

JAPAN

"The Japan tour kicked off in comfort after a long flight to Tokyo and a bus trip into the southern edges of the snowy Japanese Alps. At Berg Cot Pension, we were able to get over our jet lag while enjoying breakfast in front of a breathtaking display of woodland birds like Arctic Rosy Finch, Japanese Grosbeak and Varied Tit (and mammals at night including Raccoon Dog and Japanese Marten) visiting garden feeders. Owner Azusa-san gave us all a warm welcome, delicious mountain food, and origami lessons. Walks outside the pension along the snowy slopes of Tateshina provided views of Copper Pheasant, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and Red-flanked Bluetail.

On our daily drives we visited interesting sites for both birds and Japanese culture: we saw Japanese Wagtails and Japanese Woodpecker at a nearby Buddhist temple, Long-tailed Rosefinch and Green Pheasant near a brilliantly preserved Edo-era wooden village, a flock of Bewick's Swan in the Kamikawa river, surrounded by a variety of waterfowl including Smew and Falcated Duck, and a group of 20 Asian Azure-winged Magpie (now split from Spanish birds) roosting in the reeds. We also made a memorable excursion to Jigokudani Onsen near Nagoya to see up to 60 Japanese Macaque squabbling, delousing, frowning and bathing in the thermal springs there. We had excellent views of some gravity-defying Japanese Serow grazing the steep slope above the sulphurous pools, and very close views of three confiding Alpine Accentors.

Our next stop was Kagoshima prefecture in southern Kyushu, where we experienced sunny weather with temperatures in the 20s. The Arasaki rice fields were filled with 5000 Hooded Crane and 500 White-naped Crane. Among the throng were 1 Common Crane, a couple of Hooded x Common Crane hybrids, and up to 6 Sandhill Crane. In reeds we located plenty of Chestnut-eared, Black-faced and Common Reed Buntings, but the Chinese Penduline Tits present didn't put on such a good show for all of us. A female Japanese Quail, a difficult bird to see in Japan, obliged, as did a Ruddy-Breasted Crake. On the shingle of the Takaono river we got great views of a Long-billed Plover living up to its specific name *placidus*. An Eastern Water Rail posed well for us at dusk by a reedy pond, enabling great views of this newly separated species.

With views of Peregrine and Merlin here, and up to 15 Osprey, our raptor list was growing, but for many one of the tour highlights was a female Northern Goshawk on a recently killed male Mallard floating in a flooded rice pool. The bird dragged its heavy prey across the water to the bank where it tucked in, surrounded by 300 protesting Large-billed Crows. This incredible observation lasted for 40 minutes, providing all of us all with our longest ever view of a Goshawk!

A trip to Yatsushiro combined visits to a small tatami weaving factory, ancient Banyan tree and cliff-perching shrine with some mudflat birding. We got great views of an adult Pallas's Gull complete with its breeding black head and white mascara, and close views of 76 Saunders's Gull flitting back and forth giving tern-like calls. 2 Black-faced Spoonbill were there, but we had to wait for them to wake up until we could see their black faces and spoon bills! We stopped at Minamata, where at the river bridge we marveled at 350 Asian House Martins on wires and bridge-sidings.

We arrived at Kogawa Dam as the mist was rising off the hills, and had brilliant views of a Crested Kingfisher thrashing a freshly caught trout against a rock, and a pair of fly-by Brown Dippers. At the dam we counted 31 Mandarin Duck and heard their strange, hoarse 'geck!' calls echoing across the water. The Kirishima volcanoes was where, according to Shinto legend, Japan was said to have been born. We visited the impressive Kirishima Jingo shrine with its massive gate, serene buildings and ancient cedars. We also viewed Takachiho volcano from the volcanic Lake Miike, and walked through the gallery forest.

JAPAN: Bird List...2

The next morning we searched another area of the plateau and we were rewarded with excellent views of a pair of Mountain Hawk Eagle both perched and in flight.

Hokkaido couldn't have been more different. After a slight blip in the schedule when our flight was delayed and we had to stay in Tokyo, we arrived in thick early fog with snow on the ground- a complete white-out. But as we drove around, we got great views of up to 5 Red Fox and 60 Sika Deer close to the bus, and our first pairs of Red-crowned Crane, one pair coming to within 20 metres of our excellent high-windowed 'safari' bus, driven by Sato-san. We had a packed lunch at the Crane Centre at Tsurui village where we saw about 100 Red-crowned Crane feeding along with 5 White-tailed Eagle, and these were watched by up to 60 bugling Whooper Swans, creamy white against the starch-white snow. The Cranes put on a fantastic display, with some dancing right in front of us, breath visible in the winter air as they trumpeted. Sato-san then showed us a magnificent roosting Ural Owl of the grey-and-white race *japonicus* which posed well in its tree hole on two days.

At Yoroushi Onsen, we were filled to the brim (and then some!) with exquisitely prepared Japanese food. Here we enjoyed views of up to 30 Eurasian Jay of the subspecies *brandti* and up to 4 Sable in their yellowy winter coats at feeders outside the restaurant. Further north in Rausu, we stayed in a comfy pension. It was from here that we set out on an early morning boat trip out to the sea ice where we watched up to 50 Steller's Sea Eagle and 15 White-tailed Eagle feeding and perching on snags of sea ice right next to the boat at dawn, surrounded by hundreds of Slaty-backed, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls. We were lucky that the sea ice was quite close and that we got such good views of these birds.

