

# JAPAN

## THE COMPLETE TOUR

23 NOVEMBER – 10/15 DECEMBER 2014



*Harlequin, Hokkaido (all photos by D.Farrow)*

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Zoothera's first tour to Japan combined the best of the winter birding with four of the smaller islands, each with their own endemic species. It was a very successful visit, which covered a huge range of territory.

We began in Tokyo, with an introduction to the avifauna at the nearby Tokyo Port Wild Bird Park where a drake Baikal Teal showed nicely, plus Asian Azure-winged Magpies and our

first Dusky Thrushes and Brown-eared Bulbuls. We then took a ferry ride to the Izu Islands, staying on the small volcanic island of Miyakejima for a night where we found Grey Bunting, Izu Thrush, Japanese Robin and Izu Tit. Despite having fine seas, we saw Black-footed Albatross, Streaked Shearwaters, Pomarine Skua and Grey Phalarope. After returning to Tokyo we flew up to a snow-free Hokkaido, where we enjoyed some of the charismatic highlights such as Japanese Cranes, and White-tailed and Steller's Sea Eagles feeding on spawning salmon. We scanned from headlands along the coast and found Pacific and Black-throated Divers, Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, Least and Rhinoceros Auklets, Red-faced Cormorant, some gorgeous gatherings of Harlequin Ducks, and were surprised to find 18 Rock Sandpipers and a Minke Whale. There were many more wildfowl on ice-free water compared with travelling later in the season, with a slightly different range of species overall. Asian Rosy Finches were in good number, plus we found roosting Ural Owls, and enjoyed two nights of Blakiston's Fish Owl action. Brown Dippers entertained us, and the seafood was terrific.



*Blakiston's Fish Owl*



*Ural Owl*

Next we flew southwards to Kagoshima and the warmer climes of Kyushu. Our first birding along forest roads was exciting, with a cock Copper Pheasant of the white-backed *ijimae* race that walked around our van, so close I couldn't fit the whole bird in my binoculars! Further forest birding here produced White-bellied Green Pigeon, Ryukyu Minivet, Daurian Redstarts and Japanese Green Woodpecker, and a Japanese Badger emerged in daylight to give us a thrill. Along the coasts and in the fields of Arasaki we enjoyed the spectacle of thousands of Hooded Cranes together with hundreds of White-naped Cranes, plus a few Sandhill and Common Cranes. Also here were Ruddy-breasted Crake, dainty little Saunders's Gulls, Daurian Jackdaw, Chinese Penduline Tit, Japanese Grosbeak, Elegant and Chestnut-eared Buntings, and on inland rivers found Long-billed Plovers and Japanese Wagtails. Best of all was a stunning drake Scaly-sided Merganser that we found fishing in the rapids of a large river.

We continued southwards along the Ryukyu island chain, flying to the enchanting jungles of Amami Island. Within a few hours of arriving we had seen the endemic Lidth's Jay, Ryukyu Green Pigeon and Grey-faced Buzzard, and the gorgeous Amami Robin. We had a great nightdrive on a beautiful warm moonlit night where on forest tracks we saw at least six Amami Woodcock, landing on the road in front of us or scuttling along the verges. Not only this, we also scored on the Amami Black Rabbit, a curious endemic that resides just here and on the adjacent island. We then endured a day of rain, which meant a lot of time

sat in the bus, yet still managed to find Amami Thrush feeding on a roadside, and when the rain abated a little we found Black Wood pigeons and an Amami Woodpecker.

Next we visited Okinawa, a different experience but also with interesting forest and unusual endemics. Despite the rampant iconography, with pictures of Okinawa Rail everywhere, even on the road signs, we found that the birds can play very hard to get! Between us we saw four Okinawa Rails, although good views were not easy to come by, and most of us had to make do with just glimpses. The gorgeous Okinawa Robins on the other hand were very showy, plus we saw smart Pryer's Woodpeckers without too much trouble, our first Ryukyu Flycatcher, many Pale Thrushes, and enjoyed a daytime Northern Boobook. Then it was time to race back to the airport at the other end of the island and head for the next destination.



*Amami Robin*



*Amami Woodcock*

The last island was Ishigakijima, closer to Taiwan than to Okinawa, and our first birding produced a male Ryukyu Flycatcher and Japanese Sparrowhawk, and as dusk fell a lively Ryukyu Scops Owl emerged. Malayan Night Herons were a feature here, and we saw nine scattered around the island. We had some stunning close looks at Ryukyu Serpent Eagles that were sitting low by the roadside, so unperturbed by our bus that when had to shift our bus out of the way for other traffic, we passed just underneath it without it batting an eyelid! Also we saw several smart looking Ishigaki Tits, and we saw both White's and Brown-headed Thrushes. The beaches were quite lively too, with four Black-faced Spoonbills (one of which was attacked by a Peregrine and had to ditch in the sea!) plus Grey-tailed Tattlers, Pacific Reef Egrets, Greater and Mongolian Sand Plovers, Red-necked Stints and *taivana* Eastern Yellow Wagtails.

