

JAPAN IN WINTER

JANUARY 11 – 23, 2014

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KOJI NIIYA ON HOKKAIDO**

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TOUR REPORT
JAPAN IN WINTER
January 11–23, 2014

By Bob Sundstrom

We were midway through our 2014 Japan in Winter tour. On this day we were exploring the southern main island of Kyushu, with nearly a full day to bird at Arasaki Crane Reserve. The reserve is winter home to spectacular concentrations of more than 13,000 cranes, including a large proportion of all the world's statuesque White-naped Cranes and smaller Hooded Cranes. At sunset the previous day, we had arrived at the crane reserve in time to watch the sunset fly-in of thousands of cranes from adjacent fields to a shallow lake nearby. Long skeins of cranes called loudly in flight as they passed by our vantage point, with the sun setting behind them. An astounding sight! But today we would view the masses of cranes in the full light of day, and see what other birds Arasaki had to offer.

Kaz Shinoda, our Japanese leader, quickly located some of the rare cranes mixed in with the masses of Asian species—a few Eurasian Cranes and a few Sandhills. Last year's tour had been extraordinarily lucky to see a single Siberian Crane in the mix. Such a rarity seemed unlikely this year. Suddenly Kaz got a serendipitous tip from a photographer that a Ruddy Shelduck, a very rare vagrant from central Asia, was in the fields just a kilometer down the road. With a new rush of excitement, we piled into our small, comfy bus and motored the short distance. There, in a grassy area not far from the river, was a stunning Ruddy Shelduck: a huge duck, about two feet long, feathered in the warmest orange-brown imaginable, except for its creamy-colored head. We had excellent scope views of the duck over several minutes, before it moved on. Our timing had been impeccable—at least impeccably lucky.

Arasaki had more surprises for us that day. A small pond held two roosting Eurasian Spoonbills and three Black-faced Spoonbills, an endangered waterbird with a miniscule range in Asia. We scanned the wet fields of the reserve more carefully now and turned up gorgeous, iridescent Northern Lapwings, numbers of Common Snipe, and a very unexpected twosome of Long-toed Stints. A Eurasian Curlew flew in, at close range. Both Tundra and Taiga bean-geese were scoped. All of this with a backdrop of thousands of majestic cranes. Not far away, we walked along riverside reed beds, where a small flock of Chinese Penduline-Tits showed nicely. Just before returning to our hotel in nearby Izumi, we stopped near a bridge over a river. A couple of Brown Dippers, Gray Wagtail and... just around a bend in the river, one of our most-wanted birds: a Crested Kingfisher. This is a massive, zebra-striped kingfisher, and a very shy and skittish bird. This evening the kingfisher flew off before everyone got to see it. But, when we returned the following morning, there was a pair of Crested Kingfishers on hand, and we all had good scope views and a very close flyover of this exciting bird.

The Japan in Winter tour truly lives up to its billing as a “crane and sea-eagle spectacle.” The tour has been designed by Japanese birding tour leader, Kaz, and traverses the three main—and distinctively different— islands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Hokkaido, with about a third of the tour

devoted to each island. On our 2014 tour we saw five species of cranes, including the endangered Red-crowned Crane, which has a resident population on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. We watched hundreds of Red-crowned Cranes at close range, many pairs calling in unison and performing courtship dances. 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.

Hokkaido is also the winter home of stunning concentrations of perhaps the world's most impressive eagle, Steller's Sea-Eagle, which has a very small world range in northeast Asia. At one spot we saw at least 100 Steller's Sea-Eagles, massive brown and white eagles with immense orange bills, standing on the ice of a frozen lake. The Steller's towered over the scores of White-tailed Eagles that shared the ice with them, and White-tailed Eagles are the size of Bald Eagles. The equal of the cranes and eagles was another bird on Hokkaido—the world's largest owl, Blakiston's Fish-Owl, which we saw at close range early one morning at a pond just behind the lovely Japanese inn where we stayed. Blakiston's Fish-Owl stands just a bit taller than a Great Horned Owl, but its body is more than twice as massive—a sumo wrestler among owls. We also had the good fortune of seeing and photographing at close range a Ural Owl, an owl built like a smaller version of Great Gray Owl, on its day roost in a cavity in a huge tree.

