

JAPAN IN WINTER

JANUARY 21–FEBRUARY 2, 2017

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WITH KOJI NIYA ON HOKKAIDO
LIST COMPILED BY: BOB SUNDSTROM**

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JAPAN IN WINTER: A CRANE & SEA-EAGLE SPECTACLE!

By Bob Sundstrom

The Japan in Winter tour is subtitled “A Crane and Sea-Eagle Spectacle,” a billing it truly lives up to. The tour has been designed by Japanese birding tour leader, Kaz Shinoda, and traverses the three main—and distinctively different— islands of Honshu, Kyushu, and Hokkaido. About a third of the tour is devoted to each island. From south to north, that’s a span of over 1,600 miles, from the mild weather and green tea plantations of Kyushu to the snowy rim of the Sea of Okhotsk on Hokkaido, with the largest, central island of Honshu in-between.

On our 2017 tour we enjoyed great views of five species of cranes. At Arasaki on the island of Kyushu, we took in one of the grandest crane spectacles in the world as thousands of White-naped and Hooded cranes gathered in fields and paddies: tall, silvery White-naped Cranes with bold red faces standing head and shoulders above petite, elegant Hooded Cranes with charcoal bodies, white necks, and red forecrowns. Tucked among their thousands were a handful of Eurasian/Common Cranes and Sandhill Cranes. At sunset, most of the vast assemblage flew by as we watched, a few dozen or a few hundred at a time, with the orange sky of late sunset behind them as they winged to a nighttime roost nearby. A breathtaking spectacle!

We had to wait until the final three days of the tour for a fifth species of crane, the Red-crowned Crane. Sometimes called Japanese Crane, this crane is a cultural icon in Japan and China. Our first views of Red-crowned Cranes were at sunrise, as a flock of more than a hundred stood in the icy shallows of a river, as the growing light streamed through the bare trees along the stream. Later that day we watched hundreds of Red-crowned Cranes at close range, pairs bugling in unison and performing courtship dances, leaping from the ground with wings arched above them. Unforgettable. For those that arrived a day early for the tour, Kaz led an optional day-trip from Narita. Kaz took us to a spot where a rare Demoiselle Crane had recently been seen, and we were fortunate to get great scope views of this very special visitor (and sixth crane species for the trip).

The northern island of Hokkaido is also a winter home to legions of sea-eagles, including 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 watched 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.

Hokkaido is also home to another enormous raptor, the world’s largest owl—Blakiston’s Fish-Owl—which we saw at close range from our lovely Japanese inn at Yoroushi. A pair of the huge owls came in just after dark to capture fish just behind the inn, as we watched from inside the tall windows facing the stream and snow-covered landscape. From the same vantage point where we watched fish-owls at night, in the morning—with the enticement of bird feeders—we watched a

steady stream of Eurasian Jays, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh Tits, and Long-tailed Tits, plus a Red Fox and handsome Japanese Martens.

At Hokkaido's Lake Kussharo, dozens of Whooper Swans swam in the shallows, enveloped in mist created by geothermal heating of the lake water. A boat trip from Ochiishi harbor took us south from Hokkaido among small islands, where we saw the regional specialty, Spectacled Guillemot, as well as Least Auklet, Ancient Murrelet, and other seabirds.

While the cranes, sea-eagles, and Blakiston's Fish-Owl are the tour headliners, there is a great deal more to see on our Japan in Winter tour: 150 bird species more or less, grand scenery from the Japanese Alps to the rugged seacoast to the green interior, wonderful food, the comfort of traveling in small buses, and a variety of Western style and more traditional Japanese inns. The many species of waterfowl seen include some of the world's fanciest ducks: Mandarin Duck, Baikal Teal, Smew, and Falcated Duck. We watched endemic Japanese Wagtails forage along shallow, gravel-lined streams, alongside Long-billed Plovers, often with White and Gray wagtails nearby. On a forest walk in the Japanese Alps, we came upon a mixed flock of wonderful northern finches: Japanese Grosbeak, Eurasian Bullfinch, and Hawfinch. At the bird feeders at our inn in the alps, a couple of Japanese Macaques ("Snow Monkeys") shared time eating seeds with several species of tits, Japanese Accentors, a few finches, and Eurasian Nuthatches. Brown Dippers turned up on streams on all three islands, and we were fortunate to see the big, zebra-striped Crested Kingfisher on Kyushu and Hokkaido.

