird at Hitose.

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

Good looks in Tokyo Bay, Kahoku Lake and off Nemuro.

### Storks - Ciconiidae

**Oriental White Stork** *Ciconia boyciana*

We visited a known site for the endangered Oriental White Stork and were not disappointed. We were



delighted to see one free-flying bird roosting at the conservation centre. This a very rare bird in Japan with a population of approximately 120 birds. The population crashed through hunting, changing farming practices and lack of feeding areas in winter. Now, Conservationists are working with farmers to keep the rice paddies flooded in winter, a feeding area for the storks. Most of the population are free-flying and the rest are in captive breeding.

### Ibises & Spoonbills - *Threskiornithidae*

**Eurasian Spoonbill** *Platalea leucorodia*

We had superb views at Arasaki and a further two at Hitose.

**Black-faced Spoonbill** *Platalea minor*

Ten birds were seen well at Yatsushiro mudflats and a further seven at Hitose River Mouth.

### Bitterns & Herons - *Ardeidae*

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

A few birds were noted at the Kumu River, Arasaki.

**[Eastern] Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus coromandus*

Five birds were seen at 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 daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

**Great Egret** *Ardea alba*

Small numbers were seen daily on Honshu and Kyushu.

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

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

**Pacific Reef Heron** *Egretta sacra*

A single bird was seen flying along the rocky coastline at Kadogawa.

### Cormorants, Shags - *Phalacrocoracidae*

**Pelagic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Seen off the coast at Komatsu and encountered daily on Hokkaido.

**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*

Recorded at harbours and coastal rocky shorelines and islands.

### Ospreys - *Pandionidae*

**[Western] Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus*

Small numbers were seen almost daily on Honshu with a peak count of six at 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*

We had four sightings in the Kuruizawa, Nagano and Hokkaido areas.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*

Singletons at Kagawa Dam and at Saku Lake.

**Eastern Marsh Harrier***Circus spilonotus*

A singleton was quartering the reedbeds at Kahoku Lake.

**Hen Harrier***Circus cyaneus*

A female type bird with its white rump was seen at Kahoku Lake.

**Black Kite***Milvus migrans*

Small numbers were encountered almost daily.

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

**Mountain Hawk-Eagle***Nisaetus nipalensis*

Great flight views of a pair at Kagawa Dam. A very scarce resident.

**White-tailed Eagle***Haliaeetus albicilla*

This impressive raptor was seen daily in small numbers on Hokkaido with a peak count of 30 around Rausu. We also saw an adult high overhead at Komtasu.

**Steller's Sea Eagle***Haliaeetus pelagicus*

One of the world's most spectacular eagles! We were delighted to find good numbers (around 100 birds) near Rausu and on the Notsuke Peninsula, Hokkaido. Smaller numbers were seen daily thereafter at Nemuro.

**Turkey Vulture***Cathartes aura*

A huge surprise found at the Hitose River mouth, Miyasake, was most probably an escapee due to the distance this bird was from mainland America. A delight to see anyway!

**[Eastern] (Common) Buzzard***Buteo japonicus*

Seen in small numbers on eight 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 Rail***Rallus indicus*

Seen well by the early arrivals at KasaiRinkai Koen Park in Tokyo.

**Ruddy-breasted Crake***Porzana fusca*

Fabulous views at a reedbed in Arasaki.

**Common Moorhen***Gallinula chloropus*

Seen in small numbers on Honshu and Kyushu.

**Eurasian Coot***Fulica atra*

Commonly encountered during the tour.

**Cranes - Gruidae****Sandhill Crane***Grus canadensis*

Five birds were seen daily at Arasaki. The following day we enjoyed fabulous sightings of a group of three alongside the road. These birds probably relate to the North East Russian breeding population, which are annual in Japan.

**White-naped Crane***Grus vipio*

Good numbers (up to 1400 birds) of this migratory species were seen during our time at Arasaki. They breed in China and winter in Japan.

**Red-crowned Crane***Grus japonensis*

We enjoyed superb views of dancing birds on one morning near Tsurui. Once a very rare species in Japan, the population has gradually increased to around 1000 birds.

**Common Crane***Grus grus*

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

Sanctuary. Singleton was also seen with the Red-crowned Cranes at Kushiro.

**Hooded Crane***Grus monacha*

Large numbers (over 10000 birds) were enjoyed during our time at Arasaki. This species breeds in China and winters in Japan.

**Plovers - Charadriidae****Northern Lapwing***Vanellus vanellus*

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

**[Grey] (Gray)-headed Lapwing***Vanellus cinereus*

We were thrilled to find two of these generally scarce, migratory lapwings in a field near Komatsu.

