

Trip Report for Japan in Winter for Photographers

Dates : 20th February - 5th March 2016

Guide: Jun Matsui

Day 1 – Saturday 20th February :

Arrival day. Everyone met for dinner in the hotel

Day 2 - Sunday 21st February:

Narita - Izumi Nature Park - Nagakura Shrine, Karuizawa

Notable sightings, Brown-headed Thrush, Northern Goshawk, Black-crowned Night Heron, Mandarin Duck.

We started the days birding at a small creek near the hotel. This was the only place we saw Brown-headed Thrush for this trip. We also saw Japanese Tit, Meadow Bunting and other common species as well. It provided a nice introduction to Japanese birds. Then we headed off up to Karuizawa. Since I surprisingly, didn't have a good view of the extremely photogenic Mandarin Duck on the previous winter tour, we side tracked to Izumi Nature Park, where Mandarin Duck relatively common to make sure of them. We had good views of them there.



Mandarin ducks at Izumi

Day 2 - Monday 22nd February:

Bird Forest - Shiotsubo Onsen Hotel - Saku Reservoir

Notable sightings, Japanese Woodpecker, Varied Tit, Smew, Fox.

Bird around Bird Forest, Karuizawa. It was rather quiet in the forest and there was not much bird activities so we retired to the Shiotsubo Hotel lounge where we spent a nice time overlooking the bird feeder. We had great looks at a variety of tits and buntings. After lunch we visited Saku reservoir, the numbers

of waterfowl were not great , but there was still a nice variety of species, more than enough to keep us busy and interested.

Day 3 - Tuesday 23rd February:

Jigokudani Monkey Park - Kahoku-gata

Notable sightings, Snow Monkey, Japanese Serow.

This was the day for the Snow Monkeys, and we saw them up close and had great views. It was good to see the Japanese Serow as well as although we also saw it on the previous tour it is by no means a common animal . We were quite curious if the British Group there made it to Haneda on time as they seemed to be leaving departure rather late.

Day 4 – Wednesday 24th February:

Sai River - Shibayama-gata - Kamoike - Hashidate Harbour - Awara

Notable sightings, Scaly-sided Merganser, Siberian Crane.

Thanks to my local friend, we had a great view of the male Scaly-sided Merganser. We missed Solitary Snipe, but bumped into Copper Pheasant with great luck. Today we saw our first species of crane, the White-naped Crane, which is rare in this area. There weren't as many Baikal Teal at Kamoike as usual, but luckily there were still some around. It was nice to see Taiga Bean Goose close to the visitor's centre. We also saw a nice flock of White-fronted Geese. We ended the day well managing to find the Siberian Crane with 3 Hooded Cranes on the way back to the hotel.

Day 5 – Thursday 25th February:

Fly Kanazawa to Kagoshima and on to Arasaki

Notable Species, White-naped Crane, Hooded Crane.

The northern migration had already started, but there were still several thousands of cranes in the field offering us a fantastic spectacle and great photographic opportunities. .

Day 6 – Friday 26th February:

Izumi Area

Notable Species, Long-billed Plover, Spoonbills, Grey Bunting, Savanna Sparrow

We went back to spend the early morning at the Crane area. It was a fantastic experience with thousands of cranes. We then spent whole of the rest of the day around Izumi, It was great to see Grey Bunting which for me was the highlight of the day

Day 7 – Saturday 27th February:

Kuma River mouth - Kuma River - Sendai River mouth

Notable Species, Japanese Pheasant, Chinese Penduline Tit, Daurian Jackdaw.

In search of Saunders Gull we visited the mouth of the Kuma River where we saw waders and ducks before driving upstream where we were well rewarded by Chinese Penduline Tit. No Saunders Gulls though which is very unusual at this time of year. We drove back to the place I saw Japanese Pheasant 2 weeks previously, and we're lucky enough to see one there. We encountered a

flock of rooks on the way to hotel, and noticed there were some Daurian Jackdaws amongst them.