Beautiful Azure-winged Magpies and Eurasian Jays competed for the loveliest corvid of the trip, although Large-billed Crows had the most comical voices. We were wowed by a Mountain Hawk-Eagle soaring by in the mountains of Honshu. On the island of Kyushu, we found wintering global rarities—Black-faced Spoonbills and Saunders's Gulls. There were dashing Red-flanked Bluetails and Daurian Redstarts along forest paths, some so confiding they landed almost at our feet. Kinglet-sized Chinese Penduline-Tits worked tall streamside reeds. Throughout the trip we encountered a lineup of some of the northern world's finest buntings: Elegant, Meadow, Reed, Chestnut-eared, Gray, Rustic, and Black-faced. And it was a big irruption winter for Bramblings, so we saw these handsome northern finches on each island.

Great birding was complemented by the wonderful cultural experience of traveling in three distinctly different islands of Japan, nights in superb Japanese inns, many wonderful traditional Japanese meals, and a great group ready for the next round of new experiences in Japan.

ITINERARY:

Days 1-2 Travel to Tokyo area.

Day 2 Sunday, January 22: *Optional pre-trip outing with Kaz for those arriving early.*

Departed from Narita View Hotel mid-morning to several birding spots: 1) farmland in Joso City where a rare Demoiselle Crane had been seen; 2) swan sanctuary in Motono Village in Chiba Prefecture; 3) Imbanuma marsh and reservoir. Night at Narita View Hotel, Narita.

- Day 3** Monday, January 23: Departed Narita View Hotel toward birding sites on the east coast of the main island of Honshu: 1) small wooded, reservoir pond near hotel, with Baikal Teal and Mandarin Ducks; 2) port of Choshi, where we had lunch at a seafood restaurant and birded several spots around port waterfront; 3) Gonoike reservoir adjacent to Kamisu City Hall; and finally 4) Ukishima Marsh for harriers. On to Hotel Seaside Edogawa in Kasai, Tokyo for the night.
- Day 4** Tuesday, January 24: Birded before breakfast, walking trails in Kasai Seaside Park (which surrounds 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 at mid-elevation in the mountains at Ura-Myogi. Night at Shiotsubo Onsen Hotel & Spa in Karuizawa.
- Day 5** Wednesday, January 25: Birded before and after breakfast along trails and watched bird feeders in the snowy landscape within walking distance of Shiotsubo Onsen. Trails were in Karuizawa Wild Bird Forest and along Kose Forest Path. After lunch, departed to Chikuma River and Tokyo Electric Corp's reservoir in Saku City in Nagano Prefecture. Night at Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu in Terminal 2 of Haneda Airport, Tokyo.
- Day 6** Thursday, January 26: Morning flight from Haneda to southern main island of Kyushu. We first visited Takae reservoir and rice fields of Satsuma-Sendai City. Later stopped at seaside viewpoint Michi-no-eki (Akune). Late afternoon/early evening to Arasaki Crane Reserve to take in the sunset spectacle of thousands of cranes flying to nighttime roost. Night Hotel King, Izumi.
- Day 7** Friday, January 27: Pre-breakfast birding along a stream near Hotel King. Then to Arasaki Crane Reserve, where we would spend the bulk of the day, watching an immense gathering of White-naped and Hooded cranes, with a few rare cranes (Sandhill, Eurasian/Common) among them. Birded nearby reed beds for Chinese Penduline-Tit and Reed Bunting. Late afternoon, watched a stream from a bridge below Kogawa Dam, in search of Crested Kingfisher. We would stop here several times. Second night Hotel King.
- Day 8** Saturday, January 28: First part of morning, returned to bridge and Kogawa Dam, where we birded a woodland trail along Kogawa Dam reservoir and from atop the dam itself. Drove north to bird near two river mouths in Yatsushiro City in Kumamoto Prefecture, Kuma River and Hikawa River, as well as through adjacent agricultural areas (in Kumamoto Prefecture). Night at traditional inn, the Yunomoto-Onsen Ryokan in Miyazaki.
- Day 9** Sunday, January 29: Morning birding at Miike, a part of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park on Kyushu, in the forest and walking along the lake edge. Visit and birding at Kirishima-jingu Shinto Shrine near Kagoshima. Mid-afternoon flight from Kagoshima back to Haneda, where we caught a second flight to Kushiro on the island of Hokkaido. Arriving in Kushiro, met by Koji, who would help guide us on Hokkaido. Dinner and night at Hotel Taito in Tsurui.
- Day 10** Monday, January 30: Before sunrise, from Otowa bridge in Tsurui watched roost of Red-crowned Cranes on the river. After breakfast, visited Tsurui-Itoh Crane Sanctuary. Midday birding and lunch at Ainu restaurant at Lake Kussharo, where Whooper Swans were gathered in the steam of a thermal pool. After further birding near Lake Kussharo, we stopped at Iouzan Mountain with its steaming sulfur banks, then continued on to

