

JAPAN IN WINTER

JANUARY 12 – 24, 2013

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KOJI NIIYA ON HOKKAIDO**

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Our Japan in Winter tour made its inaugural run in January 2013, and more than lived up to its billing as a “crane and sea-eagle spectacle.” The tour, run on an itinerary carefully crafted by Japanese birding tour leader Kaz Shinoda, traversed the three main—and distinctively different—lands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Hokkaido, with about a third of the tour devoted to each island. Kaz’s wealth of birding experience in Japan enabled us to see a superb variety of birds, from cranes and sea-eagles to many Japanese endemic birds, world rarities, more than 25 species of waterfowl, northern finch and bunting specialties, and—perhaps the premier bird of the tour—Blakiston’s Fish-Owl.

Every tour has its highlights, and Japan in Winter had a steady run of them. Let’s start with Blakiston’s Fish-Owl, even though we saw it late in the tour on the snowy, northern island of Hokkaido. We stayed at a traditional Japanese inn, known as a ryokan, in eastern Hokkaido, where we also enjoyed wonderful traditional Japanese meals. After dinner on the first of our two nights there, just as the group had wrapped up the day’s bird checklist, an inn employee rushed into the dining area to tell us that the Blakiston’s Fish-Owl had arrived at the pond behind the inn. The dining room’s tall windows faced the pond and, quickly wiping condensation from the windows, we faced toward the pond to see not only the largest species of owl in the world, but one that makes its living hunting fish. We were quickly ushered to an adjoining room that faced the pond with an even closer view of the owl.

It was the female of the resident pair, the larger of the two sexes, and she stood at the edge of the small pond facing us, peering intently into the water. A female Blakiston’s Fish-Owl can weigh 10 ½ pounds—that’s more than a typical Bald Eagle and a lot more than large owls like Snowy or Great Horned. Although not much taller than one of these other owls, this fish-owl was twice as wide—built like a sumo wrestler. The thrill of seeing one of the most remarkable birds in the world is hard to capture in words. After about 15 minutes, the massive fish-owl leapt forward, grabbed a fish from below the water’s surface, held it up in one powerful talon, and then a moment later flew off into the darkness. All of our guest rooms faced toward the pond too, and during that same night and the next, group members had repeated views of the owl and its fishing technique.

As amazing and memorable as the fish-owl was, that experience was rivaled closely by the Red-crowned Cranes on Hokkaido. Known also as Japanese Crane and considered the largest of all cranes, the people of Hokkaido have gone to great lengths to help this endangered species thrive on the island. We first saw Red-crowned Cranes at sunrise, as a flock of hundreds stood in the icy shallows of a river turned pink by the first rays of sun. Later we watched the cranes at gathering areas where they fed, and often pairs would dance together and raise their necks side by side while giving loud, musical unison calls. A magical experience.

The same day we saw the fish-owl in the evening, a local guide, Koji Niiya, who toured with us on Hokkaido, had taken us to see another owl, a Ural Owl on its day roost. Other highlights on Hokkaido included very close views of massive Steller’s Sea-Eagles (we saw more than 100),

White-tailed Eagles, and a boat trip on which we saw regional specialty Spectacled Guillemot, as well as five other auk species, including Least Auklet.

Hokkaido's cranes were a marvel, but it was on the southern island of Kyushu that we experienced cranes on an epic scale. At Arasaki, where land has been set aside for cranes to winter and prosper, we saw over 13,000 cranes. Most were statuesque White-naped Cranes and smaller, darker Hooded Cranes, both very attractive. With a bit of searching we found rarer cranes mixed in the massive assemblage: a few Common (or Eurasian) Cranes, Sandhill Cranes, and one young Siberian Crane—one of the rarest cranes in the world. That makes six species of cranes for the tour, more than one might see in any other country in the world.