Returning to Tokyo, we waved goodbye to two of our number that were returning home, then continued with our extension to some of the sites in Honshu. We began with the reed beds of Omigawa where we had nice views of Marsh Grassbird, plus Eastern Marsh Harrier and Slavonian Grebe, then had an interesting drive upcountry - through the middle of the mega city that is Tokyo! On reaching Karuizawa, we enjoyed an awesome banquet laid on by our hotel.

In the wooded hills we saw Red-flanked Bluetail, Long-tailed Rosefinches, Japanese Grosbeaks, Dusky Thrushes and Rustic Buntings, and on a winding forest road we surprised male and female Copper Pheasants, an Alpine Accentor and two Japanese Accentors feeding on a stream. Japanese Yellow Marten was a nice surprise, then as the weather turned wet, at a small lake we found Falcated Duck, Smew, and a male Green Pheasant. Close to our lodgings, at dusk we saw Japanese Giant Flying Squirrels peeking out of their nest boxes.



*Pale Thrush*



*Japanese Macaque*

Next we visited the famous ‘Snow Monkey Park’ near Nagano, and watched the Japanese Macaques emerging from the forest and making their way to their hot tub. Not an everyday sight to see so many monkeys in a bath! It was mostly females and young soaking themselves with blissful expressions, and almost all engaged in mutual grooming. Happy to have dodged the crowds here, we continuing to the Komatsu area where we soon ran into foul weather along the coastal highway (with its many tunnels – 54 for the day list!) and endured storms of rain, sleet and snow with powerful gusts of wind. We made our way to the heated indoor observatory at Katono Kamo-ike where we could look out onto the lake crammed with duck which included 800+ Baikal Teal, Smew, Falcated Duck, a handful of Bewick’s Swans and dozens of both Tundra and Taiga Bean Geese, plus flocks of Greater White-fronted Geese that dropped in as dusk fell.

Our final day was again rather blighted by the weather, but we enjoyed a good start with a large flock of Bewick’s Swan plus two or three Tundra Swan mixed in. A handsome flock of Grey-headed Lapwing stood huddled in rice fields and Green Pheasants strolled about on the margins, and on another pond we had closer views of many Falcated Duck, an American Wigeon and more Baikal Teal. Then it was time to head for Komatsu airport, and once the snow had been blown off the wings we flew back to Tokyo for a final night. A great trip overall, with 233 species recorded, and some truly awesome food!

## SYSTEMATIC LIST

- Chinese Bamboo Partridge (introduced) *Bambusicola thoracicus* (H)** Heard only on Miyakejima.
- Copper Pheasant *Syrnaticus soemmerringii*** Crippling views of a male at Mi-ike, another three at Karuizawa.
- Ring-necked Pheasant (introduced) (Common P) *Phasianus colchicus*** Common on Ishigakijima
- Japanese Green Pheasant (Green P) *Phasianus versicolor*** Several seen on the extension, also at Narita.
- Indian Peafowl (introduced) (Common P) *Pavo cristatus*** Present on Ishigakijima.
- Taiga Bean Goose *Anser fabalis*** At least 1200 seen on Hokkaido, another 40+ on the extension.
- Tundra Bean Goose *Anser rossicus*** A minimum of 20 on the extension at Katano Kamo-Ike.
- Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons*** Some flocks seen around Kaga on the extension.
- Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*** The flock of 15 'Canada' Geese seen at Kiritappu must refer to this taxon. Wild!
- Black Brant *Branta [bernicla] nigricans*** A few hundred seen around Notsuke on Hokkaido.
- Mute Swan (introduced) *Cygnus olor*** A couple at Satsuma.
- Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*** In good number on Hokkaido.
- Bewick's Swan *Cygnus bewickii*** A gathering of 380 on flooded paddies at Kaga on the extension.
- Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*** At least two with the above species at Kaga.
- Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Gadwall *Anas strepera*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*** A few seen in the Arasaki area, many more on the extension.
- Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*** Numerous on Hokkaido, Kyushu, and on the extension.
- American Wigeon *Anas americana*** A drake and two hybrids seen near Kaga on the extension.
- Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*** Very numerous in Kyushu and on the extension. Real wild ones!
- Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Baikal Teal *Anas formosa*** A smart drake in Tokyo on our first day, 800 more at Kaga on the extension.
- Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*** Regularly encountered along our route.
- Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*** Numerous in Tokyo, and in the Kaga area, scattered sightings elsewhere.
- Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*** Occasional groups encountered.
- Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*** Seen in number around the coasts of Hokkaido.
- Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*** Good numbers around the coasts of Hokkaido, great views at Nosappu.
- Stejneger's Scoter *Melanitta stejnegeri*** Scores present along the coasts of Hokkaido.
- Black Scoter *Melanitta americana*** As for the above, with calling birds audible.
- Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*** Dozens seen along Hokkaido coast, mostly drakes.
- Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*** Frequently encountered on Hokkaido.
- Smew *Mergellus albellus*** A group seen on one of the roadside lakes on Hokkaido, some in the Kaga area.
- Goosander *Mergus merganser*** Hundreds seen on Hokkaido particularly around Notsuke, also seen near Karuizawa.
- Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*** A good number seen on Hokkaido.



- Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*** A superb encounter with a male at Satsuma in Kyushu.

**Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*** Not uncommon off the Hokkaido coasts.

**Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*** Several seen around the coasts of Hokkaido.

**Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica*** Big numbers along the east coast of Hokkaido, particularly off Notsuke Hanto.

**Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*** At least ten seen from the ferry to the Izu Islands

**Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*** Scores of these seen from the Izu ferry.

**Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*** Seen on most days, except on Hokkaido.

**Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*** Good numbers on Hokkaido with up to 50 in a day.

**Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*** Occasional sightings, good numbers at Omigawa on the extension.

**Slavonian Grebe *Podiceps auritus*** A few seen along the Hokkaido coast, singles at Omigawa and near Kaga.

**Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*** A horde of 150+ seen in Notsuke Bay on Hokkaido.

**Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*** Five in a ditch at Arasaki.

**Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*** Four birds at Ohama beach on Ishigakijima.

**Striated Heron *Butorides striata*** A single near Izumi was unexpected.

**Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*** Nine in a day on Ishigakijima, just one was adult.



*Malayan Night Heron*



*Red-faced Cormorant*

**Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*** Four seen on Ishigakijima.

**Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*** A couple on Okinawa, plenty on Ishigakijima.

**Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*** Frequent, biggest numbers on Kyushu.

**Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*** One on Ishigakijima.

**Eastern Great Egret *Casmerodius modestus*** Common on Kyushu, Honshu and the islands.

**Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*** Seen on Okinawa and Ishigakijima.

**Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*** Regularly seen on Kyushu and on the islands.

**Pacific Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*** A few seen on Amami and on Ishigakijima, all grey morph.

**Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*** One from the Izu ferry, two off the Kyushu coast at Akune.

**Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*** Commonly encountered, very numerous around Tokyo.

**Temminck's Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*** Plenty seen around the Izu islands and the Hokkaido coasts.

**Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*** In good number around the Hokkaido coasts.

**Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*** A single bird with the above species at Cape Nosappu.

**Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*** Regularly encountered.

**Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*** Frequent sightings throughout the tour.

**Eurasian Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*** Also seen frequently, most numerous around the Kyushu coasts.

**Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*** Seen often and in number except for on the southern islands.

**White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*** Numerous on Hokkaido, watched nosing on salmon.

**Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*** A good number along the coast of Hokkaido plus a few inland.

**Ryukyu Serpent Eagle *Spilornis perplexus*** Excellent close encounters with a pair on Ishigakijima.

**Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus*** Several seen over the reedbeds at Omigawa on the extension.

**Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus*** A single female-type at Arasaki.

**Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*** A vocal pair at Banna Park on Ishigakijima.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*** Several seen along our route.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* Two on Miyakejima, a single at Arasaki.  
**Grey-faced Buzzard** *Butastur indicus* Numerous on Amami and several more on Okinawa.  
**Eastern Buzzard** *Buteo japonicus* Frequent sightings, quite numerous on the Izu Islands,  
**Slaty-legged Crake** *Rallina eurizonoides* (H) A calling bird heard in the forest on Ishigakijima.  
**Okinawa Rail** *Gallirallus okinawae* A bloody headache! A variety of poor views for most, at least four individuals seen.  
**Brown-cheeked Rail** *Rallus indicus* (H) Heard at Arasaki and Omigawa.  
**White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus* Quite common and visible on Ishigakijima.  
**Ruddy-breasted Crake** *Porzana fusca* Nice views of one at Arasaki.  
**Watercock** *Gallicrex cinerea* A single seen in rice paddies on Ishigakijima.



*Steller's Sea Eagle*



*White-tailed Eagle*

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus* A few sightings along the way.  
**Common Coot** *Fulica atra* Seen virtually throughout the tour, most numerous on Hokkaido.  
**Sandhill Crane** *Grus canadensis* At least four seen at Arasaki.  
**White-naped Crane** *Grus vipio* Hundreds at Arasaki, the best-looking Crane.  
**Common Crane** *Grus grus* At least three at Arasaki, plus a hybrid or two.  
**Hooded Crane** *Grus monacha* A couple of thousand at Arasaki, although there was supposed to be 13,000!  
**Red-crowned Crane** *Grus japonensis* 45 birds seen near Kushiro, and four seen near Nemuro.  
**Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus* Singles on Kyushu and on Okinawa.  
**Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus* A couple of dozen at Arasaki.  
**Grey-headed Lapwing** *Vanellus cinereus* Fifteen stood in a cold paddyfield at Kaga.  
**Pacific Golden Plover** *Pluvialis fulva* Seen in number at Ose beach on Amami and on Ohama beach on Ishigakijima.  
**Grey Plover** *Pluvialis squatarola* A few seen on the southern islands.  
**Long-billed Plover** *Charadrius placidus* As many as nine showed well on the Sendai river at Satsuma.  
**Little Ringed Plover** *Charadrius dubius* Several sightings, at Yatsushiro and on the southern islands.  
**Kentish Plover** *Charadrius alexandrinus* Quite a few at Yatsushiro, also on the southern islands.  
**Mongolian Plover** *Charadrius mongolus* Numerous individuals on the beaches on Amami and Ishigakijima.  
**Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* A few birds identified on Ishigakijima.  
**Amami Woodcock** *Scolopax mira* At least six birds seen on our night drive on Amami. Awesome!  
**Pin-tailed/Swinhoe's Snipe** *Gallinago stenura/megala* One flushed on Okinawa, my gut still says Swinhoe's...  
**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* Scattered sightings, most numerous at Kijoka on Okinawa.  
**Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius phaeopus* A few seen on Ishigakijima.  
**Common Redshank** *Tringa totanus* A few seen on Ishigakijima.  
**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia* Some seen on Amami, more on Ishigakijima.  
**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* Scattered sightings on Kyushu and on the southern islands.  
**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola* Two at Kijoka on Okinawa.  
**Grey-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes* Several seen on the beaches on Amami and Ishigakijima.  
**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* Frequent sightings on Kyushu and on the southern islands.  
**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres* Seen on the beaches on Amami and numerous on Ishigakijima.

**Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*** A single on Amami and a few more on Ishigakijima.  
**Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*** Several at Arasaki, one on Amami.  
**Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis*** A nice surprise to see 18 of these on offshore rocks on Hokkaido.  
**Dunlin *Calidris alpina*** Regular sightings from Kyushu southwards.  
**Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*** A single bird seen from the Izu ferry.



*Grey-headed Lapwing*



*Grey-tailed Tattler*

**Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*** Many seen around the coasts of Kyushu and Hokkaido.  
**Kamchatka Gull *Larus kamtschatschensis*** Not uncommon on Hokkaido.  
**Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*** Good views around the Hokkaido coast, but not numerous.  
**Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*** Not uncommon around Hokkaido, the biggest gathering was at Kiritappu.  
**Vega Gull *Larus vegae*** Most numerous on Kyushu, a few scattered elsewhere.  
**Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*** The most numerous gull on Hokkaido.  
**Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*** Just a couple picked out at Yatsushiro.  
**Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*** Not uncommon on Hokkaido and Kyushu.  
**Saunders's Gull *Saundersilarus saundersi*** A nice encounter with nine feeding over a paddyfield at Yatsushiro.  
**Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*** Singles from the Izu ferry and at Rausu.  
**Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*** A single seen from the Izu ferry.  
**Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba*** Several birds of the *snowii* race off the coast of Hokkaido.  
**Spectacled Guillemot *Cepphus carbo*** Not uncommon off the coast of Hokkaido.  
**Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*** Small groups seen off Cape Kiritappu and Notsuke Hanto.  
**Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*** Distant views of at least three off the Hokkaido coast.  
**Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*** A surprisingly big number seen off Notsuke Hanto.  
**Rock Dove (feral) *Columba livia*** Available.  
**Black Woodpigeon *Columba janthina*** After much teasing on Miyakejima, good views on Amami of a couple of birds.  
**Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*** Seen daily except for two days on Hokkaido.  
**Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* (H)** Heard on Ishigakijima.  
**White-bellied Green Pigeon *Treron sieboldii*** A small number seen at Mi-ike.  
**Ryukyu Green Pigeon *Treron permagnus*** Several seen well on Amami, also at Banna Park on Ishigakijima.  
**Japanese Scops Owl *Otus semitorques*** A poor view on Amami, a wintering mainland bird? Also heard on Okinawa.  
**Ryukyu Scops Owl *Otus elegans*** A couple seen on Ishigakijima, one showed very well.  
**Blakiston's Fish Owl *Bubo blakistoni*** A superb show by up to three birds at Rausu on both nights of our stay.  
**Ural Owl *Strix uralensis*** A very nice look at a roosting pair at Kushiro airport. The race is *japonica*.  
**Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica*** One on Amami, one on Ishigakijima, one in daytime on Okinawa.  
**House Swift *Apus nipalensis*** A trio seen on the Kyushu coast.  
**Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda*** A glimpse of one on Okinawa was the only sighting.  
**Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*** Regularly seen from Arasaki southwards.  
**Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*** Good looks at a bird at Satsuma, one of two there.  
**Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*** A glimpse of one near Izumi.

**Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker *Yungipicus kizuki*** Regular encounters throughout, except on Hokkaido and Ishigaki.  
**Pryer's Woodpecker *Dendrocopos noguchii*** Several sightings on Okinawa, though a little furtive.  
**White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* (H)** Heard at Mi-ike.  
**Amami Woodpecker *Dendrocopos [leucotos] owstoni*** A female seen after much searching in the rain on Amami.  
**Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*** A few seen on Hokkaido and on the Honshu extension.  
**Japanese Green Woodpecker *Picus awokera*** Two were seen at Mi-ike, another four on the Honshu extension.  
**Ryukyu Minivet *Pericrocotus tegimae*** Seen at Mi-ike, and on all the Ryukyu Islands.  
**Bull-headed Shrike *Lanius bucephalus*** Often seen, on Miyakejima, Kyushu and Honshu.  
**Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*** Several seen on Ishigakijima.  
**Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*** A few seen on Hokkaido (*brandtii*) and some more on Honshu (*japonicus*).  
**Lidth's Jay *Garrulus lidthi*** A few seen, on all three days we were on Amami.  
**Azure-winged Magpie (Asian A-w M) *Cyanopica cyanus*** A half-dozen on our first day in Tokyo.  
**Daurian Jackdaw *Coloeus dauuricus*** A few at Arasaki, all dark-plumaged birds.