Winter in Japan also means vast quantities of waterfowl of more than 25 species, including such beauties as Smew, Falcated Duck, and Mandarin Duck, and concentrations of enormous Whooper Swans. A boat trip on Hokkaido's east coast gave us close views of Spectacled Guillemot, a regional specialty, as well as other species of alcids and many Long-tailed Ducks and Harlequin Ducks. 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, Long-billed Plovers, and Saunders's Gull. There were such highly prized wintering buntings as Elegant, Meadow, Rustic, Black-faced, and Gray; sought after finches like Long-tailed Rosefinch; handsome Daurian Redstarts and Bull-headed Shrikes; and lovely Azure-winged Magpies. A rare Forest Wagtail, a bird that Kaz had found earlier in winter and was still present in a woodland on Kyushu, added a fourth wagtail species to the trip and a remarkable rarity.

Great birding was complemented by the wonderful cultural experience of traveling over three islands in Japan and staying in a couple of traditional Japanese inns, as well as many wonderful traditional Japanese meals.

Days 1-2 Travel to Tokyo area.

Day 2 Sunday, January 12: Optional Pre-trip Outing for Early Arrivals. Some of the group birded informally on hotel grounds and vicinity after breakfast. Departed from Narita View Hotel mid-morning 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. Excellent day for swans, ducks, and buntings.

Day 3 Monday, January 13: Departed Narita View Hotel toward birding sites on the east coast of the main island of Honshu. A couple of hours birding at Kounoike reservoir adjacent to Kamisu city hall. Then on to port of Choshi, where we had lunch at a seafood

- restaurant and birded several spots around port waterfront. Late afternoon birding along Hitachi River, then on to Hotel Seaside Edogawa in Kasai, Tokyo for the night.
- Day 4** Tuesday, January 14: Birded before breakfast, walking trails in the large park surrounding Hotel Seaside Edogawa through a mix of wooded areas, marsh edges, and near Tokyo Bay. Departed after breakfast for Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps, stopping enroute to bird in the mountains at Ura-Myogi. Night at Shiotsubo Onsen Hotel & Spa in Karuizawa.
- Day 5** Wednesday, January 15: Birded before and after breakfast along trails and watched bird feeders in the snowy landscape of this mountain resort. After lunch, departed to Chikumagawa River and Tokyo Electric Corp's reservoir in Saku City in Nagano Prefecture. Night at Haneda Hotel Tokyu in domestic airport in Haneda.
- Day 6** Thursday, January 16: Morning departure to southern main island of Kyushu. We first visited Sendai reservoir, then farmlands at Taake where we walked pathways among rice paddies. Later stopped at seaside viewpoint Michi-no-eki Akune, where had terrific view of Blue Rock-Thrush. Late afternoon to Arasaki Crane Reserve to take in the sunset spectacle of thousands of cranes flying to their nighttime roost. Night Hotel King.
- Day 7** Friday, January 17: Prior to breakfast, we walked riverside trails near Hotel King. After breakfast, we visited Arasaki Crane Reserve, where we would spend the bulk of the day. We first watched an immense gathering of White-naped and Hooded cranes, then located the rare cranes (Siberian, Eurasian/Common) at the feeding ground in an adjacent area. After looking for buntings at reedbeds in the reserve, we looked for Crested Kingfisher from a bridge near Kogawa Dam. Second night Hotel King.
- Day 8** Saturday, January 18: Returned to bridge near Kogawa Dam, where all were able to see shy Crested Kingfisher. Then birded a woodland trail along Kogawa Dam reservoir and from atop the dam itself. Later birded near two river mouths in Yatsushiro City in Kumamoto Prefecture, Kumagawa River and Hikawa River, as well as through adjacent agricultural areas. Night at traditional inn, the Yunomoto-Onsen Ryokan in Miyazaki.
- Day 9** Sunday, January 19: 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 help guide us on Hokkaido. Dinner and night at Hotel Taito in Tsurui.
- Day 10** Monday, January 20: Before sunrise, assembled at Otowa bridge in Tsurui to watch the roost of Red-crowned Cranes on the river. After breakfast, visited a private landowner's crane feeding site, as well as Tsurui-Itoh Crane Sanctuary where cranes were flying in. Later, Koji took us to a spot in the forest where a Ural Owl was visible on a day roost. Traveled through other areas in nearby eastern Hokkaido, stopping to bird at Lake Kussharo where Whooper Swans were gathered, before continuing on to our lodging in Yoroushi, the Ryokan Fujiya. Began vigil for Blakiston's Fish-Owl, which appeared early the following morning around sunrise at the pond just behind our rooms. Dinner and night at Ryokan Fujiya.
- Day 11** Tuesday, January 21: After breakfast, birded near ryokan and adjacent stream, before departing for birding along eastern shore of Hokkaido. At Lake Fuhren (Fuhren-ko), saw many Steller's Sea-Eagles and White-tailed Eagles at an ice-fishing spot. Koji also led us to a spot on Nemuro Peninsula where we saw a Ural Owl on a day roost. Early afternoon