As we traveled from island to island, our compilation of waterfowl species grew to 27 species! There were many truly eye-catching ducks: Mandarin and Falcated ducks, Smew and Baikal Teal, and hundreds of Long-tailed and Harlequin ducks. There were Whooper Swans and Bewick's Swans, Tundra Bean-Geese and Common Shelducks, and many more. We saw such Japanese endemics as Japanese Wagtail and Japanese Woodpecker, and other species tied to only slightly broader ranges: Japanese Pygmy-Woodpeckers just 5 ½ inches long, huge Japanese Grosbeaks, and Long-billed Plovers. There were world rarities: Black-faced Spoonbill and Saunders's Gull; such highly prized wintering buntings as Meadow, Rustic, Chestnut-eared, and Gray; and sought after finches like Long-tailed Rosefinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, and Hawfinch. There were stunning thrushes like the huge Scaly Thrush and Blue Rock-Thrush, and very tame little gems like Daurian Redstart and Red-flanked Bluetail. There was the almost mythical Solitary Snipe probing in an icy stream in Hokkaido and, nearby, a singing Brown Dipper.

Our guides helped us come to know more about Japanese culture, religion, history, and food. A tour of Shinto shrine with the shrine's director was a cultural highlight.

One final wildlife highlight: As we came in from a walk in the snowy Japanese Alps (at Karuizawa), we sat back to take in birds coming to our lodge's bird feeders. There were Marsh Tits, Great Tits, Varied Tits and, suddenly, the birds vanished from the feeders only to be replaced on the feeder platforms by a troop of "Snow Monkeys": burly, heavily furred, red-faced Japanese Macaques, including mothers toting young ones on their arms. The monkeys made short work of the bird seed.

Days 1-2 Travel to Tokyo area.

Day 2 Sunday, January 13: **Optional Pre-trip Outing for Early Arrivals.** Departed from Narita View Hotel to several birding spots in the Narita vicinity: 1) swan sanctuary in Motono Village in Chiba Prefecture 2) rice fields and brush lines, and adjacent reservoir at Inbanuma in Chiba Prefecture. A great birding day for swans, ducks, and buntings.

Day 3 Monday, January 14: Departed from Narita View Hotel to visit birding sites on the east coast of the main island of Honshu, including ports of Hasaki and Choshi. Very stormy weather today, with heavy rain and later in the day, a very surprising snow storm that snarled traffic near Tokyo. After lunch at a seafood restaurant in Choshi, drove to Yatsu mudflat and nature center in Chiba Prefecture where already very snowy. Then on to Hotel Seaside Edogawa in Kasai, Tokyo for the night.