Oriental Rook



Asian Rosy Finch

**Oriental Rook *Corvus pastinator*** A few at Mi-ike, hundreds at Arasaki.  
**Oriental Crow *Corvus orientalis*** Seen often in small numbers on Hokkaido, Kyushu and Honshu.  
**Large-billed Crow *Corvus japonensis*** Seen daily  
**Eastern Great Tit (Japanese T) *Parus minor*** Seen on all the islands except Ishigakijima, just a couple on Hokkaido.  
**Ishigaki Tit *Parus [cinereus] nigriloris*** Several seen on two dates on Ishigakijima.  
**Coal Tit *Periparus ater*** A few seen at Karuizawa on the extension.  
**Japanese Varied Tit *Poecile varius*** Multiple sightings around Mi-ike, also on Amami and at Karuizawa.  
**Owston's Varied Tit (Izu T) *Poecile owstoni*** A total of eight birds found on Miyakejima.  
**Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*** A poor view of a single on Hokkaido.  
**Willow Tit *Poecile montanus*** Rather common in the woods at Karuizawa.  
**Chinese Penduline Tit *Remiz consobrinus*** A group of four in reeds at Arasaki, some great prolonged views of them.  
**Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*** Plenty on Kyushu, also seen on Ishigakijima.  
**Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*** Not uncommon on all the Ryukyu Islands.  
**Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*** One over the river at Satsuma.  
**Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus*** A flock at Mi-ike, more in the woods at Karuizawa.  
**Japanese Skylark *Alauda japonica*** Numerous in the fields at Arasaki.  
**Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*** Scattered sightings from Arasaki, Okinawa, Ishigakijima and Omigawa.  
**Chinese Bulbul *Pycnonotus sinensis* (NL)** Two seen on Okinawa.  
**Brown-eared Bulbul *Microscelis amaurotis*** Seen throughout, a daily bird.  
**Marsh Grassbird *Megalurus pryeri*** At least three seen at Omigawa, more heard calling from the reedbeds.  
**Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*** A glimpse of one at Mi-ike.  
**Japanese Bush Warbler *Cettia diphone*** Frequently seen, on Miyakejima, Kyushu and on the Ryukyu Islands.  
**Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus*** Two or three birds found being vocal on Ishigakijima.  
**Chinese Hwamei (introduced) *Garrulax canorus*** Four seen near Karuizawa.  
**Red-billed Leiothrix (introduced) *Leiothrix lutea*** Four seen at Mi-ike.

**Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus*** Frequently observed, absent from Hokkaido.

**Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*** A single at Karuizawa.

**Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*** A few seen; on Miyakejima, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Honshu.

**Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*** On Hokkaido *asiatica*, on Kyushu *roswellia*, on Honshu *amurensis*.

**Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*** A single at Karuizawa.

**White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus*** Plenty seen on Kyushu, also on Honshu on the extension.

**White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea*** Nice views of one feeding at the roadside on Ishigakijima.

**Amami Thrush *Zoothera major*** A lucky viewing of one feeding at the roadside in the rain on Amami.

**Pale Thrush *Turdus pallidus*** A few present in Kyushu, very common in the Ryukyu Islands.

**Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolais*** A dozen seen in a rice paddy on Ishigakijima.

**Izu Thrush *Turdus celaenops*** At least five of these smart birds seen on Miyakejima.

**Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*** Numerous on the main islands, a few on Ishigakijima.

**Japanese Robin *Luscinia akahige*** Great views of males on Miyakejima.

**Amami Robin *Luscinia [komadori] komadori*** Great close looks at up to 5 smart males on Amami.

**Okinawa Robin *Luscinia [komadori] namiyei*** Very numerous and showy on Okinawa.

**Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanura*** Singles at Mi-ike and Ada, a few more at Karuizawa.

**Daurian Redstart *Phoenicurus aureoreus*** Common in Kyushu, a few seen on the Ryukyus.

**Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*** Plenty seen on the smaller islands, also on Kyushu.

**Ryukyu Flycatcher *Ficedula owstoni*** A female at Ada, several smart males on Ishigaki.

**Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*** Showy at this season, many examples seen on Hokkaido, Kyushu and at Karuizawa.

**Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans*** A flock of 400+ seen at Arasaki.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*** Seen almost daily, except for on the Ryukyu Islands.

**Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*** A single seen at Karuizawa with the following species.



Japanese Accentor



Chinese Penduline Tit

**Japanese Accentor *Prunella rubida*** Three seen well at Karuizawa.

**Green-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [tschutschensis] taivana*** Nice examples of these seen on Ishigakijima.

**Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*** Commonly encountered.

**Black-backed Wagtail *Motacilla lugens*** Widespread, most numerous on Kyushu.

**Japanese Wagtail *Motacilla grandis*** Two at Mi-ike and more at Satsuma on the Sendai river, also on Honshu.

**Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*** Two seen in the fields at Arasaki.

**Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*** At least three seen in Kyushu.

**Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*** One seen at Arasaki.

**Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*** Very numerous in the fields at Arasaki.

**Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*** A couple of dozen seen at Karuizawa.

**Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*** Big flocks at Arasaki, also at Mi-ike and on Honshu.

**Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*** A flyover on Hokkaido.

**Common Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*** Nice looks at some at Kiritappu.

**Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa*** Many found on Hokkaido; 80+ at Kiritappu, 18+ at Notsuke. Lovely!

**Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus*** A male and three females seen well at Karuizawa.

**Grey-bellied Bullfinch *Pyrrhula griseiventris*** Three on Hokkaido. Five on Miyakejima appeared to be *P. (p.) rosacea*.  
**Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*** A bird at Kaga was the sole sighting.  
**Japanese Grosbeak *Eophona personata*** Sizeable flocks at Mi-ike and Arasaki, a few at Karuizawa.  
**Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*** Numerous on Kyushu, also a few seen on the extension.  
**Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*** Nice views of several at Arasaki, a single at Omigawa.  
**Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*** A single at Arasaki, many in a reedy ditch at Karuizawa.  
**Elegant Bunting (Yellow-throated B) *Emberiza elegans*** Several seen around Mi-ike were the only ones.  
**Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*** Plenty in Kyushu, scattered sightings elsewhere.  
**Grey Bunting *Emberiza variabilis*** Several on Miyakejima were a nice surprise, also two at Mi-ike.  
**Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*** A few at Arasaki, many at Omigawa.



Ryukyu Serpent Eagle

## **MAMMALS and OTHERS – contributed by Kevin Bryan**

### **1. MAMMALS**

#### **Taxonomy**

For references and bibliography see Appendix 1.A.

Classification and nomenclature is based on Duff and Lawson (2004); itself, based on earlier versions of the major reference work by Wilson and Reader (2005).

This taxonomy may be different from that used in each of the currently published volumes of *Handbook of The Mammals of the World* (Vols 1 to 4 (see Appendix 1.A.). Important differences are incorporated as appropriate.

A surprisingly large number of live species were seen and identified (18). Not all species were seen by all members of the tour group.

**Order: LAGOMORPHA** – Rabbits, Hares and allies

**Family: Leporidae** – Rabbits and Hares

**Amami (Amami Black) Rabbit** (*Pentalagus furnessi*)

Endemic to Japan (found only on two islands; Amami Oshima and Toku-no-Shima). A fascinating species; quite unlike 'conventional' rabbits and hares. A relict of a lineage of Asian rabbits that have died-out elsewhere.

This species has shorter ears and legs than other rabbits. A nocturnal forest dwelling species with a dark brown pelage. Two separate individuals were seen on Wed 4 Dec on Amami. A good sighting.

**Japanese Hare** (*Lepus brachyurus*)

Endemic to Japan. Although given the label 'hare', this species is actually relatively small compared to, for example, the European Hare (*Lepus europaeus*), which is 2.5 to 7.0 kg. At 1.3 to 2.5 kg, *L. brachyurus* is nearer in size to the European (Common or Iberian) Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*), which is 1.1 to 2.5 kg.

In addition, *L. brachyurus* has adapted to living in both suburban and forest settings.

Seen on both Sun 30 Nov (a live specimen at the Copper Pheasant site) and on Wed 3 Dec (road-kill). In both cases, the individuals were a dark brown.

**Order: RODENTIA** – Rodents

**Family: Sciuridae** – Squirrels

**Japanese Squirrel** (*Sciurus lis*)

Endemic to Japan. This is very much like a smaller, more delicate, version of the Grey Squirrel (Eastern Grey (Gray) Squirrel), *Sciurus carolinensis*, that has (sadly) been introduced into Britain. *S. lis* weighs 250 to 310 g and *S. carolinensis* weighs 400 to 600 g. In many respects, their ecologies are not dissimilar either.

A single individual seen in large trees in gardens on Fri 12 Dec.

**Eurasian Red (Red) Squirrel** (*Sciurus vulgaris*)

We saw the endemic sub-species, *S. v. orientis* (Hokkaido, Japanese Hokkaido or Japanese Red Squirrel).

This sub-species, like those found on the mainland, has tufted ears for most of the cooler months of the year.

This attractive squirrel displays a range of colour patterns. We saw a dark-brown morph (although the underparts were still pale). The ear-tufts also seemed particularly long.

Seen on Thu 12 Nov in Hokkaido in a small 'wild bird park' near the first 'crane stop'.

**Japanese Giant Flying Squirrel** (*Petaurista leucogenys*)

This is the largest of the Asian giant flying squirrel species and is endemic to Japan. Some texts indicate that it also occurs in China (Canton area) to which it is believed to have been introduced. These squirrels are highly nocturnal and strictly arboreal. These are large squirrels, 0.7 to 1.5 kg and are capable of considerable glides (150m).

We saw three individuals on Thu 11 Dec and one on Fri 12 Dec (probably one of the individuals seen the previous day). In all cases they were observed, at dusk, peering from nextboxes in the Wild Bird Park in Karuizawa.

**Order: CARNIVORA** – Carnivores

**Family: Herpestidae** – Mongooses

**Small Indian (Small Asian) Mongoose** (*Herpestes auropunctatus*)

Regarded my many as a species complex.