lodging at Yuyado Daiichi in Yoroushi. Most saw Blakiston's Fish-Owl before dinner from hotel windows overlooking stream. Dinner and night, Yoroushi.

Day 11 Tuesday, January 31: During breakfast, watched Eurasian Jays, Long-tailed Tits and other birds coming to feeders by hotel. Drove on to Lake Furenko, where saw a gathering of Steller's Sea-Eagles and White-tailed Eagles at an ice-fishing spot. Early afternoon birding cruise from Ochiishi harbor among offshore islands, where alcids, sea ducks, and cormorants were seen; alternative local land birding for those not taking two-hour cruise, around Ochiishi & Hanasaki harbors. Returned to Yuyado Daiichi for a second night.

Day 12 Wednesday, February 1: Bird feeder watching again, before departing Yoroushi. Crane watching at Akan Kokusai Tsuru (Crane) Center and lunch nearby. On to Kushiro airport for mid-afternoon flight to Haneda. Farewell dinner and night at Haneda Excel Hotel Tokyu in Haneda Terminal 2.

Day 13 Thursday, February 2: Shuttle from Haneda for departures from Narita Airport.

NOTE: species in *italics* are unusual or scarce; in **bold** are more rare sightings for Japan; alternate common names in ()

KEY:

P = optional pre-tour outing 1/22/17

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 Swan (*Cygnus columbianus columbianus*) – P. At Motono Village swan sanctuary on pre-trip outing, hundreds of Bewick's type Tundra Swans were the predominant swan present. (*Cygnus columbianus bewickii*) is considered by some European and Asian authorities a distinct species, Bewick's Swan (*C. bewickii*).

Whooper Swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) – P, HK. Superb views of these large swans with lots of yellow at bill base, at Lake Kussharo on Hokkaido. Also at Otowa Bridge and Akan Crane Ctr.

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) – K. These large, boldly patterned waterfowl were seen at several locations on Kyushu, including Arasaki and the Kuma and Hikawa River mouths.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) – HN, K. Excellent views the first morning of the tour, where we scoped some of the 30+ on a small wooded reservoir pond near Narita View Hotel. On Kyushu, good scope views at Takae reservoir; a few at Kogawa Dam.

Falcated Duck (*Anas falcata*) – P, HN, K, HK. Seen first on the pre-trip, we later saw these elegant ducks at Gonoike, several spots on Kyushu, and one in the harbor at Ochiishi.

Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) – HN, K, HK; abundant duck, especially on Kyushu

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – P, HN, K, HK; widespread on all three islands

Eastern Spot-billed Duck (*Anas zonorhyncha*) – P,HN,K; widespread, very large dabbler
 Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) – P,HN,K; uncommon during the tour
 Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) – P,HN,K
Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*) – P,HN. A difficult view of a male at the wooded pond near Narita View Hotel on first day of tour. A dozen or so seen on pre-trip at Imbanuma reservoir. A scarce wintering duck in the area of the tour.
 Green-winged (Common or Eurasian) Teal (*Anas crecca*) – P,HN,K. 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 Honshu and Kyushu.
 Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) – HN,K. Especially good views of this species at a marshy pond at Kasai Seaside Park, one of several spots we saw them on Honshu.
 Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*) – HN,K
 Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) – HN,K,HK
 Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – HN,HK; close views of a few of these ornately plumaged diving ducks on Choshi waterfront; dozens seen on the Ochiishi boat trip, others on Nemuro van trip.
 White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) – HK; on boat trip and land tour from Ochiishi
 Black Scoter (*Melanitta americana*). HN,HK. Hundreds on the Ochiishi boat trip, where it was the most prevalent sea duck. AOU recently split Black Scoter from Common Scoter (*M. nigra*); Japanese wintering birds are *M. americana*, but vagrant *M. nigra* could occur.
 Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) – HK. Nice views of these beautiful sea ducks on the boat trip and van trip on Nemuro Peninsula.
 Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*) – HK; Lake Kussharo and Ochiishi
 Smew (*Mergellus albellus*) – P,HN. A small flock seen on the pre-trip at Imbanuma; one female also at Gonoike 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. Seen in Hanasaki harbor, the starting point of the Ochiishi cruise.

PHEASANTS, GROUSE & ALLIES (Phasianidae)

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge (*Bambusicola thoracicus*) – K [introduced] – heard only
 Japanese Green Pheasant (*Phasianus versicolor*) – HN; several females at Chikuma River area; a Japanese endemic, which some still consider part of Ring-necked Pheasant species

LOONS (Gaviidae)

Arctic Loon (*Gavia arctica*) – HK; flying birds seen on boat trip; close view on van tour from Ochiishi

GREBES (Podicipedidae)

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) – P,HN,K; widespread on fresh water ponds, reservoirs and streams, and salt water bays
 Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*) – HN; a few at Choshi

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) – HN, HK; at Choshi and Ochiishi
Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – P, HN, K; large, pale grebes seen at numerous spots
Eared (Black-necked) Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – HN, K, HK.

CORMORANTS & SHAGS (Phalacrocoracidae)

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – P, HN, K
Temminck's/Japanese Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) – HN, K, HK. Numerous at Choshi, lined up as they roosted on sea walls. Large cormorants, with even more white on the face than Great Cormorants. A few on Kyushu at Akune, one on Hokkaido.
Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – HN, HK; at Choshi and Ochiishi

HERONS, EGRETS & BITTERNs (Ardeidae)

Gray Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) – P, HN, K; widespread, sometimes dozens in one place on Kyushu
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*) – HN, K; just a few on this year's tour
Pacific Reef-Heron (*Egretta sacra*) – HN; Kaz and a few others saw one dark morph at Choshi
Black-crowned Night Heron – K; seen from the bus, on the way to the two rivers in Yatsushiro

IBISES & SPOONBILLS (Threskiornithidae)

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) – K; scarce in Japan by range, we scoped a group of 3 or 4 at Arasaki; the larger of the two spoonbill species seen
Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) – K. An endangered species with a very small wintering distribution in southern Japan. We saw 6 to 8 at Arasaki and a few more feeding along the Kuma River.