- Day 4** Tuesday, January 15: Birded before and after breakfast, walking trails in the large park surrounding Hotel Seaside Edogawa through a mix of wooded areas, marsh edges, and near Tokyo Bay. Saw a variety of woodland birds, including Eurasian Bullfinch and Azure-winged Magpie. Departed after lunch for Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps, several hours later than planned because of traffic problems due to largest snowfall in Tokyo in 12 years. Consequently, we had to skip planned birding at Ura-Myogi. Night at Shiotsubo Onsen Hotel & Spa in Karuizawa.
- Day 5** Wednesday, January 16: Birded on trails and watched bird feeders in the snowy landscape of this mountain resort. Then visited the Chikumagawa River and Tokyo Electric Corp's reservoir in Saku City in Nagano Prefecture. We saw many kinds of ducks including a female Baikal Teal there. Night at Haneda Hotel Tokyu in domestic airport in Haneda.
- Day 6** Thursday, January 17: Morning departure to southern main island of Kyushu. We visited a reservoir in Satsuma-sendai City, where we saw Mandarin Ducks and, in the woods surrounding the reservoir, a Ryukyu Minivet. Driving among plowed fields, wind kept some birds down, but we saw Eurasian Kestrel, Hen/Northern Harrier, and Sky Larks. Checked coastal waters at Michi-no-eki Akune, where had terrific view of Blue Rock-Thrush.
- Day 7** Friday, January 18: We walked riverside trails near Hotel King, and saw a small flock of Falcated Ducks as well as Japanese Wagtails. After breakfast, we visited Arasaki Crane Reserve. We first watched an immense gathering of White-naped and Hooded cranes, then located the rare cranes (Siberian, Eurasian/Common, Sandhill) at the feeding ground in an adjacent area. After looking for buntings in the reedbeds along one of the rivers in the reserve, we went to Takaono Dam. Crested Kingfisher was missing due to ongoing construction there. We returned to Arasaki around sunset to take in the spectacle of thousands of cranes flying to their nighttime roost.
- Day 8** Saturday, January 19: Pre-breakfast birding again along the river adjacent to Hotel King. After breakfast, we visited the two rivers in Yatsushiro City in Kumamoto Prefecture. With the tide high at the Kumagawa River, we first birded near Hikawa River first and saw Long-billed Plovers and two rarities, Black-faced Spoonbills and Saunders's Gulls. Later, at lower tide, we scoped shorebirds, gulls, and herons at Kumagawa River.
- Day 9** Sunday, January 20: Morning birding at Miike, a part of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park on Kyushu, in the forest and walking along the lake edge. Mid-afternoon flight back to Haneda, where we caught a second flight to Kushiro on the island of Hokkaido. Arriving in Kushiro, we met up with Koji, who would guide us on Hokkaido. Dinner and night at Hotel Taito in Tsurui.
- Day 10** Monday, January 21: Before sunrise, assembled at a bridge in Tsurui to watch the roost of Red-crowned Cranes on the river. After breakfast, visited crane sanctuary to watch feeding cranes as many were flying in. Later, Koji took us to a spot in the forest where a Ural Owl was visible on a day roost. Toured other areas nearby eastern Hokkaido, including Lake Kussharo where Whooper Swans were gathered. Evening vigil after dinner at Ryokan Fujiya for Blakiston's Fish-Owl, which appeared first at about 7:30 p.m. Dinner and night at Ryokan Fujiya.
- Day 11** Tuesday, January 22: Left early for birding along eastern shore of Hokkaido, beginning with lots of Steller's Sea-Eagles and some White-tailed Eagles at Notsuke Peninsula and

Lake Furen. Early afternoon birding cruise from Ochiishi among offshore islands, where lots of alcids, sea ducks, and cormorants were seen. Returned to Ryokan Fujiya for a second night, again watching (successfully) for Blakiston's Fish-Owl after dinner.

Day 12 Wednesday, January 23: Birded close by ryokan before departing, rewarded with scope studies of Solitary Snipe and Brown Dipper. Sightseeing stops at Mashu Lake caldera in Akan National Park, at Akan Lake and Ainu theme shopping area. Lunch and then crane watching at Akan Kokusai Tsuru (Crane) Center. Tour of Tottori Shinto shrine with shrine manager, and then stop at Wasyo fish market. On to Kushiro airport, where we had dinner before flying to Haneda. Night at Haneda Hotel Tokyu in Terminal 2.

Day 13 Thursday, January 24: Shuttle from Haneda for departures from Narita Airport.

FIELD LIST

NOTE: species in **bold** are unusual to rare sightings for Japan

KEY:

P = optional pre-tour outing 1/13/13

HN = Honshu

K = Kyushu

HK = Hokkaido

ABBREVIATIONS: AOU = American Ornithological Union;
BOU = British Ornithological Union;
IOC/IOU = International Ornithological Committee/Union

BIRDS

WATERFOWL: GEESE, SWANS & DUCKS (Anatidae)

Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) – **K**; one with Tundra Bean-Geese at Arasaki Crane Reserve

Tundra Bean-Goose (*Anser fabalis*) – **K**; we scoped five at Arasaki Crane Reserve

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – **P,K**. At Motono Village swan sanctuary on pre-trip outing, there were hundreds of Bewick's type Tundra Swans and several North American type with restricted yellow on bill. One also at Arasaki. Bewick's Swan (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) is considered by some European and Asian authorities a distinct species (*C. bewickii*)

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) – **P,HK**. Superb views of these large swans with lots of yellow at base of bill at several sites on Hokkaido. At least 6 at Motono swan sanctuary on pre-trip.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) – **K**. We scoped a few at Arasaki, then saw hundreds at Kumagawa River mouth.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) – **K**. After a bit of searching we found a couple pairs of these beautiful ducks on a reservoir in Satsuma-sendai City

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) – **HN**

Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*) – P,K. Excellent views of these elegant ducks from the river trail near Hotel King on Kyushu. Seen elsewhere on Kyushu and in large numbers on the pre-trip outing on Inbanuma reservoir.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) – P,HN,K,HK

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – widespread, seen on all three islands

Eastern Spot-billed Duck (*Anas zonorhyncha*) – P,HN,K; numerous

Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) – HN

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – seen on all three islands

Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) – P,HN. Kaz sorted out a few on reservoirs, among many other ducks.