This widespread Asiatic species was introduced to a number of Japanese islands to control venomous snakes. It did not control the snakes and has decimated local wildlife.

*Not actually seen.* An extensive trail of foot-prints were seen on the beach Fri 5 Dec on Amami.

**Family: Canidae** – Dogs and Foxes

**Red Fox** (*Vulpes vulpes*)

A familiar site across the northern hemisphere. A large and attractive male seen by the roadside in the suburbs of Nemuro on Hokkaido on Thu 27 Nov. This is the Japanese sub-species *japonica*.

**Raccoon Dog** (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*)

Sadly, only seen as road-kill on Thu 27 Nov in Hokkaido. This is an interesting species; it is the only dog that hibernates (although not in C&E Europe where it is feral (having escaped from fur farms)). The animal was only killed that day. Hibernation is generally November to March.

**Family: Otariidae** – Eared Seals and Sea-Lions

The Otariids have small, yet visible, external ear flaps. They are more adapted to a partially terrestrial existence than the Phocids.

**Northern (Steller's) Sea-Lion** (*Eumetopias jubatus*)

Four individuals (three females and one male) of this endangered species were seen on Fri 28 Nov in coastal waters off the Rausu area on Hokkaido. The male was swimming about 50m from the females and all were approx 250m from the shore.

This is the largest eared seal and, within the pinnipeds, only the Walrus and the Elephant Seals are larger. The size of the animals, particularly the male, contributed to the identification. In addition, the shape of the male's muzzle also supported identification of this species in comparison with the Northern Fur Seal (*Callorhinus ursinus*).

**Family: Phocidae** – Earless Seals (also referred to as 'True' seals)

Phocids are better adapted for aquatic life than Otariids. They lack visible external ears and have more streamlined bodies.

**Spotted (Largha) Seal** (*Phoca largha*)

Very similar to the generally larger Harbour Seal considered next and, in many instances, we were not able to speciate the sightings.

Generally lighter with spots (which can be numerous and dense) rather than 'blotches' or broken 'rings'.

Seen on Wed 26, Thu 27 and, particularly, Fri 28 Nov, in various coastal sites on Hokkaido.

**Harbour (Common) Seal** (*Phoca vitulina*)

In water, this seal only generally exposes its' head. In addition, the nostril pattern is different from that of the Spotted (although this could not be clearly seen). More likely to be actually seen in harbours and estuaries; as was the case in this tour. Seen on Thu 27 and Fri 28 Nov on Hokkaido.

Interestingly, the conservation centres and information boards in coastal Hokkaido mostly referred to the Spotted Seal with little or no reference to the Harbour Seal.

**Family: Mustelidae** – Mustelids

**Japanese Weasel** (*Mustela itatsi*)

Previously considered a sub-species of the Siberian Weasel (*M. sibirica*). Endemic to a number of areas within Japan. Introduced to Sakhalin island in Russia. It has also been introduced to some of the Ryukyu and Izu Islands, within Japan, to control rodents and, typically, has become a danger to some of their local fauna. Good views were had of at least two animals on Tue 25 Nov on the island of Miyake within the Izu island group, with at least one animal repeatedly crossing a small track through forested land. This weasel is considerably larger than the Least Weasel ('Weasel') (*M. nivalis*) with which we are more familiar; it more similar in size to the Stoat (Ermine) (*M. ermine*) with which we are also more familiar. It is also quite stocky.

**Japanese Marten** (*Martes melampus*)

This species is also found on the Korean peninsula. A step-up from the Japanese Weasel in size and similar to the European Pine Marten (*M. martes*) in that respect.

Predominantly nocturnal, highly omnivorous and both terrestrial and arboreal.

Seen from a stationary vehicle on Thu 11 Dec in the Karuizawa area.

**Japanese Badger** (*Meles anakuma*)

Endemic to Japan and an excellent encounter! A singleton, seen in very good light and for a sustained period, late afternoon on Sun 30 Nov in the Kagawi Dam area.

Previously considered to be a sub-species of the smaller Asian Badger (*M. leucurus*). *M. anakuma* is much plainer than either the Asian Badger or the European Badger (*M. meles*). In addition, both have much

stronger black and white facial stripes than the Japanese Badger. Like the other badgers; earthworms form a significant component of the diet of these nocturnal omnivores.

**ORDER: CHIROPTERA – Bats**

**Family: Pteropodidae – Flying Foxes (Old World fruit bats)**

**Ryukyu Flying-Fox (Ryukyu Fruit-bat) (*Pteropus dasymallus*)**

A 'megabat' (ie of the suborder Megachiroptera) native to Taiwan, Japan (SW islands) and the Philippines. Over its' overall range; this species is near threatened.

A forest species with a dietary preference for figs. Very good views of more than one individual on each of 5, 7, 8 and 9 Dec covering Amami, Okinawa and Ishigaki. Although described as nocturnal; we had good daytime views of the bats feeding on figs (including significant movement within and between trees to reach better fruits and obtain better feeding positions).

We also saw good numbers of smaller bats, presumably insectivorous, throughout the Ryukyu Islands. Speciation was not attempted.