OSPREY (Pandionidae)

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – K; fairly common on the Kyushu river mouths

HAWKS, EAGLES & KITES (Accipitridae)

Mountain (Hodgson's) Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus [Spizaetus] nipalensis*) – HN. A highly sought after sighting in Japan, where very scarce. We had a brief but very good view of one soaring as we birded along a narrow roadway among the mountains at Ura-Myogi.
Eastern Marsh Harrier (*Circus spilonotus*) – P, HN; nice views of this large harrier species early in the tour, including several late in the day at Ukishima Marsh
Northern (Hen) Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). P, HN. 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; a couple of birds seen in flight
Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) – HN, K; two seen in flight, a bit smaller than the North American form of N. Goshawk
Black (Black-eared) Kite (*Milvus migrans*) – P, HN, K, HK. Seen on all three islands and most days of the tour, this scavenger was a familiar sight on the tour soaring on broad wings with wide, notched tail, which it tipped sideways in flight. Also heard whistling.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – HK; seen all three days on Hokkaido, with excellent views and photo opportunities at Lake Furen alongside larger Steller's Sea-Eagles
Steller's Sea-Eagle (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) – HK. We had great looks at these impressively large eagles on Lake Furen. A massive bird of prey and one of the very largest eagles, Steller's has a small geographic range in northeast Asia, and in Japan winters only on Hokkaido.

Common (Eastern) Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) – HN,K; scope view of a perched buzzard at Kasai Seaside Park.

RAILS, GALLINULES & COOTS (Rallidae)

Eurasian/Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – K. Two on the stream adjacent to Hotel King in Izumi City. 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 (Common) Coot (*Fulica atra*) – P,HN,K

CRANES (Gruidae)

Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) – P. An occasional, rare visitor to Japan, we were fortunate to see one on the pre-trip outing, as it foraged in on winter farmland near Joso City. Winters mostly in northwest India, after migrating over the Himalayas. This was the first time for this species on the VENT Japan in Winter tour.

Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) – K. Rare but nearly annual straggler to the huge crane concentration at Arasaki. Kaz spotted 6 Sandhills altogether at Arasaki.

White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*) – K. Thousands of these statuesque silver and white cranes at Arasaki, where 40-50% of the world population winters.

Common/Eurasian Crane (*Grus grus*) – K. Rare annual straggler to Kyushu, one at Arasaki.

Hooded Crane (*Grus monacha*) – K. 80% of the world population winters at Arasaki, their thousands mixed among thousands of taller, paler White-naped Cranes.

[Hooded X Common Crane hybrid] – K; seen on both days at Arasaki, near the visitor center, most likely the same hybrid individual seen last year in same spot.

Red-crowned Crane (*Grus japonensis*) – HK. We first saw them first in the dawn light at Otowa Bridge, in the thermally heated shallows. The most revered crane in Japan (also known as Japanese Crane) and an important cultural icon in the country and in China.

Endangered, with world population estimated at around 2,750. Excellent views and photo opportunities of feeding and sometimes dancing cranes at Tsurui-Itoh Crane Sanctuary and Akan Crane Center.

PLOVERS & LAPWINGS (Charadriidae)

Black-bellied/Gray Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – K; one of the most widespread birds in the world, on all continents except Antarctica

Northern Lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*) – P,HN,K. First seen on Honshu, the largest numbers of these striking, crested plovers were at Arasaki. Its green and purple iridescence, together with a spiky crest, make it a very memorable shorebird.

Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) – K. Close views on mudflats of Kuma 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. Seen first alongside the Chikuma River, and later on the stream near Hotel King. A regional Asian endemic that specializes in foraging along shallow, moving streams.

SANDPIPERS & ALLIES (Scolopacidae)

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – HN,K; seen at several sites, always bobbing its tail; the Eurasian cousin of Spotted Sandpiper of the New World

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) –K; first seen the stream near Hotel King, a very dark-backed tringid

Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) – HN,K; close views at Kasai Seaside Park, from the blinds; also at Kuma River

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) – a flock of about 20 at Akune, first time for this tour

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) –K; another very widespread species; flock of 200+ at Arasaki

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) – K. A distinct species from the snipe formerly known as Common Snipe in North America, the latter now classified as Wilson's Snipe (*Gallinago delicata*). Great views of this secretive bird at Arasaki.