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) – P,HN,K,HK. British Ornithological Union (BOU) splits Green-winged Teal typical of North America as *Anas carolinensis* from Eurasian/Common Teal as *Anas crecca*. American Ornithological Union still considers the two as subspecies (*A. crecca carolinensis* and *A. crecca crecca*). We saw many of the Eurasian form and Kaz picked out one of the North American form at Saku City reservoir.

Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) – HN

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) – P,HN,K,HK

Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) – HN,HK

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – HN,HK; a few in Choshi harbor and hundreds on the boat trip out of Ochiishi on Hokkaido

White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*). HK. Some authorities split White-winged Scoter into three species, and in their taxonomy the “White-winged” Scoter seen in Japan is Stejneger’s Scoter (*M. stejnegeri*). BOU splits Velvet (*M. fusca*) and White-winged (*M. deglandi*), with *stejnegeri* considered just a subspecies of White-winged. AOU hasn’t yet split them.

Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*). HK. Hundreds seen on the boat trip. AOU recently split Black Scoter from Common Scoter (*M. nigra*); Japanese wintering birds are *M. americana*, although vagrant *M. nigra* could occur.

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) – HK. Scores of these lovely sea ducks were seen on the boat trip.

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) – HK

Smew (*Mergellus albellus*) – P,HN. A petite, beautiful merganser, we saw dozens on the pre-trip, and another five at Saku City reservoir.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) – HN,HK. Common Merganser/Goosander in Eurasia is a different subspecies (*M. m. merganser*) than in North America (*M. m. americana*).

Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*) – HK. Mostly in Ochiishi harbor.

PHEASANTS, GROUSE & ALLIES (Phasianidae)

Green Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) – HN; heard only

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – P,HN,K,HK

Horned (Slavonian) Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) – HN; a couple in Choshi harbor

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – HN; a large, slim, elegant grebe

Eared (Black-necked) Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – HN,K

CORMORANTS & SHAGS (Phalacrocoracidae)

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – P,HN,K

Temminck's/Japanese Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) – HN,K

Red-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – HK; we were fortunate to see several flying near nesting islands during the boat trip

Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – HN,HK

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNES (Ardeidae)

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) – P,HN,K

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) – P,HN,K. The subspecies seen in Japan is *A. alba modesta*, in North America *A. alba alba*; some split the Asian form as Eastern Great Egret (*A. modesta*)

Little Egret (*Ardea garzetta*) – P,HN,K

Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – K

IBISES & SPOONBILLS (Threskiornithidae)

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) – K; scarce in Japan by range, we saw one at Arasaki and one at the mouth of Hikawa River

Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) – HN,K. The one hunkering down with gulls at stormy Choshi harbor was quite a surprise. At the mouth of the Hikawa there were 20 roosting with one Eurasian Spoonbill. An endangered species with a tiny range in southern Japan and nearby mainland.

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES (Accipitridae)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – P,HN,K

Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – seen on all islands, this scavenger was the most frequently seen raptor; on Kyushu, nearly 100 gathered at sunset near the Kumagawa River.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – HK; Impressive, Bald Eagle sized raptors, our closest views were those eagles flying in to grab fish during the Red-crowned Crane feeding at Akan Kokusai Crane Center.

Steller's Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) – HK. Superb views of immense eagles with huge orange beaks perched right near the roadway at Notsuke.

Eastern Marsh Harrier (*Circus spilonotus*) - P

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). P,K. Known in Europe and Asia as Hen Harrier, some European authors split Northern Harrier of North America as *Circus hudsonius* from Hen Harrier of Eurasia as *Circus cyaneus*.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – P,K

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) – P; one or two birds in flight near swan sanctuary

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) – P,K,HK

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – P,K; best views were of a bird hunting near the levee along the Kumagawa River on Kyushu.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – P (seen by Kaz)

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – HN,K,HK. Chasing ducks at Saku reservoir on Honshu.