Day 8 – Sunday 28th February:

Izumi Crane Centre - Sendai River, Satsuma-Miike

Notable Species, Japanese Grosbeak, Crested Kingfisher, Grey Bunting, Elegant bunting.

It was a fine warm day. We drove to Kagoshima. On the way we stopped at the Sendai River in search of a Crested Kingfisher, and there were two pairs fighting over their territory which was an interesting spectacle to watch. We bumped into a flock of Japanese Grosbeaks along the road, it was a lucky encounter. At Miike, thanks to local photographers, we had excellent views of Grey Bunting, Forest Wagtail, Elegant Bunting and some other birds.

Day 9 – Monday 29th February:

Travelling Kyushu to Hokkaido via Haneda

There was no problem flying to Haneda,. It was nice weather and some of us even saw Mt.Fuji. At Haneda it all fell apart. Our flight to Kushiro on Hokkaido was cancelled due to the heavy snow. Luckily there was a seat for all of us to fly to Nakashibetsu and we took that. Unfortunately we needed to be in Kushiro where our vehicle was waiting. I tried three different car hire firms and eventually managed to get a car. It took us roughly 3 hours to get to Kushiro in the snow. No real birding today but quite an adventure!.



Red-crowned Crane from Otowa Bridge

Day 10 – Tuesday 1st March

Otowa Bridge - Rausu Harbor

Notable Species, Red-crowned Crane, Steller's Sea-Eagle, Ural Owl, Blakiston's Fish Owl

The day dawned sunny and it was a lovely morning. We went to Otowa Bridge, and the Tsurui Ito Crane Sanctuary where we enjoyed beautiful views of Red-crowned Crane.

Then we drove north. We stopped for Ural Owl. As we were heading north, the weather got worse. When we got to the Teshikaga, half way point, most of the road was closed. We took a much longer route but eventually managed to get safely through to Rausu.

There were 30 Chinese at Washi no Yado waiting to see the Blakiston's Fish Owl, but most of them left before the owl came in. For some reason the owls chose to come bit late. We all had a good views of them. The Ministry of the Environment Japan is now requesting people stop feeding the owl so how long they will be relatively easy to see is anyone's guess.

Day 11 – Wednesday 2nd March:

Rausu Boat - Netsuke Peninsula - Yourouushi

Notable Species, Steller's Sea-Eagle, Blakiston's Fish Owl

Nice weather again. The pack ice hadn't arrived at Rausu, something which has never happened in the last 28 years. However there were still plenty of Eagles, over 150 each, of both White-tailed Eagle and Steller's Sea Eagle. There were also many Gulls around.

After the cruise, we drove to the Notsuke Peninsula. The birds there had changed since I was there 2 weeks previously. We eventually drove to Yorouushi, and had an excellent view of the Blakiston's Fish Owl again at the very comfortable hotel there,



Blakiston's Fish Owl in daylight at Yorouushi

Day 12 – Thursday 3rd March:

Yourouushi - Ochiishi Cruise - Cape Nosappu

Notable Species, Asian Rosy Finch, Red-faced Cormorant, Spectacled Guillemot.

The Fish Owl was still perched when we got up and we even saw it catch a fish in day light. We found Solitary Snipe, watching it from the breakfast area. We spent some time at the hotel feeder before we headed to Ochiishi. We dropped the ladies off at Furen on the way to Ochiishi Cruise. The cruise was quite successful and we even got bonus Asian Rosy Finches. Cape Nosappu was freezing cold as usual, but we did manage to find Red-faced Cormorant at its roost.

Day 13 – Friday 4th March:

Lake Furen - City Forest Birdhide - Onneto Birdhide - Cape Nosappu.

We had another look for at the eagles. They are such great birds you cannot tire of them. We then visited some bird hides in Nemuro and went back to Cape Nosappu.

Day 14- Saturday 5th March:

Our final early morning in Hokkaido as we said good bye to our hosts at Furen headed for Kushiro and the flight back to Tokyo.