AUKS, MURRES & PUFFINS (Alcidae)

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) – HK; seen on the boat trip

Pigeon Guillemot (*Cepphus columba*) – HK; we saw one or two on the boat trip

Spectacled Guillemot (*Cepphus carbo*) – HK. With its range restricted mostly to Sea of Okhotsk, this alcid is a true regional specialty. At least 20 seen on boat trip.

Ancient Murrelet (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – HK; small numbers on the boat trip

Least Auklet (*Aethia pusilla*) – HK; smallest alcid in the world, seen quite close to the boat of

GULLS, TERNS & SKIMMERS (Laridae)

Saunders's Gull (*Saundersilarus saundersi*) – K. A very range restricted and threatened species with small population, we saw as many as 50 altogether foraging for small crabs – present by the millions – on the tide flats of the Kuma River mouth.

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

Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) – HN,K; numerous at Choshi

Common Gull/Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) – HN,HK. Most taxonomic authorities split the Mew Gull of North America as *L. brachyrhynchus* from Common Gull of Eurasia as *L. canus*, but AOU is behind on this trend. We saw this species at Choshi and Ochiishi.

Vega Gull/Herring 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.

Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus schistisagus*) – HN,HK; the large, very dark backed gulls were seen both a Choshi and Ochiishi

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

Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) – HN, HK; also at Choshi and Ochiishi, although more prevalent than Glaucous-winged at both sites

PIGEONS & DOVES (Columbidae)

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

Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) – P, HN, K. An ornately feathered dove, seen best during the tour at Kasai Seaside Park.

White-bellied Green (Japanese) Pigeon (*Treron sieboldii*) – K. A few in flight near Takae reservoir and Kogawa Dam.

OWLS (Strigidae)

Blakiston's Fish-Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) – HK. One of the most anticipated birds of the tour, given its rarity in Japan, immense size for an owl, and adaptation as a fishing owl. We were amazingly fortunate to see ultimately see two of them, with very close views of one at a small pool as it captured fish (at Yuyado Daiichi, in Yoroushi).

KINGFISHERS (Alcedinidae)

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – P, K. A brilliant blue kingfisher, we saw one especially well along the stream near Hotel King on Kyushu.

Crested Kingfisher (*Megaceryle [Ceryl] lugubris*) – K, HK. Absent from its typical sites on Kyushu, this large black and white striped kingfisher was seen at Lake Miike on Kyushu, as well as flying by Otowa Bridge on Hokkaido. A lucky few also saw one fly by along the stream near Hotel King.

WOODPECKERS (Picidae)

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos kizuki*) – HN, K, HK. Seen at a variety of wooded spots, a tiny woodpecker with brown barring.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) – HN, HK. A boldly marked woodpecker with red vent, best views and photo opportunities were at the Yuyado Daiichi feeders.

Japanese (Green) Woodpecker (*Picus awokera*) – HN, K; heard on Honshu at Karuizawa; we saw one moving from tree to tree at Miike on Kyushu; frustratingly shy.

FALCONS (Falconidae)

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – K; terrific view along the stream near Hotel King

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

SHRIKES (Laniidae)

Bull-headed Shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*) – P, HN, K; Widespread in agricultural country on both Kyushu and Honshu, the males a pretty rufous brown.

CROWS, JAYS & MAGPIES (Corvidae)

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius*) – HN, K, HK. Handsome jay, rusty brown with a patch of blue in the wing. We saw two very different looking forms: *japonicus* on Honshu, which some split as Japanese Jay; and *brandtii* on Hokkaido, the latter sometimes split as Brandt's Jay.

Azure-winged Magpie (*Cyanopica cyanus*) – HN. Wonderful studies of these sleek, beautifully colored birds at Kasai Seaside Park. We found ourselves in the midst of a foraging flock of 10 or more magpies, on both side of the wooded trail. (Most 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 – K; at Arasaki, the much smaller corvids among the numerous Rooks
Gray Bunting K (A brief look at a male and a female on the trail by Kogawa Dam Reservoir.)
Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) – K; flocks at or near Arasaki and rice fields of Satsuma-Sendai City
Carrion Crow (*Corvus corone*) – P,HN,K,HK; large crow with gruff voice
Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchus*) – HN,K,HK. The larger crow of the trip, with large and humped bill and comical calls.