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) – K; heard near Hotel King on the river walk

Eurasian/Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – K; The European and Asian version of this bird is now considered a distinct species from North American Common Gallinule (*Gallinula galeata*), a split recognized by AOU in 2011.

Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*) – P,HN,K

CRANES (Gruidae)

Siberian Crane (*Grus leucogeranus*) – K. A critically endangered species, we were very fortunate that a juvenile had joined the thousands of cranes at Arasaki. Its rusty brown feathering was unlike any other cranes we saw.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) – K; rare, annual straggler to Kyushu; seen at Arasaki

White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*) – K; thousands of these statuesque, red-faced cranes at Arasaki

Common/Eurasian Crane (*Grus grus*) – K; another annual straggler to Kyushu; seen at Arasaki

Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) – K; thousands at Arasaki, smaller and darker than the White-naped Cranes they assembled with

Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*) – HK. The premier crane in Japan, also called Japanese Crane and the focus of much cultural elaboration. Endangered. We first saw them at in the river shallows at sunrise, with the pink light coloring the surrounding snow, ice, and water. Also seen at close range at a couple of feeding areas, where some were dancing and calling in unison.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS (Charadriidae)

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) – P,HN,K

Black-bellied/Gray Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – HN,K

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) – K. Dozens on the mudflats beyond the levee along the Kumagawa River. Kentish Plover was split from the similar North American species, Snowy Plover (*Charadrius nivosus*), by AOU in 2011.

Long-billed Plover (*Charadrius placidus*) – HN,K; excellent views of this local Asian endemic foraging along shallow streams

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – P,HN,K; very similar to North American Spotted Sandpiper, but no spots

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) – **HN,K**; good scope views of this very dark tringid

Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) – K; a few foraging on streams and mudflats

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) – K; a very nice surprise, there were at least 7 on the Kumagawa mudflats

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – HN,K

Solitary Snipe (*Gallinago solitaria*) – HK. Koji found one very near Ryokan Fujiya, a large and darkly barred snipe wading in a frigid stream. Great scope views of a hard to find bird.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). P,HN,K. Good views at several sites of these very cryptically plumaged shorebirds. We watched one hunkered down in a snow-covered marsh on Honshu. A distinct species from the snipe formerly known as Common Snipe in North America, now classified as Wilson's Snipe (*G. delicata*).

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS (Laridae)

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa trydactyla*) – HN; a couple roosting with hundreds of other gulls
Saunders's Gull (*Saundersilarus saundersi*) – K. A vulnerable and range-restricted species, an immature flew in close to the bus where we were able to scope it at length. Later, at low tide along the Kumagawa, we saw perhaps 30 of them.

Black-headed Gull (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – HN,K

Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) – HN,K

Mew Gull/Common Gull (*Larus canus*) – HN. Most authorities split Mew Gull of North America as *L. brachyrhynchus* from Common Gull of Eurasia as *L. canus*, but AOU has yet to follow the trend.

Herring Gull/Vega Gull (*Larus argentatus/L. vegae*) – P,HN,K,HK. AOU has yet to adopt the split of the Vega Gull of east Asia from Herring Gull of North America, although most authorities favor this split. Therefore, according to AOU, the Vega Gulls we saw in Japan are *Larus argentatus vegae*, a subspecies.

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) – HN,K,HK

AUKS, MURRES & PUFFINS (Alcidae)

Common Murre/Guillemot (*Uria aalge*) – HK

Thick-billed Murre/Brunnich's Guillemot (*Uria lomvia*) – HK

Pigeon Guillemot (*Cephus Columba*) – HK; a scant visitor to the area

Spectacled Guillemot (*Cephus carbo*) – HK. Range restricted mostly to Sea of Okhotsk, so very much a regional specialty. We saw 50 or more on the boat trip, some quite close.

Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – HK

Least Auklet (*Aethia pusilla*) – HK; the smallest of all alcids and a Bering Sea endemic breeder, we saw 15 or more from the boat

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) – P,HN,K; a very attractive dove

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) – P,HN,K,HK

OWLS (Strigidae)

Blakiston's Fish-Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) – HK. One of the premier birds of the tour, we had excellent views on two nights of the immense owl coming to a small pond near the Ryokan Fujiya. We watched it patiently hunt fish from the pond edge, then jump in and pull out a fish with its talons, before flying off. A pair was in the trees behind the ryokan early one morning, and a pair called a great deal after dark.

Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*) – HK; superb views of one on a day roost, half of its body sticking out of a tree cavity

KINGFISHERS (Alcedinidae)

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – P,K

WOODPECKERS (Picidae)

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos kizuki*) – HN,K; close views of truly tiny woodpeckers

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) – HN,HK

Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*) – HK; seen by a few of us when flying across in front of the bus, near Akan Pass

Japanese (Green) Woodpecker (*Picus awokera*) – HN,K; good views of this Japan endemic near the lodge in Karuizawa

CUCKOO-SHRIKES (Campephagidae)

Ryuku Minivet (*Pericrocotus tegimae*) – K; nice views of a very scarce visitor to the area, the one along the lakeside trail at Miike was seen from just a few meters

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Bull-headed Shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*) – P,HN,K; petite shrike with a handsome rusty plumage

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES (Corvidae)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) – HN,HK. A gorgeous jay, seen best on Hokkaido, coming to the ryokan bird feeders and in the park at Lake Kussharo

Azure-winged Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*) – HN. A small flock visited the front of the Seaside Edogawa Hotel in the morning, the only place we saw them. Some authorities split the similar magpie found only in the Iberian Peninsula as Iberian Azure-winged Magpie, *C. cooki*.

Daurian Jackdaw (*Corvus dauuricus*) – K; flying in a huge flock of Rooks, probably only seen well by Bob

Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) – K; large flocks at Arasaki

Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) – P,HN,K,HK

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) – P,HN,K,HK

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) – HK; a pair flew over above the geothermal sulfur vents

SWALLOWS & MARTINS (Hirundinidae)

Asian House Martin (*Delichon dasypus*) –K; flocks flying both at the reservoir in Satsuma-Sendai City and along the river near Hotel King

LARKS (Alaudidae)

Sky Lark/Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) – K

CHICKADEES & TITS (Paridae)

Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*) – HK; the chickadee lookalike on snowy Hokkaido

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*) – HN; coming to the feeders at Karuizawa

Coal Tit (*Pariparus ater*) – HN

Great Tit (*Parus major*) – HN,K,HK. Likely several species are included under Great Tit, although BOU hasn't officially split them. IOC splits Great Tit into 3 species, and those in Japan are considered Japanese Tit (*Parus minor*), same as what Mark Brazil terms Eastern Great Tit.

Varied Tit (*Sittiparus varius*) – HN,K. The unmistakable, chocolate brown breasted chickadees with raspy call notes.

LONG-TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – HN,K,HK. Definitely in the running for the cutest birds of the tour, who wouldn't enjoy seeing a bushtit decked out in white, black, and pink? The distinctive *caudatus* form on Hokkaido even had an all white head.

NUTHATCHES (Sittidae)

Eurasian Nuthatch (*Sitta euroapea*) – HN,HK. First seen at Karuizawa, there were nuthatches visiting feeders on snowy Hokkaido.

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – K. Seen by some in the wooded edge of Kumagawa River walk. Formerly part of the Winter Wren species, which is now three species.

DIPPERS (Cinclidae)

Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) – K,HK. After a quick view along the stream near our Karuizawa lodge, we had nice scope views near the Hokkaido ryokan, where as many as three dippers congregated under the bridge.

BULBULS (Pycnonotidae)

Brown-eared Bulbul (*Hypsipetes amaurotis*) – ubiquitous, except in snowy areas

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) – HN,K,HK

BUSH-WARBLERS & ALLIES (Cettidae)

Japanese Bush-Warbler (*Cettia diphone*) – P,HN,K

YUHINAS, WHITE-EYES & ALLIES (Zosteropidae)

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – P,HN,K

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS (Muscicapidae)

Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*) – HN,K. The forest edge of the Miike lake trail was a fine spot to see this tiny “robin.” We watched a couple feeding low to the ground, then perching on stumps or other low objects.

Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus auroreus*) – P,HN,K. A little gem, we watched these tiny flycatchers on several occasions as they perched low and foraged very close to the group. [Daurian" refers to the region of Transbaikal known as Dauria of southeastern Siberia to the east of lake Baikal.]

Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) – K. The very blue male seen on the Kyushu coastline was literally hanging out on the edge of the parking area.

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Scaly (White's) Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) – HK. A wonderful surprise, one of these scarce and very shy, cryptic large thrushes was foraging alongside a jay on the lawn of a park.

Pale Thrush (*Turdus pallidus*) – HN,K,HK

Brown-headed Thrush (*Turdus chrysolaus*) – P,HN

Dusky Thrush (*Turdus eunomus*) – widespread and common winter visitor

STARLINGS (Sturnidae)

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – K; surprisingly, a rarity where we saw a few at Arasaki

White-cheeked Starling (*Sturnus cineraceus*) – P,HN,K

ACCENTORS (Prunellidae)

Japanese Accentor (*Prunella rubida*) – HN; seen by Tara and Kaz near the village on Karuizawa

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)

Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) – HN,K; seen best along the small river near Hotel King on Kyushu

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) – all islands

Japanese Wagtail (*Motacilla grandis*) – P,HN,K; the mostly black wagtail, endemic to Japan

Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – K; striding along the forest floor at Miike

Buff-bellied/American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) – P,HN,K. The pipit seen in plowed fields and rice paddies, known as Buff-bellied in Eurasia and American in North America. The prevalent subspecies in Japan is *japonicus*, which also strays to western Alaska.

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

Meadow Bunting (*Emberiza cioides*) – P,HN,K; had a very bold face pattern, like Lark Sparrow

Chestnut-eared Bunting (*Emberiza fucata*) – K; a bit shy and less prevalent than Black-faced

Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*) – P,K; like Chestnut-eared, seen best in riverside brush on Kyushu

Black-faced Bunting (*Emberiza spodocephala*) – P,HN,K; the most commonly seen bunting during the trip

Gray Bunting (*Emberiza variabilis*) – P; seen by part of the group foraging on the ground on the grounds of Narita View Hotel

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) – P,HN,K

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES (Fringillidae)

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – K; near Arasaki, a huge, distant roaming flock; near Hotel King, we saw two females perched up at close range

Asian Rosy-Finch (*Leucosticte arctoa*) – HN; a flock flew over the group at the Saku City reservoir, seen by part of the group

Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Uragus sibiricus*) – HN; one of the prize birds seen above the lodge in Karuizawa

Oriental Greenfinch (*Chloris sinica*) – P,HN,K

Eurasian Siskin (*Spinus spinus*) – K

Eurasian Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – HN,HK; seen very well at Seaside Park and Karuizawa, a very striking finch with pinkish underparts

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – a few seen on each island, always a treat

Japanese Grosbeak (*Eophona personata*) – HN,K; one came to the feeders at Karuizawa, and two more were seen on the river walk near Hotel King

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*) – K; just a few among Eurasian Tree Sparrows

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) – widespread, common

MAMMALS

Japanese Macaque (*Macaca fuscata*) – HN; “snow monkeys” took over the bird feeders at the hotel in Karuizawa, and others were seen along the trails

Japanese Hare (*Lepus brachyurus*) – HN; seen by Bob on the Karuizawa trails

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) – HK

Sika [Deer] (*Cervus nippon*) – HK; looking like small elk, the Sika were numerous on Hokkaido

Japanese Marten (*Martes melampus*) – HK; seen by some near the Ryokan Fujiya feeders

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*) – HK; brief sighting on the Ochiishi boat trip

Japanese Squirrel (*Sciurus lis*) – HK; squirrels with tufted ears at the Ryokan Fujiya feeders and in trees nearby

Wild/feral horses (*Equus ferus*) – HK