birding cruise from Ochiishi (Hanasaki harbor) among offshore islands, where lots of alcids, sea ducks, and cormorants were seen. Group members not taking cruise joined Kaz to bird from land at Cape Hanasaki on Nemuro Peninsula. Returned to Ryokan Fujiya for a second night.

Day 12 Wednesday, January 22: Birded close by ryokan before departing. Lunch and then crane watching at Akan Kokusai Tsuru (Crane) Center. On to Kushiro airport for afternoon flight to Haneda. Farewell dinner and night at Haneda Hotel Tokyu in Haneda Terminal 2.

Day 13 Thursday, January 23: Shuttle from Haneda for departures from Narita Airport.

FIELD LIST

NOTE: species in **bold** are unusual to rare sightings for Japan; alternate common names in ()

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)

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

Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – P,K. At Motono Village swan sanctuary on pre-trip outing, hundreds of Bewick's type Tundra Swans were present. (*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 bill base at several sites on Hokkaido. A few family groups at Motono swan sanctuary on pre-trip.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) – K. We scoped a few at Arasaki, then saw another 60 at Kumagawa River mouth.

Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – K. A fabulous surprise was the single bird at Arasaki reserve that we were fortunate to see well before it flew off. A rarity in Japan.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) – HN,K. Best views were at Ura-Myogi at sunset, where a flock of 15 floated on the water. Also at Sendai. A large flock of 200+ at Kogawa dam were very skittish.

Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) – HN,K

Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*) – P,K. Nice scope views of these elegant ducks on the pre-trip outing on Inbanuma reservoir, and great scope views at Kounoike reservoir. A few at the reservoir near Chikumagawa River too.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) – 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; just a few

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – HN,K,HK; abundant on Honshu

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*). The Eurasian form was common on the tour.

Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) – HN,K; handsome diving ducks, reminiscent of both Canvasback and Redhead

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) – H. A single drake at Kounoike reservoir, mixed in among a flock of Tufted Ducks. Very rare in Japan.

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

Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) – HN,HK; thousands rafted up on Tokyo Bay

Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – HN,HK; 10 or so Choshi harbor and scores on the boat trip out of Ochiishi

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. Six were seen on the Ochiishi boat trip.

Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*). HK. Hundreds seen on the Ochiishi 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. Quite a few of these beautiful sea ducks were seen on the boat trip.

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) – HK

Smew (*Mergellus albellus*) – P,HN. Seen at three different sites. There were over 100 Smew at Kounoike reservoir. Snow white males with fine black patterning were truly striking.

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. In Hanasaki harbor, the starting point of the Ochiishi cruise.

PHEASANTS, GROUSE & ALLIES (Phasianidae)

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

LOONS (Gaviidae)

Red-throated Loon (Red-throated Diver) (*Gavia stellata*) – flying by just as boat re-entered Hanasaki harbor, the starting point of the Ochiishi cruise.

Arctic Loon (Black-throated Diver) (*Gavia arctica*) – one at Kounoike reservoir, viewed at close range

Pacific Loon (Pacific Diver) (*Gavia pacifica*) – at least one on the Ochiishi cruise

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – P,HN,K,HK; ubiquitous on fresh water

Horned (Slavonian) Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) – K; distantly at seaside viewpoint Michi-no-eki Akune

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – HN; large, slim and pale grebes, hundreds were rafted up on Tokyo Bay, seen from Seaside Park; also a Choshi

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,HK

Red-faced Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax urile*) – HK. One was standing on a large nesting rock at the far point of the Ochiishi boat trip; a scarce bird in the area

Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – HN,HK; at Choshi and Ochiishi

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNs (Ardeidae)

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) – P,HN,K; widespread, many nice views

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 two at Arasaki reserve, roosting alongside three smaller Black-faced Spoonbills

Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) – HN,K. An endangered species with a very small range in southern Japan, we were fortunate to see three on a pond at Arasaki and others at the Hikawa river.