Great- spotted Woodpecker

Species List

Birds

Anatidae

- White-fronted Goose** *Anser albifrons*
In the Hashidate area there were more than a hundred.
- Taiga Bean Goose** *Anser fabalis middendorffi*
At Kamoike.
- Bewick's (Tundra) Swan** *Cygnus columbianus bewickii*
At Kahokugata area.
- Whooper Swan** *Cygnus cygnus*
At Hokkaido, Tsurui and Rausu.
- Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*
At Izumi. More than 30.
- Mandarin Duck** *Aix galericulata*
Good close view at Izumi Nature Park, Chiba.
- Gadwall** *Anas strepera*
Small number viewed in several locations.
- Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata*
Reasonably common in Kyushu.
- Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*
Reasonably common throughout this trip.
- Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos*
Large numbers in Kyushu, common throughout this trip.
- Eastern (Chinese) Spot-billed Duck** *Anas (p.) zonorhyncha*
Common throughout this trip.
- Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata*
Common throughout this trip.
- Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta*
Large numbers in Kyushu, common throughout this trip.
- Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa*
Saw 5 at Kamoike, they seemed to have left their wintering ground earlier than usual.
- Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca*
Common throughout this trip.
- Common Pochard** *Aythya ferina*
Common throughout this trip.
- Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula*
Saw some in Saku Reservoir and Kyushu.
- Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila*
Some at Tokyo Bay and Hokkaido.
- Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus*
Nice views at several harbours in Hokkaido.
- White-winged Scoter** *Melanitta deglandi*
Distant view from Notsuke.
- Common (Black) Scoter** *Melanitta americana*
Common in Hokkaido.
- Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis*

Common in Hokkaido.	
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Common in Hokkaido.	
Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>
Saw 5 at Saku Reservoir.	
Common Merganser	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Good view at Sai River.	
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Reasonably good view at Hokkaido.	

Phasianidae

Japanese Pheasant	<i>Phasianus versicolor</i>
Successfully found 1 male at Sendai River mouth.	
Copper Pheasant	<i>Syrnaticus soemmeringii</i>
Very lucky to see family group of 5 near Shibayama-gata, where we first tried for Solitary Snipe.	
Chinese Bamboo-Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>
Heard some at Narita.	

Gaviidae

Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
At the Ochiishi Cruise.	

Podicipidae

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Common through this trip.	
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
At the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
At Kuma River.	
Horned (Slavonian) Grebe	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>
At Izumi.	
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>

Threskiornithidae

Black-faced Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>
Good view at Izumi.	
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
Good view at Izumi.	

Ardeidae

Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
1 flew off from a tree at Narita.	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Common through this trip.	
Eastern Great Egret	<i>Ardea modesta</i>
Common throughout this trip.	

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Obvious ones at Saku Resovior.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Common throughout this trip.

Phalacrocoracidae

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Couple hundred at Cape Nosappu.

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*

2 roosting at Cape Nosappu. And also sighted on Ochiishi Cruise.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Seen various places.

Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

At Hashidate, Kaga.

Pandionidae

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Good view at Kuma River.

Accipitridae

Black-eared Kite *Milvus (m.) lineatus*

Most common raptor on this trip.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

150+ at Rausu Harbor.

Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*

150+ at Rausu Harbor.

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*

Good views at Narita.

Eastern Buzzard *Buteo japonicus*

Common around Karuizawa.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Didn't get a really good view at all but saw them along the roadside.

Rallidae

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

2 at Narita.

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

Common.

Gruidae

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis*

2 at Izumi, near Crane Center.

White-naped Crane *Grus vipio*

Great view at Izumi.

Common Crane *Grus grus*

2 at Izumi.

Hooded Crane *Grus monacha*

Still several thousands at Izumi.