**[Grey] (Black-bellied) Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

Ten birds were seen at the mudflats at the Yatsushiro River mouth and a further many at Hitose

**Long-billed Plover***Charadrius placidus*

A pair were found at the Sai River near Kagawa Dam, where we enjoyed fabulous scope views.

**Little Ringed Plover***Charadrius dubius*

A single bird was found at Hitose, Miyazaki. A scarce winter visitor.

**Kentish Plover***Charadrius alexandrinus*

Small numbers at Yutshiro Harbour and Hitose River mouth.

**Lesser Sand Plover***Charadrius mongolus*

A singleton was scoped at the Hitose River Mouth.

**Snipes & Sandpipers - Scolopacidae****Eurasian Curlew***Numenius arquata*

Small numbers at Yutsushiro Estuary and at Hitose River Mouth.

**Temminck's Stint***Calidrius Temminckii*

Five birds were scoped in a flooded field at Yutshiro Harbour.

**Sanderling***Calidris alba*

We had distant scope views three at Hitose.

**Dunlin***Calidris alpina*

Small flocks at Yatsushiro mudflats and at Hitose.

**Common Snipe***Gallinago gallinago*

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

**Green Sandpiper***Tringa ochropus*

Singletons were seen daily in the Arasaki area.

**Common Sandpiper***Tringa hypoleucos*

Small numbers were seen daily in the Arasaki area.

**Wood Sandpiper***Tringa glareola*

A singleton at Yutshiro Harbour.

**Common Greenshank***Tringa nebularia*

Small numbers at Yatsushiro mudflats.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher***Haematopus ostralegus*

Two birds were seen at Yutshiro Harbour. A scarce winter passage migrant.

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

A few birds were seen at the coast at Rausu and Nemuro.

**Black-headed Gull***Chroicocephalus ridibundus*

Small numbers were seen around Yatsushiro Harbour.

**Saunders's Gull***Chroicocephalus saundersi*

A rather scarce and localized gull throughout its limited range! We were delighted to find at least two on the mudflats at the Hitose River Mouth.

**Black-tailed Gull***Larus crassirostris*

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

**Mew Gull***Larus canus*

A distant scope view at Yutshiro Harbour and then good views at Rausu Harbour.

*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 recognises any splits of Mew Gull.*

**Glaucous-winged Gull***Larus glaucescens*

Small numbers were seen daily on Hokkaido.

**Glaucous Gull***Larus hyperboreus*

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

**[Vega] (Herring) Gull***Larus vegae*

First seen in Tokyo, we later found this species near Rausu, near Komatsu, Yatsushiro and Hyuga.

*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*

Small numbers at Yutshiro and then good numbers were found daily along the Hokkaido coastline.

**Caspian Tern***Hydroprogne caspia*

Two of these scarce winter visitors were seen at Yutshiro Harbour.

**Auks - Alcidae****Common Murre***Uria aalge*

A single bird was found off Cape Nossapu.

**Pigeon Guillemot***Cepphus columba*

Mike and Erik saw two off Cape Nossapu and a single bird was seen on our Oschi-ischi Nature cruise, Nemuro.

**Spectacled Guillemot***Cepphus carbo*

One of Cape Nossapu and up to twenty-five were seen on our Oschi-ischi Nature cruise, Nemuro.

**Ancient Murrelet***Synthliboramphus antiquus*

We had great views of up to three off Cape Nossapu, Nemuro.

**Japanese Murrelet (E)***Synthliboramphus wumizusume*

We enjoyed fabulous close looks at two pairs of this scarce species in Hyuga harbour.

**Least Auklet***Aethia pusilla*

Up to thirty birds were seen exceptionally well on our Oschi-ischi Nature cruise, Nemuro.

**Pigeons & Doves - Columbidae****Rock Dove (I)***Columba livia*

Widespread in urban areas throughout.

**Oriental Turtle Dove***Streptopelia orientalis*

Common and seen daily during our time on Kyushu and Honshu.

**White-bellied Green Pigeon***Treron sieboldii*

Fifteen birds landed briefly in a large tree at Karuizawa. Luckily everybody saw them!

**Owls - Strigidae****Blakiston's Fish Owl***Bubo blakistoni*

Our first evening was cancelled, as the winds were wild and heavy snowfall stopped vehicles getting to

the site. On our second evening, the weather was not much better, but we could walk in from the main road to the viewing area. However, the blizzard was still raging but every so often there was a break in the wind. After a two-hour vigil, a bird came in and all pandemonium let loose with cameras whizzing! The bird quickly caught a fish in the stream and luckily the blizzard kept the bird at the stream for a further ten minutes. A break in the wind and the owl was gone. An absolute cracker and undoubtedly one of the major highlights of the tour!

**Ural Owl***Strix uralensis*

Incredible scope views were had of a roosting bird during the day near Kushiro, Hokkaido.