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES (Accipitridae)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – HN,K

Eastern Marsh Harrier (*Circus spilonotus*) – P,HN; nice views early in the tour on Honshu, including near Motono swan reserve and along Hitachi River

Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). HN,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*. The males we saw were paler overall than North American harriers.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – HN; outstanding scope view of a gray-backed adult at Kasai Seaside Park

Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) – P,HN; good views of perched and flying birds, adults and one immature

Black (Black-eared) Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – Seen on all islands and every day of the tour. Often observed soaring on broad wings with notched tail; several perched kites were scoped too, sometimes giving a piercing whistle.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – HK; Bald Eagle-sized, we first saw a few soaring then roughly 100 of them, alongside larger Steller's Sea-Eagles.

Steller's Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) – HK. At Lake Fuhren, scores of these immense eagles with huge orange beaks were standing on the ice-covered lake, while others perched in the trees alongside the lake. A very impressive bird of prey and one of the very largest eagles, Steller's has a rather small geographic range in northeast Asia.

Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) – HK. Seen at Cape Hanasaki by those who skipped the Ochiishi boat trip.

Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) – P,HN,K,HK; seen nearly every day of the tour, but no more than a few on any day

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) – P,HK; heard on pre-trip outing at Inbanuma reservoir, then seen nicely at Akan Crane Reserve as a rail foraged along a concrete drainage channel

Eurasian/Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – P,K; 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 (Common) Coot (*Fulica atra*) – P,HN,K,HK

CRANES (Gruidae)

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

White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*) – K. We saw thousands of these statuesque, red-faced cranes at Arasaki, where 40-50% of the world population winters.

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

Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) – K. Thousands at Arasaki where 80% of the entire population winters, much smaller and darker than the White-naped Cranes they were mixed with at the reserve.

Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*) – HK. The most revered crane in Japan (also called Japanese Crane) and the focus of much cultural elaboration in the country. Endangered. We first saw them at sunrise in the river shallows at Tsurui. Excellent views and photo opportunities at Tsurui at a private landowner's crane feeding site, as well as Tsurui-Itoh Crane Sanctuary, and later at Akan Crane Center.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS (Charadriidae)

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

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) – P,K. Colorfully iridescent and very distinctive with spiked crest, we had excellent views of lapwings at Arasaki and Kyushu rice paddies.

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) – HN, K. On mudflats of Tokyo Bay and 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. A localized Asian endemic that specializes in foraging along shallow, rushing streams.

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – HN,K; very similar behaviorally and in shape to North American Spotted Sandpiper

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) – HN,K; very dark tringid, reminiscent of Solitary Sandpiper

Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) – K; a very distant view

Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) – K; nice view of a single curlew at Arasaki, and a few more in the distance on Kumagawa mudflats

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*) – K. A scarce wintering species in southern Japan, we found a couple in a wet field at Arasaki, in the same field as lapwings and snipe.

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) – HN,K

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*). K. Excellent views at Arasaki and in rice paddies on Kyushu. A distinct species from the snipe formerly known as Common Snipe in North America, now classified as Wilson's Snipe (*G. delicata*).

AUKS, MURRES & PUFFINS (Alcidae)

Common Murre (Guillemot) (*Uria aalge*) – HK; 10 or so on the boat trip

Thick-billed Murre (Brunnich's Guillemot) (*Uria lomvia*) – HK; 5 or so on boat trip

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 roughly 30-40 on the boat trip, some quite close.

Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – HK; a total of perhaps 100 on boat trip

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS (Laridae)

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa trydactyla*) – HN; one at Choshi in a large roost of various gulls

Saunders's Gull (*Saundersilarus saundersi*) – K. At Hikawa and Kumagawa river mouths, we saw at least several dozen of this vulnerable and range-restricted species.

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

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

Mew Gull/Common Gull (*Larus canus*) – HN,K,HK. 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 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.

Thayer's Gull (*Larus thayeri*) – H. Kaz picked one out in a large gull roost at Choshi.

Heuglin's Gull/Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus heuglini/L. fuscus heuglini*) – K. 2 or 3 in gull roost at Hikawa River tide flats. Taxonomic issues surround this species. Some authorities consider it a subspecies of Lesser Black-backed Gull; others consider the *taimyrensis* form we saw a hybrid of Vega and Heuglin's gulls.