LARKS (Alaudidae)

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

SWALLOWS & MARTINS (Hirundinidae)

Asian House Martin (*Delichon dasypus*) –K; several flocks near Izumi

CHICKADEES & TITS (Paridae)

Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*) – HK. Similar in appearance to Willow Tit, this was the tiny chickadee lookalike on snowy Hokkaido.

Willow Tit (*Poecile montanus*) – HN; another chickadee-like tit seen only at Karuizawa

Varied Tit (*Sittiparus varius*) – HN,K; colorfully patterned tit.

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*) – HK; seen by some at Yuyado Daiichi feeders, Kaz found several near Akan Crane Sanctuary

Japanese (Eastern Great) Tit (*Parus minor*) – HN,K,HK. IOC splits Great Tit into 3 species, and those in Japan are considered Japanese Tit (*Parus minor*), same as what Mark Brazil labels Eastern Great Tit.

PENDULINE-TITS (Remizidae)

Chinese Penduline-Tit (*Remiz consorbinus*) – good views of several in reed beds near Arasaki

LONG-TAILED TITS (Aegithalidae)

Long-tailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – HN,K,HK. Like a bushtit feathered in white, black, and pink. Heard on Honshu, seen by some at Kirishima-jingu Shrine on Kyushu, and a small flock of the distinctive *caudatus* form with all white head on Hokkaido at the feeders at Yuyado Daiichi.

NUTHATCHES (Sittidae)

Eurasian Nuthatch (*Sitta euroapea*) – HN,K,HK. First seen at Karuizawa feeders, where the buff bellied subspecies *amurensis* is typical. Later saw the white-bellied subspecies *asiatica* on Hokkaido.

TREECREEPERS (Certhiidae)

Eurasian Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) – looking like a pale version of the North American Brown Creeper, we enjoyed fine views of one feeding low on a tree trunk near Akan Crane Center

WRENS (Troglodytidae)

Eurasian Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) – HN. Good views on the walks into the woods from our lodge in Karuizawa.

DIPPERS (Cinclidae)

Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) – HN,K,HK. First seen at near Karuizawa Wild Bird Forest trail, later on the kingfisher-vigil stream and Kogawa Dam on Kyushu, and on the stream behind the inn at Yoroushi on Hokkaido. The dippers at Kogawa Dam seemed to be competing for a potential nest cavity in the concrete with a Rock Pigeon.

BULBULS (Pycnonotidae)

Brown-eared Bulbul (*Hypsipetes amaurotis*) – nearly ubiquitous

KINGLETS (Regulidae)

Goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*) –K; heard only, at Miike

BUSH-WARBLERS & ALLIES (Cettidae)

Japanese Bush-Warbler (*Horornis diphone*) – HN,K. Always a difficult to see skulker.

WHITE-EYES, YUHINAS & ALLIES (Zosteropidae)

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – HN,K; mossy green with bold, white eye-ring

LAUGHINGTHRUSHES & ALLIES (Leiothrichidae)

Hwamei/Chinese Hwamei (AKA Melodious Laughingthrush) (*Garrulax canorus*) – HN [introduced]; seen by some at Ura-Myogi

Red-billed Leiothrix (*Leiothrix lutea*) – K [introduced]; a small flock along the path at Miike

OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS (Muscicapidae)

Red-flanked Bluetail (*Tarsiger cyanurus*) – HN,K. Nice views of a few dazzling males, as well as one female. First seen right next to the roadway at Ura-Myogi in the Japanese Alps.

Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus auroreus*) – P,HN,K. We saw a number of these miniature gems, perching low and in the open; males especially colorful combination of ochre, gray and black. [*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 beautiful male at the sea overlook at Akune.