**Kingfishers - Alcedinidae****Common Kingfisher***Alcedo atthis*

We had good views at Lake Mi-Ike.

**Crested Kingfisher***Megaceryle lugubris*

We had brilliant scope views of a bird on the Sendai River with another nearby.

**Woodpeckers - Picidae****Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker***Dendrocopos kizuki*

Singletons and pairs were encountered throughout the tour.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker***Dendrocopos major*

Commonly seen at Karuizawa.

**White-backed Woodpecker***Dendrocopos leucostos*

Good but brief looks at Lake Mi-Ike.

**Japanese [Green] Woodpecker (E)***Picus awokera*

We had brief looks at Lake Mi-ike and wonderful views at Karuizawa.

**Falcons - Falconidae****[Common] (Eurasian) Kestrel***Falco tinnunculus*

Single birds were seen on six days of the trip.

**Merlin***Falco columbarius*

We enjoyed good views of a perched bird in fields at Komatsu.

**Peregrine Falcon***Falco peregrinus*

Singletons were encountered on ten days.

**Shrikes - Laniidae****Bull-headed Shrike***Lanius bucephalus*

Seen daily in small numbers throughout Kyushu and Honshu.

**Crows & Jays - Corvidae****Eurasian Jay***Garrulus glandarius*

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

*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 recognises any splits of Eurasian Jay.*

**Azure-winged Magpie***Cyanopica cyanus*

Three of these stunners were seen at Kasai Ringkai Koen Park in Tokyo by the early arrivals.

**Rook***Corvus frugilegus*

Hundreds of these crows were seen in the Arasaki area.

**Carrion Crow***Corvus corone*

Seen daily in huge numbers throughout.

**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.

**Waxwings - Bombycillidae**

**Japanese Waxwing**

*Bombycilla japonica*

This was a good winter for this species in Japan and we enjoyed fabulous looks at a flock at our hotel near Lake Mi-ike and even better looks at a small flock in a park near Karuizuwa. A species that breeds in China and winters occasionally in Japan.

**Tits & Chickadees - Paridae**

**Coal Tit**

*Pariparus ater*

Small numbers around Karuizawa.

**Varied Tit**

*Poecile varius*

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

**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.

**Japanese 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 were seen well in reedbeds in the Arasaki area.

**Larks - Alaudidae**

**Eurasian Skylark**

*Alauda arvensis*

First seen in flocks at around Arasaki, where we saw up to 100 birds in rice fields and later around Komatsu.

**Asian Short-toed Lark**

*Calandrella cheleensis*

A single bird was found at the Notsuke Peninsular, Hokkaido. A rare winter visitor to Japan.

**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 Mi-ike and at Miyazaki.

**Asian House Martin**

*Delichon dasypus*

Seen around Arasaki and on the Sendai River.

**Cettia Bush Warblers & Allies - Cettiidae**

**Japanese Bush Warbler** *Horornis diphone*  
 Seen daily in small numbers in the Arasaki and Lake Mi-ike areas.

**Bushtits - Aegithalidae**

**Long-tailed Tit** *Aegithalos caudatus*  
 Small groups were encountered occasionally around Karuizawa and Mi-ike as well as Hokkaido.

**Laughingthrushes - Leiothichidae**

**Chinese Hwamei (I) (H)** *Garrulax canorus*  
 Heard singing at Arasaki.

**White-eyes - Zosteropidae**

**Japanese White-eye** *Zosterops japonicus*  
 Small flocks were seen in Tokyo, Arasaki area and at Karuizawa.

**Goldcrests & Kinglets - Regulidae**

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*  
 Two birds were seen by some at Karuizawa.

**Wrens - Troglodytidae**

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
 Singleton's were seen around Lake Mi-ike and at Karuizawa.

**Nuthatches - Sittidae**

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

**Treecreepers - Certhiidae**

**Eurasian Treecreeper** *Certhia familiaris*  
 Brief views at Lake Mi-ike and splendid views in the Citizens Wood, Hokkaido.

**Starlings - Sturnidae**

**White-cheeked Starling** *Spodiopsar cineraceus*  
 Good numbers were seen daily throughout the tour.

**[Common] (European) Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*  
 Small wintering flocks were found at Arasaki.

**White-shouldered Starling** *Sturnus sinensis*  
 A single bird was scoped at Arasaki. A rare winter visitor to Japan.

**Thrushes - Turdidae**

**White's Thrush** *Zoothera aurea*  
 Two of these stunners were scoped at Lake Mi-ike and another at Karuizawa for some.

**Brown-headed Thrush** *Turdus Chrysolaus*  
 A single bird was found at KasaiRingkai Koen Park, Tokyo.

**Pale Thrush** *Turdus pallidus*  
 Small numbers were encountered daily in the Arasaki, Lake Mi-ike and Karuizawa areas.