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

Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*) – HN,HK; a few at Choshi and Ochiishi

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) – HN,HK; ditto

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

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

Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) – P,HN,K; this handsome dove was common in parks and around houses

OWLS (Strigidae)

Blakiston's Fish-Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) – HK. One of the most anticipated birds of the tour, we saw one early the first morning at Ryokan Fujiya, standing by the small pond visible close at hand from our rooms at the inn. A pair also was heard calling outside the inn by those sitting in the outdoor onsen bath after dark.

Ural Owl (*Strix uralensis*) – HK. Koji knew just where to lead us in the woods on Hokkaido to see a Ural Owl on its day roost, peering out from a large cavity in a big tree.

KINGFISHERS (Alcedinidae)

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – P,K; best scope views on Kyushu, including one along the stream in front of Hotel King

Crested Kingfisher (*Megaceryle [Ceryl] lugubris*) – A huge, zebra-striped kingfisher, we all saw it on our second trip to a bridge over a stream near Kogawa dam. The kingfisher, one of a pair in the area, flew close by us as we stood on the bridge, then was scoped farther down the river. We scoped another from Kogawa dam, which had also flown over the group. Another seen in flight on Hokkaido.

WOODPECKERS (Picidae)

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos kizuki*) – P,HN,K. A tiny woodpecker, we saw them at a variety of spots on Honshu and Kyushu, with at least five in one large mixed flock of woodland birds at Miike.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) – HN,HK. A flashy woodpecker with rosy vent, we had several good views at different spots, including in Karuizawa near the lodge and one coming to the feeder at Ryokan Fujiya where it took turns at the feeder with a Eurasian Jay.

Japanese (Green) Woodpecker (*Picus awokera*) – HN; remained elusive, with only brief view in the woods near the lodge in Karuizawa

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – HN,K; excellent views of this large kestrel, including one along the stream near Hotel King

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) – HK; in tree line near Akan Crane Center

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – P,HN,K

CUCKOO-SHRIKES (Campephagidae)

Ryuku Minivet (*Pericrocotus tegimae*) – K; seen by Kaz and Leon at Miike, in a large mixed flock of woodland birds

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Bull-headed Shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*) – P,HN,K; small shrike feathered in warm rufous tones; seen daily on Honshu and Kyushu

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES (Corvidae)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) – HN,HK. A beautiful jay, rusty brown with a patch of blue in the wing. We saw subspecies *japonicus* on Honshu and *brandtii* on Hokkaido, the latter sometimes split as Brandt's Jay.

Azure-winged Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*) – HN. A flock of about 15 was seen behind the Seaside Edogawa Hotel in the morning, the only place we saw them. Some authorities split the very disjunct population of a similar magpie found only in the Iberian Peninsula as Iberian Azure-winged Magpie, *C. cooki*.

Daurian Jackdaw (*Corvus dauuricus*) – K. In a large flock of Rooks at Arasaki, at least 15 Daurian Jackdaws, all of dark (slate and black) rather than black and white plumage.

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

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

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchus*) – P,HN,K,HK. The larger crow of the trip, with large and humped bill and a remarkable vocabulary of comical calls.

SWALLOWS & MARTINS (Hirundinidae)

Asian House Martin (*Delichon dasypus*) –K; seen only by Lang

LARKS (Alaudidae)

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

CHICKADEES & TITS (Paridae)

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

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*) – HN; seen only at Karuizawa, mostly at seed feeders

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*) – HN,HK; best views at Karuizawa lodge feeders

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 attractive and complex-patterned chocolate brown breasted chickadees.

PENDULINE-TITS (Remizidae)

Eurasian Penduline-Tit – in the reed beds near Arasaki, we had good views of at least four of this tiny birds. Taxonomy varies by authority; some split the birds we saw as Chinese Penduline-Tit (*Remiz consobrinus*).

LONG-TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – P,HN,K. Looking like a bushtit decked out in white, black, and pink. Seen several times in foraging flocks of ten or more.

NUTHATCHES (Sittidae)

Eurasian Nuthatch (*Sitta euroaepa*) – HN, HK. First seen at Karuizawa (subspecies *amurensis*), there were also nuthatches (subspecies *asiatica*) visiting feeders on Hokkaido.

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – K. Seen by some near the feeders at Karuizawa lodge, also on Kyushu in Miike. Formerly part of the Winter Wren species, which is now three species.

DIPPERS (Cinclidae)

Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) – HN, K, HK. We had excellent luck with dippers. Seen very well on the stream near Karuizawa lodge, as well as at Kogawa dam and near Ryokan Fujiya.

