

JAPAN

'On any other trip a phone call to the leader's room at 3am is normally not a good thing, but Japan is different! The phone call was to let us know that the Blakiston's Fish Owl was at the hotel pond! Better still this pond was visible from each of our rooms, and after a quick knock on doors we were all watching the owl, fluffed up like some large square box of feathers. We even saw it catch a fish. In fact any initial worries about Blakiston's Fish Owl and how it can sometimes be difficult were blown out of the water on this trip! Our first evening rewarded us with one perched on top of a telephone tower, followed by a middle of the night sighting. After that the pressure was off and we just couldn't stop seeing the owls. With three perched in one scope view – and two of these calling. To cap it all one sat by the pond throughout our dinner and checklist (and eventually left the pond after 2 hours, meaning that Bird of the Trip was settled!) This was just one of many highlights on Hokkaido where the temperature dropped to -22 °C, one morning, while we watched Red-crowned Cranes settled in the 'warmer' waters of their previous nights roost.

We also recorded Steller's Eagle on no less than 5 days, with a maximum daily count of 330 and some simply stunning encounters out in the sea ice, where cameras and extremities were pushed to the limit by the cold. Similar breath taking experiences were had with White-tailed Eagles and Red-crowned Cranes at one of the 'Crane' feeding stations. The coastline of Hokkaido was stacked with ducks and we saw hundreds of Harlequins, Black and Asian White-winged Scoters, and Long-tailed Ducks which complemented a wildfowl list that already included both Whooper and Bewick's Swans, 25000+ Pintail and some beautiful Smew and Goosander.

Before all of this we had still managed to cram in so much with several days on Kyushu rewarding us with thousands of Hooded Cranes, mixed in with hundreds of White-naped and several Commons. Nearby we saw White's Thrush, Long-billed Plovers, Black-faced Spoonbills, Saunders's Gulls and a fine drake Falcated Duck. Around Miike we were treated to another showy White's Thrush, a flock of Baikal Teal and diminutive Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers.

Honshu highlights included the fabulous bird tables in the mountains where hundreds of Japanese Grosbeaks, Hawfinches and Asian Rosy-finches made braving the snow even more difficult. We also caught up with Japanese Woodpecker, Copper Pheasant and on one day visited the famous Onsen where Japanese Macaques come to bathe. The Onsens weren't only popular with the macaques and there can be few more relaxing ways to finish a winters day birding than sitting in a hot bath, in the snow, where it would have been possible to listen to Blakiston's Fish Owls calling (had we not been scoping them around the corner!).

The list of highlights could go on with all the gulls to study (including a superb adult Pallas's Gull), Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, Crested Auklets, Ancient Murrelet, mouth watering vagrants to the UK such as Oriental Turtle Dove, Dusky Thrush, Olive-backed Pipit and Orange-flanked Bush-Robins as well as local specialities like Ryukyu Minivet, Japanese Wagtail, Brown Dipper, Pale and Brown-headed Thrushes, Varied Tit and Grey Bunting.

On top of all this we had the Fergus Crystal experience! For anyone not aware of Fergus and his love of Japan then be prepared! From day one we were treated to full explanations about bath etiquette, local customs, clothing, food, language and his knowledge and passion for the country is simply astounding. Not only did his fluent Japanese make all of our time in Japan run smoothly from internal flights and hotel check-ins he was always on hand to identify food and explain how it should be eaten! Aside from all of this he is also a superb birder with an incredible taxonomic knowledge and fantastic hearing. Quite simply Fergus made our Japan experience unforgettable!' James Lidster

Bird List:Key to the status codes:

Column A = total number of days that the species was recorded on the last tour.

Column B = maximum daily count for that particular species on the last tour.