**Order: PRIMATES – Primates**

**Family: Cercopithecidae – Old World monkeys**

**Japanese Macaque (*Macaca fuscata*)**

Now frequently referred to as the 'Snow Monkey' or 'Japanese Snow Monkey'. Endemic to Japan and the country's only primate. It is found across a large swathe of the main islands (except Hokkaido).

Seen on Sat 13 Dec at the hot-springs in Jigokudani Monkey Park (Nagano). A fascinating encounter, even if somewhat 'touristy' in the immediate vicinity of the springs. The array of behaviours was very interesting. Away from the pools, we watched an adult male harvest and eat the below-soil stems of grasses from a bank. The animal was 1m away and fed for 10+ minutes.

No other non-human primate is more northern-living or lives in a colder climate. However, it must be noted that this species' range has contracted with the growth in the human population and that the macaques have, to some extent, had to 'retreat' to the more demanding habitats as humans exploit the best.

**Order: CETACEA – Whales**

**Family: Balaenopteridae – Rorquals (the largest group of baleen whales)**

**Common (Northern) Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)**

See on Fri 28 Nov from the Notsuke Peninsula in Hokkaido. This animal was very close to the shore. In addition, from the positions of consecutive sightings; this encounter may have consisted of two animals. Possibly also seen on Thu 27 Nov from the Nosappu Headland (Hokkaido).

**Family: Phocoenidae – Porpoises**

**Harbour Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)**

This small, unobtrusive Cetacean was seen on several occasions, at various sites, on Thu 27 Nov in calmer waters.

**Family: Delphinidae – Marine Dolphins**

**'Common' Dolphin (*Delphinus* spp.)**

This covers both the **Short-beaked Common Dolphin (*D. delphis*)** and the **Long-beaked Common Dolphin (*D. capensis*)**.

We saw 'Common' Dolphin (6+) on the Izu Island ferry crossing on Mon 24 Nov. It was not possible to speciate the individuals based on appearance; even though we had good views.

In terms of preference; the S-bCD prefers more offshore water and the L-bCD shallower more coastal waters. However, the waters and currents between and around the islands are quite complex and can be quite deep near shore in some areas. As such, habitat, in this case is not a good indicator.

**Bottlenose (Common Bottlenose) Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)**

In descriptive parlance; this is *more common* than the common dolphin above.

We saw 6+ animals on the Izu Island ferry crossing on Tue 25 Nov and 10+ animals on Fri 5 Dec from the coast of Amami.

The animals on the 25 Nov (as with the Common Dolphins on 24 Nov) were, at times, riding the ferry's bow wave.

A robust and active dolphin; always good to see.

**Other Cetaceans?**

A large 'Dolphin' was seen on Thu 27 Nov. In addition, one member of the group sighted a 'Beaked Whale' of some kind (on the same day). Speciation was not attempted.

**Order: ARTIODACTYLA** – Even-toed Ungulates

**Family: Suidae** - Pigs

**Wild Pig (Wild Boar)** (*Sus scrofa*)

Widespread in Japan (not Hokkaido); including some of the Ryukyu islands.

Not actually seen; but sign seen on Okinawa and at several locations on Honshu.

**Family: Cervidae** – Deer

**Sika (Sika Deer)** (*Cervus nippon*)

This species was once widespread throughout E Asia in historical times and has been subject to a long history of management, transportation and hunting. It is now extinct to very rare in most of its' former range. Introduced to numerous other countries, including Britain (where, in some areas, it is regarded as a pest).

Japan is its' native stronghold and it is found on all the main islands; although only in Hokkaido is it generally abundant and apparent.

A large 'typical' deer seen on all days in Hokkaido (26-30 Nov); sometimes in great numbers and at close proximity. Seen in a variety of habitats from coastal scrub and salt marsh to higher elevation forests. Sightings included some particularly resplendent males.

## Appendix A.1 References and Bibliography

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## 2. FISH

**Order: PERCIFORMES** – Perch-like Bony-Fish

**Family: Salmonidae** – Salmonids

**Chum (Dog or Keta) Salmon** (*Oncorhynchus keta*)

*Oncorhynchus* is a genus of Pacific salmon and trout. *O. keta* has the largest natural range of any Pacific salmon and is often extremely abundant.

This species is included in this narrative for three good reasons:-

1. It was particularly abundant – and evident – in rivers on the Hokkaido leg of the tour.
2. Many in the tour group had not experienced a 'salmon run'.
3. This species is a pivotal food resource for many species; including, for example, the magnificent Steller's Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*).

The sight of the salmon run was both fascinating and spectacular. They are the last Pacific salmon species to spawn (November to January) and die about two weeks after their return to freshwater. We observed fish in all stages of this transition from spawning to death. See:- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chum\\_salmon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chum_salmon)

Many other species of fish were seen. Wherever the water was not being significantly churned – and in almost all rivers, estuaries and harbours – fish could be seen, often in large numbers. These ranged from shoals of medium-large mullet to more delicate 'pipefish'.



*Blakiston' Fish Owl*



*Ryukyu Scops Owl*



*Crested Kingfisher*



*Brown Dipper*