BULBULS (Pycnonotidae)

Brown-eared Bulbul (*Hypsipetes amaurotis*) – all but ubiquitous

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) – HN; seen by some at Karuizawa

BUSH-WARBLERS & ALLIES (Cettidae)

Japanese Bush-Warbler (*Cettia diphone*) – P, HN, K. Great views, ultimately, of this difficult to see skulker.

YUHNAS, WHITE-EYES & ALLIES (Zosteropidae)

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – P, HN, K; pairs and small flocks, often near flowers

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS (Muscicapidae)

Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*) – K. Seen by some of the group along the trail near Kogawa dam, and at Miike woodland.

Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus auroreus*) – P, HN, K. Tiny gems, and happily perching low and in the open. [Daurian refers to the region of Transbaikal, also known as Dauria, of southeastern Siberia to the east of lake Baikal.]

Blue Rock-Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) – K. A strikingly blue and rufous male seen on the Kyushu coastline at Michi-no-eki Akune.

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Pale Thrush (*Turdus pallidus*) – HN, K. Quite a few seen on Kyushu, where a common winter visitor.

Brown-headed Thrush (*Turdus chrysolaus*) – P, HN. Seen best at Seaside Park, where a single bird foraged on the ground under a shrub.

Dusky Thrush (*Turdus eunomus*) – P, HN, K, HK; widespread and common winter visitor

BABLERS (Timaliidae)

Hwamei/Chinese Hwamei (AKA Melodious Laughingthrush) (*Garrulax canorus*) – HN; on singing at Ura-Myogi was quite a surprise; in Japan, introduced on Honshu

Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) – K; a flock at Miike melted into the background, as this species often does; introduced species in Japan

STARLINGS (Sturnidae)

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

ACCENTORS (Prunellidae)

Japanese Accentor (*Prunella rubida*) – HN; three seen well on a brushy hillside at Ura-Myogi

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)

Forest Wagtail (*Dendroanthus indicus*) – A vagrant to Japan from the Asian mainland, we saw one at Miike, where it was the object of much attention by local bird photographers. Kaz first found this particular bird in November 2013, and we were fortunate that it remained.

Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) – HN,K; seen regularly along streams on the two southern islands.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) – P,HN,K; seen in many open habitats, including parking lots

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

Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – K; walking nonchalantly across the forest floor at Miike

Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) – K; flushed from fields at Taake, where gave high, thin call

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.

WAXWINGS

Japanese Waxwing (*Bombycilla japonica*) – H; heard in woods at Karuizawa

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

Meadow Bunting (*Emberiza cioides*) – P,HN,K. The bunting we saw most frequently, including some singing males, with very bold dark face pattern.

Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*) – HN; a flock of 15 or so in riverside brush near Hitachi River

Yellow-throated/Elegant Bunting (*Emberiza elegans*) – K;

Black-faced Bunting (*Emberiza spodocephala*) – P,HN,K; seen daily on the two southern islands, but a shy bird that kept mostly to the underbrush

Gray Bunting (*Emberiza variabilis*) – K; a flock of these very secretive buntings seen at Miike also briefly along trail at Kogawa dam

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

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES (Fringillidae)

Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Uragus sibiricus*) – HN; nice views of a pair near the roadside at Ura-Myogi

Oriental Greenfinch (*Chloris sinica*) – P,HN,K; flocks on Kyushu numbering in the hundreds

Common Redpoll (*Acanthis flammea*) – HK; brief sighting along roadside

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – HN, HK; one came to feeders at Karuizawa and at Hokkaido ryokan, allowing excellent views of this close cousin of Evening Grosbeak
few seen on each island, always a treat

Japanese Grosbeak (*Eophona personata*) – HN, K; first seen at Karuizawa, we later came on a flock of 30 or so, some feeding on the ground, during the river walk near Hotel King

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*) – K; near the Akan viewing center, with Eurasian Tree Sparrows

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

MAMMALS

Japanese Macaque (*Macaca fuscata*) – K; heard screaming in the woods at Miike, but not visible

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) – HK

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

Japanese Marten (*Martes melampus*) – P, HK; two seen on the pre-trip day on paths among rice paddies; also seen by some near the Ryokan Fujiya

Short-tailed Weasel (Ermine, Stoat) (*Mustela erminea*) – seen by some near Ryokan Fujiya