	A	B	
Northern Fulmar	1	2	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>
Little Grebe	8	4	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Black-necked Grebe	1	5	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
Slavonian Grebe	1	2	<i>Podiceps auritus</i>
Red-necked Grebe	1	2	<i>Podiceps grisegena holboelli</i>
Great Crested Grebe	1	5	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
Great Cormorant	9	70	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Japanese Cormorant	1	1	<i>Phalacrocorax capillatus</i>
Pelagic Cormorant	4	300	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>
Grey Heron	6	20	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	6	10	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Little Egret	5	32	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	1	1	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Black-faced Spoonbill	1	14	<i>Platalea minor</i>
Whooper Swan	6	100	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Bewick's Swan	2	100	<i>Cygnus bewicki jankowski</i>
Greater White-fronted Goose	1	2	<i>Anser albifrons</i>
Black Brant	1	10	<i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
Common Shelduck	1	2	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
Mandarin Duck	3	15	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	7	3000	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Falcated Duck	4	2	<i>Anas falcata</i>
Gadwall	3	4	<i>Anas strepera</i>
Baikal Teal	1	37	<i>Anas formosa</i>
Eurasian Teal	5	40	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Mallard	10	5000	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Asian Spot-billed Duck	6	50	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Northern Pintail	7	25000	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Northern Shoveler	2	5	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Common Pochard	3	10	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
Tufted Duck	5	35	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Greater Scaup	7	300	<i>Aythya marila</i>
Harlequin Duck	4	200	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>
Long-tailed Duck	2	500	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>
Black Scoter	4	150	<i>Melanitta americana</i>
Asian White-winged Scoter	2	250	<i>Melanitta stejnegeri</i>
Common Goldeneye	5	100	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Smew	2	10	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	5	30	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Goosander	8	500	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Osprey	3	10	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Black-eared Kite	13	100	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>

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White-tailed Eagle	4	43	<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
Steller's Sea-Eagle	5	330	<i>Haliaeetus pelagicus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	2	2	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Northern Goshawk	1	1	<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
Eastern Buzzard	9	10	<i>Buteo japonicus</i>
Rough-legged Buzzard	2	1	<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
Common Kestrel	7	2	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	2	3	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Chinese Bamboo Partridge	1	1	<i>Bambusicola thoracica</i>
Copper Pheasant	1	2	<i>Syrnaticus soemmerringii scintillans</i>
Green Pheasant	2	1	<i>Phasianus versicolor</i>
White-naped Crane	2	600	<i>Grus vipio</i>
Common Crane	2	1	<i>Grus grus lilfordi</i>
Hooded Crane	2	4000	<i>Grus monacha</i>
Red-crowned Crane	4	500	<i>Grus japonensis</i>
Ruddy-breasted Crake	1	1	<i>Porzana fusca</i>
Common Moorhen	2	4	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Eurasian Coot	4	60	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Northern Lapwing	3	30	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Grey Plover	1	50	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Long-billed Plover	2	2	<i>Charadrius placidus</i>
Little Ringed Plover	1	1	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish Plover	2	15	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus</i>
Common Snipe	2	14	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Eurasian Curlew	1	1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Common Greenshank	2	10	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper	2	1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Common Sandpiper	4	6	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Dunlin	2	1000	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Red-necked Stint	1	2	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>
Black-tailed Gull	3	2	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>
Common Gull	5	20	<i>Larus canus kamschatschensis</i>
Glaucous-winged Gull	4	20	<i>Larus glaucescens</i>
Glaucous Gull	4	100	<i>Larus hyperboreus pallidissimus</i>
Siberian Gull	1	1	<i>Larus heuglini</i>
Vega Gull	7	100	<i>Larus vegae</i>
Slaty-backed Gull	5	300	<i>Larus schistisagus</i>
Pallas's Gull	1	1	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>
Black-headed Gull	3	50	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Saunders's gull	1	52	<i>Saundersilarus saundersi</i>
Common Guillemot	3	15	<i>Uria aalge</i>
Brunnich's Guillemot	4	6	<i>Uria lomvia</i>
Spectacled Guillemot	3	14	<i>Cephus carbo</i>
Pigeon Guillemot	1	3	<i>Cephus columba</i>
Ancient Murrelet	1	20	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>
Crested Auklet	1	6	<i>Aethia cristatella</i>
Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	13	100	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>
Japanese Green Pigeon	1	4	<i>Treron sieboldii</i>
Oriental Turtle-Dove	7	15	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Blakiston's Fish Owl	3	3	<i>Ketupa blakistoni</i>
Common Kingfisher	3	5	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>