Common x Hooded Crane	<i>Grus grus x G. monacha</i>
2 obvious ones and several more suspicious ones at Izumi.	
Red-crowned Crane	<i>Grus japonensis</i>
Fantastic view at Hokkaido.	
Siberian Crane	<i>Grus leucogeranus</i>
Nice to see this elusive bird at Kaga.	

Charadriidae

Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Small flock at Izumi.	
Grey-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus cinereus</i>
Near Kamoike.	
Grey (Black-bellied) Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
At Kuma River.	
Long-billed Plover	<i>Charadrius placidus</i>
4 near Crane Center. already starting the breeding display.	
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
At Kuma River.	
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
At Kuma River.	

Scolopacidae

Solitary Snipe	<i>Gallinago solitaria</i>
From dining room at Daiichi.	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Good view at Izumi.	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Common in Kyushu.	
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
1 at Izumi.	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
At Narita.	
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
At Sendai River.	
Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Large flock at Kuma River.	
Rock Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ptilocnemis</i>
2 on the Rocky island Nemuro.	
Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>
Large flock at Kuma River.	
Temminck's Stint	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
At Sendai River.	
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
At Kuma River.	

Laridae

Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Some around Tokyo.	
Black-tailed Gull	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>

Mew Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
At Kaga and Kuma River.	
Glaucous-winged Gull	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>
Great view at Rausu and Notsuke.	
Glaucous Gull	<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
Great views at Rausu and Notsuke.	
Vega Gull	<i>Larus vegae</i>
Great views at Rausu and Notsuke.	
Slaty-backed Gull	<i>Larus schistisagus</i>
Great views at Rausu and Notsuke.	

Alcidae

Common Murre (Guillemot)	<i>Uria aalge</i>
On the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Pigeon Guillemot	<i>Cepphus columba</i>
On the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Spectacled Guillemot	<i>Cepphus carbo</i>
On the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Ancient Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>
On the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Least Auklet **	<i>Aethia pusilla</i>
On the Ochiishi Cruise.	
Crested Auklet	<i>Aethia cristatella</i>
On the Ochiishi Harbour.	

Columbidae

Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon)	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common, everywhere.	
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Common.	

Strigidae

Blakiston's Fish Owl	<i>Bubo blakistoni</i>
Great views at Rausu and Daiichi.	
Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>
Good views at the usual roost.	

Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
Good views at the Crane Park.	
Crested Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>
Fantastic views of 4 individuals at Sendai River.	

Picidae

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos kizuki</i>
Seen in several places.	
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Good views on Hokkaido.	

Japanese Green Woodpecker Good views at Karuizawa.	<i>Picus awokera</i>
<u>Falconidae</u>	
Common Kestrel Common.	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>
Peregrine Falcon At Izumi.	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
<u>Laniidae</u>	
Bull-headed Shrike Common in most area.	<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>
<u>Corvidae</u>	
Eurasian Jay Good views at Daiichi. At Karuizawa.	<i>Garrulus glandarius brandtii</i> <i>G. g. japonicus</i>
Azure-winged Magpie 1 flew over us while we driving through Saku town.	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>
Daurian Jackdaw We had some difficulty tracking them down but, once we found one, there were lots.	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>
Eastern Rook Common around Izumi.	<i>Corvus (frugilegus) pastinator</i>
(Eastern) Carrion Crow Common throughout this trip.	<i>Corvus corone orientalis</i>
(Japanese) Large-billed Crow Common throughout this trip.	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos japonensis</i>
<u>Paridae</u>	
Marsh Tit Common in Hokkaido.	<i>Parus palustris hensoni</i>
Willow Tit Common in Honshu.	<i>Poecile montanus restrictus</i>
Varied Tit Common, great views at Shiotsubo Hotel, Karuizawa.	<i>Poecile varius varius</i>
Coal Tit Common, especially at Hokkaido.	<i>Periparus ater insularis</i>
Japanese (Eastern Great) Tit Very common throughout this trip.	<i>Parus minor</i>
<u>Remizidae</u>	
Chinese Penduline Tit Couldn't find any in usual site, lucky to found group of 20 at Kuma River.	<i>Remiz consobrinus</i>

Alaudidae

Eurasian (Japanese) Skylark
At Izumi.