**Dusky Thrush***Turdus eunomus*

Seen daily around Arasaki, Karuizawa, as well as at Komatsu and on Hokkaido. A common wintering thrush from Siberia.

**Naumann's Thrush***Turdus naumanni*

A bird was seen well at our hotel grounds in Karuizawa. A scarce winter visitor from Siberia.

**Chats, Old World Flycatchers - Muscicapidae****Red-flanked Bluetail***Tarsiger cyanurus*

A female was seen by a few of us at a park in Tokyo with other sightings, Kogawa Dam, at Lake Mi-ike and lastly at Karuizawa.

**Daurian Redstart***Phoenicurus aureoreus*

We enjoyed regular sightings around Arasaki and Mi-ike.

**Blue Rock Thrush***Monticola solitarius*

Small numbers were seen around Arasaki and Mi-ike.

**Dippers - Cinclidae****Brown Dipper***Cinclus pallasii*

Great looks at a pair on a small stream at Karuizawa.

**Old World Sparrows - Passeridae****Russet Sparrow***Passer rutilans*

A few birds were seen at Arasaki and a large flock of 100 birds was seen at our hotel near Lake Mi-ike.

**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 our hotel in Karuizawa.

**Wagtails - Motacillidae****Grey Wagtail***Motacilla cinerea*

This winter visitor was seen on three separate days of the tour, mainly around Arasaki.

**White Wagtail***Motacilla alba ocularis*

This winter visitor was commonly seen throughout the tour.

**Japanese Wagtail (E)***Motacilla grandis*

Seen fairly regularly around Arasaki, Karuizawa and Komatsu.

**Olive-backed Pipit***Anthus hodgsoni*

Up to ten were seen around Lake Mi-ike.

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

Up to 50 birds were seen on consecutive days at Arasaki.

**Finches - Fringillidae****Brambling***Gringilla montifringilla*

A large flock of around 300 birds in a wooded area in Arasaki. This species was recorded on a further 8 days. A handsome finch indeed!

**Hawfinch***Coccothraustes coccothraustes*

Only three brief sightings this year.



**Japanese Grosbeak***Eophona personata*

We enjoyed great looks at this stunner at Karuizawa.

**Eurasian Bullfinch***Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A pair were seen by some of the group in Tokyo and four birds were seen well at Citizens Park, Hokkaido.

**Asian Rosy Finch***Leucosticte arctoa*

Mike and Marianne had four birds at Citizen Park, Hokkaido.

**Pallas's Rosefinch***Carpodacus roseus*

A stunning male was found at Karuizawa by Charlene. A scarce winter visitor and great find!

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

Good numbers were found around Arasaki and seen daily in Kyushu and Honshu thereafter.

**Eurasian Siskin***Spinus spinus*

Good views in trees around our hotel in Karuizawa and a small flock was found at the crane viewing area in Kushiro.

**Buntings & Allies - *Emberizidae*****Meadow Bunting***Emberiza cioides*

A few singing males were seen around Arasaki and at Karuizawa.

**Chestnut-eared Bunting***Emberiza fucata*

A single bird was seen by half the group in a field at Arasaki.

**Rustic Bunting***Emberiza rustica*

Small groups were found in the Karuizawa area.

**Yellow-throated Bunting***Emberiza elegans*

This stunning bunting was seen at Lake Mi-ike where we enjoyed great views of eight birds on two visits.

**Black-faced Bunting***Emberiza spodocephala*

First seen on our pre-trip outing to a park near Tokyo, thereafter seen in reasonable numbers around Arasaki and Lake Mi-ike.

**[Grey] (Gray) Bunting***Emberiza variabilis*

Mike and Erik had a clear but brief look at a male at Lake Miike. This is a shy and retiring forest species.

**[Common] Reed Bunting***Emberiza schoeniclus*

First recorded in reedbeds to a park in Tokyo. Also recorded in a large patch of reedbeds at Arasaki on two days.

**Pine Bunting***Emberiza leucocephalos*

After a tip-off by other birders, three birds were found feeding on a grassy area in Nemuro, Hokkaido. A scarce winter visitor.

**Snow Bunting***Calcarius nivalis*

A flock of ten birds dazzled us on the beautiful Notsuke Peninsular Nature Reserve between Rausu and Nemuro.

**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*

One was seen at Karuizawa by a few of us.

**(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.

**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 at the Notsuke Peninsular, and near Rausu, Hokkaido.

**Wild Boar***Sus scrofa*

A young animal was found wandering in the hills at Karuizawa

**Sea Otter***Enhydra lutris*

We enjoyed fantastic looks at two at sea and one sunbathing on rocks in Nemuro

**Japanese Badger***Meles anakuma*

A single animal was seen at night while owling at Lake Mi-ike.

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