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Crested Kingfisher	1	1	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>
Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	4	7	<i>Dendrocopos kizuki</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	5	4	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Japanese Woodpecker	4	2	<i>Picus awokera</i>
Asian House Martin	3	10	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
Barn Swallow	3	6	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Richard's Pipit	1	1	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
Eurasian Skylark	2	30	<i>Alauda arvensis japonica</i>
Horned Lark	1	1	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
White Wagtail	7	60	<i>Motacilla alba lugens</i>
Japanese Wagtail	6	9	<i>Motacilla grandis</i>
Grey Wagtail	7	10	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Olive-backed Pipit	1	4	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
Red-throated Pipit	1	8	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
Buff-bellied Pipit	4	40	<i>Anthus rubescens japonicus</i>
Ryukyu Minivet	2	5	<i>Pericrocotus tegimae</i>
Brown-eared Bulbul	11	25	<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>
Goldcrest	4	5	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
Bohemian Waxwing	2	20	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
Brown Dipper	7	2	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
Winter Wren	4	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Blue Rock-Thrush	3	3	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
White's Thrush	3	1	<i>Zoothera aurea</i>
Pale Thrush	6	40	<i>Turdus pallidus</i>
Brown-headed Thrush	1	1	<i>Turdus chrysolaus</i>
Dusky Thrush	13	30	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>
Zitting Cisticola	2	1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Japanese Bush-Warbler	4	5	<i>Cettia diphone</i>
Orange-flanked Bush-Robin	3	9	<i>Luscinia cyanurus</i>
Daurian Redstart	7	8	<i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i>
Marsh Tit	4	4	<i>Poecile palustris</i>
Willow Tit	4	10	<i>Poecile montana</i>
Coal Tit	5	35	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Lesser Grey Tit	10	25	<i>Parus minor</i>
Varied Tit	5	10	<i>Sittiparus varius</i>
Long-tailed Tit	7	20	<i>Aegithalos caudatus trivergatus/tephronotus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	8	7	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	2	2	<i>Certhia familiaris japonicus</i>
White-crowned Penduline-Tit	1	7	<i>Remiz consobrinus</i>
Japanese White-eye	5	50	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>
Bull-headed Shrike	4	6	<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>
Northern Grey Shrike	1	1	<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
Eurasian Jay	5	20	<i>Garrulus glandarius brandti</i>
Daurian Jackdaw	1	1	<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>
Rook	4	1150	<i>Corvus frugilegus pastinator</i>
Carrion Crow	13	350	<i>Corvus corone</i>
Large-billed Crow	13	100	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Common Raven	1	2	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Black-billed Magpie	1	1	<i>Pica pica</i>
White-cheeked Starling	9	30	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
Common Starling	2	17	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>

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Meadow Bunting	6	12	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
Chestnut-eared Bunting	1	3	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>
Rustic Bunting	4	8	<i>Emberiza rustica</i>
Elegant Bunting	1	4	<i>Emberiza elegans</i>
Black-faced Bunting	5	20	<i>Emberiza spodocephala personata</i>
Grey Bunting	2	3	<i>Emberiza variabilis</i>
Common Reed Bunting	4	10	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
Brambling	5	40	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Common Crossbill	1	1	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
Eurasian Siskin	3	12	<i>Carduelis spinus</i>
Mealy Redpoll	5	42	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
Arctic Redpoll	1	1	<i>Carduelis (hornemanni) exilipes</i>
Asian Rosy-Finch	5	150	<i>Leucosticte arctoa</i>
Grey-capped Greenfinch	9	100	<i>Carduelis sinica</i>
Bullfinch	4	20	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Hawfinch	7	150	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
Japanese Grosbeak	5	80	<i>Eophona personata</i>
Russet Sparrow	1	30	<i>Passer rutilans</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	13	300	<i>Passer montanus</i>

May-08