Alauda arvensis japonica

Pycnonotidae

Brown-eared Bulbul

Reasonably common in many places.

Microscelis amaurotis

Hirundidae

Asian House Martin

Delichon dasypus

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Both species seen near the Sendai River.

Cettidae

Japanese Bush Warbler

At Kyushu.

Cettia diphone

Aegithalidae

Long-tailed Tit

Common in Karuizawa.

Aegithalos caudatus

Cisticolidae

Zitting Cisticola

At Izumi.

Cisticola juncidis

Zosteropidae

Japanese White-eye

At Narita.

Zosterops japonicus

Troglodytidae

Winter Wren

At Karuizawa.

Troglodytes troglodytes

Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch

Good views at Daiichi.

Sitta europaea asiatica

Sturnidae

White-cheeked Starling

Common, everywhere.

Spodiopsar cineraceus

Common Starling

Some at Izumi.

Sturnus vulgaris

Turdidae

Pale Thrush

Common in Kusu.

Turdus pallidus

Brown-headed Thrush

2 at Naraita.

Turdus chrysolaus

Dusky Thrush Common.	<i>Turdus eunomus</i>
<u>Muscicapidae</u>	
Red-flanked Bluetail 1 at Karuizawa area.	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>
Daurian Redstart Reasonably common.	<i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i>
Blue Rock Thrush At Kuma River.	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
<u>Cinclidae</u>	
Brown Dipper Good view at Karuizawa, and Daiichi, Hokkaido.	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
<u>Passeridae</u>	
Russet Sparrow Saw some at Kuma River mouth.	<i>Passer rutilans</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow Common.	<i>Passer montanus</i>
<u>Motacillidae</u>	
Grey Wagtail Good views at Sendai River.	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail (Black-backed) Common.	<i>Motacilla alba lugens</i>
Japanese Wagtail Reasonably common. Best viewed at Sai River.	<i>Motacilla grandis</i>
Buff-bellied Pipit At Izumi.	<i>Anthus rubescens japonicus</i>
Forest Wagtail At Miike.	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
<u>Fringillidae</u>	
Brambling Good view at Chiba.	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Oriental Greenfinch Common, huge flock at Kuma River.	<i>Carduelis sinica</i>
Asian Rosy Finch 20 on Ochiishi Cruise.	<i>Leucosticte arctoa</i>
Long-tailed Rosefinch 1 flashed by at Karuizawa.	<i>Uragus sibiricus</i>
Hawfinch Seen at several places. Seeing one at the top of the small fishing boat was rather unusual.	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Japanese Grosbeak We're lucky to bumped in small flock of 30 while we driving.	<i>Eophona personata</i>

Emberozidae

Meadow Bunting

Common.

Emberiza cioides

Chestnut-eared Bunting

1 at Izumi.

Emberiza fucata

Rustic Bunting

Emberiza rustica

Yellow-throated Bunting *Emberiza elegans*

Good view at Miike.

Black-faced Bunting

Emberiza spodocephala

Grey Bunting

Emberiza variabilis

Good view at Miike.

Common Reed Bunting

Emberiza schoeniclus

Savanna Sparrow

Passerculus sandwichensis

Vagrant to Japan, saw 1 at Izumi.

Mammals

Japanese Squirrel

At Karuizawa and Hokkaido.

Sciurus lis

Siberian Marten (Sable)

At Daiichi.

Martes zibellina

Red Fox

At Karuizawa and Hokkaido.

Vulpes vulpes

Harbour Seal

Some at Cape Nosappu.

Phoca vitulina

Japanese Macaque (Snow M.)

At the Monkey Park.

Macaca fuscata

Sika Deer

Common and abundant in Hokkaido.

Cervus nippon

Japanese Serow

At the Snow Monkey Park

Capricornis crispus