THRUSHES & ALLIES (Turdidae)

Pale Thrush (*Turdus pallidus*) – HN,K. Seen at many spots, especially prevalent on Kyushu.

Brown-headed Thrush (*Turdus chrysolaus*) – HN. At least three of this scarce visitor were seen at Seaside Park, including a male of the *orii* subspecies which is an unexpected visitor.

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

STARLINGS (Sturnidae)

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

ACCENTORS (Prunellidae)

Japanese Accentor (*Prunella rubida*) – HN; seen well near the seed feeders at the inn in Karuizawa. A scarce endemic, there were as many as 4 near the feeders.

WAGTAILS & PIPITS (Motacillidae)

Gray Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) – HN,K; seen along streams, gray with yellow flanks

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) – P,HN,K; seen in many open habitats, with an unusual preference for foraging in parking lots

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

Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) – K; scope views of a several in the rice fields near Satsuma-Sendai City

Buff-bellied/American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) – P,HN,K. The pipit was commonly seen in plowed fields and rice paddies, with good views at Arasaki. The prevalent subspecies in Japan is *japonicus*, which occasionally strays to western Alaska.

BUNTINGS, SPARROWS & ALLIES (Emberizidae)

Meadow Bunting (*Emberiza cioides*) – P,HN,K. Handsome, chestnut colored bunting with bold dark face pattern, and willingness to perch in the open.

Chestnut-eared Bunting (*Emberiza fucata*) – a great find, one perched for scope views in the rice fields near Satsuma-Sendai City

Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*) – P; in brushy areas near Imbanuma reservoir; more crested than other buntings seen except Elegant.

Elegant (Yellow-throated) Bunting (*Emberiza elegans*) – K; several in a flock along the trail at Kogawa Dam, with yellow throat, bold dark face pattern and tall crest

Black-faced Bunting (*Emberiza spodocephala*) – P,HN,K; seen on the two southern islands, offering fine views on the edge of the trails through Kasai Seaside Park

Gray Bunting (*Emberiza variabilis*) – K; a brief look at a male and a female on the trail by Kogawa Dam Reservoir

Reed Bunting (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) – HN,K; perched up in reeds, seen best near Arasaki

SISKINS, CROSSBILLS & ALLIES (Fringillidae)

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – HN,K,HK. This was a big winter – an irruption year – for this northern finch in Japan, and we saw them in flocks at a number of places, with very good views such as at reservoir near Chikuma R.

Eurasian Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – four of these beautiful finches with patches of rose feathers; along the trail at Karuizawa

Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Uragus sibiricus*) – P; a female seen on the pre-trip, near Imbanuma

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

Eurasian Siskin (*Spinus spinus*) – HN,HK; great looks at two that flew in to the trees as we were watching Coal Tits at Akan Crane Center

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – HN,HK; at least one at feeders in Yoroushi

Japanese Grosbeak (*Eophona personata*) – HN,K; great views at Karuizawa and on Kyushu near Hotel King and elsewhere

OLD WORLD SPARROWS (Passeridae)

Russet Sparrow (*Passer rutilans*) – K; flock at Arasaki

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

MAMMALS

Japanese Macaque (*Macaca fuscata*) – the “Snow Monkey,” there were two helping themselves to bird seed at the inn feeders in Karuizawa

Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina stegnegeri*) – HK; seen on the Ochiishi boat trip

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris lutris*) – HK; the subspecies of Asian and Russian marine waters, seen on by those on the van trip on Nemuro Peninsula

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes schrenki*) – HK; subspecies unique to Hokkaido

Japanese Marten (*Martes melampus*) –HK; wonderful views of martens near feeder area at Yuyado Daiichi resort

Sika [Deer] (*Cervus nippon*) – HN,HK; deer with rather short, elk-like faces compared to North American deer; very numerous on Hokkaido

Japanese Squirrel (*Sciurus lis*) – HN; at Karuizawa feeders.