We had to spend the rest of the day in the pension relaxing, as there was a government ordered tsunami warning along the coast in the wake of the recent Chile earthquake. At night, near Rausu we visited a nearby port and got brief views of a Blakiston's Fish Owl perched on a telegraph pole, but unfortunately it didn't give us a closer look.

A trip down the coast to the Nosappu peninsula and nearby ports afforded us with views of Spectacled Guillemot, Black and White-winged Scoter and very close Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, but undoubtedly the highlights here were close views of 3 frolicking Sea Otter just offshore and an adult breeding plumaged Red-faced Cormorant on a cliff 50 metres from us with some Pelagic Cormorant. We made an excursion inland to a lake where we watched 5 Steller's Sea Eagles and incredibly another Mountain Hawk Eagle. In nearby spruce forests we had rare views of Pine Grosbeak and Black Woodpecker. We had lunch watching 100 Whooper Swan at the melted edge of the frozen lake.

On our last day we experienced some fairly wild, blustery conditions on an exposed Notsuke peninsula, where we braved a walk to the lighthouse and some choppy sea-watching. We were rewarded with a great last bird of the trip: a Pine Bunting in a flock of Arctic Rosy Finch- then we started our return home, notching up Feral Pigeon counts until the last minute!" – Fergus Crystal

JAPAN: Bird List...3

BIRD LIST:

This is a list of all the species seen during the last two tours to Japan combined with a list of the species actually recorded on the most recent tour.

Column A = Number of tours on which this species has been recorded.

Column B = Number of days this species was seen on the last tour.

Column C = Maximum daily count for this species on the last tour.

H = Heard only

B = Breeding noted

A		B	C	
1	Northern Fulmar			<i>Fulmarus glacialis rodgersii</i>
2	Little Grebe	5	6	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
2	Black-necked Grebe	1	8	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>
1	Slavonian Grebe			<i>Podiceps auritus</i>
2	Red-necked Grebe	1	5	<i>Podiceps grisegena holboelli</i>
2	Great Crested Grebe	1	2	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
2	Great Cormorant	5	203	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
1	Temminck's Cormorant			<i>Phalacrocorax capillatus</i>
1	Red-faced Cormorant	1	1	<i>Phalacrocorax urile</i>
2	Pelagic Cormorant	3	50	<i>Phalacrocorax pelagicus</i>
2	Grey Heron	6	30	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
2	Great White Egret	4	15	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
2	Little Egret	2	5	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
2	Cattle Egret	2	15	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
1	Black-crowned Night Heron			<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
2	Black-faced Spoonbill	1	2	<i>Platalea minor</i>
2	Mute Swan	1	1	<i>Cygnus olor</i>
2	Whooper Swan	5	200	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
2	Tundra Swan	2	60	<i>Cygnus columbianus bewicki</i>
1	Bean Goose	1	7	<i>Anser fabalis serralrostris</i>
1	Greater White-fronted Goose			<i>Anser albifrons</i>
1	Black Brant			<i>Branta bernicla nigricans</i>
1	Common Shelduck			<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>
2	Mandarin Duck	1	31	<i>Aix galericulata</i>
2	Eurasian Wigeon	7	350	<i>Anas penelope</i>
2	Falcated Duck	1	3	<i>Anas falcata</i>
2	Gadwall	2	20	<i>Anas strepera</i>
1	Baikal Teal			<i>Anas formosa</i>
2	Eurasian Teal	7	300	<i>Anas crecca</i>
2	Mallard	9	120	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
2	Asian Spot-billed Duck	6	350	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
2	Northern Pintail	5	350	<i>Anas acuta</i>
2	Northern Shoveler	2	10	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
2	Common Pochard	2	15	<i>Aythya ferina</i>
2	Tufted Duck	3	16	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
2	Greater Scaup	2	12	<i>Aythya marila</i>
2	Harlequin Duck	3	250	<i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>
2	Long-tailed Duck	2	40	<i>Clangula hyemalis</i>

JAPAN: Bird List...4

2	Black Scoter	3	400		<i>Melanitta americana</i>
2	White-winged Scoter	3	40		<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>
2	Common Goldeneye	5	150		<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
2	Smew	1	4		<i>Mergellus albellus</i>
2	Red-breasted Merganser	4	100		<i>Mergus serrator</i>
2	Goosander	5	20		<i>Mergus merganser</i>
2	Osprey	2	16		<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
2	Black-eared Kite	12	200	B	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>
2	White-tailed Eagle	5	20		<i>Haliaeetus albicilla</i>
2	Steller's Sea-Eagle	5	60		<i>Haliaeetus pelagicus</i>
1	Eurasian Sparrowhawk				<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
1	Northern Goshawk	1	1		<i>Accipiter gentilis</i>
2	Eastern Buzzard	6	2		<i>Buteo japonicus</i>
1	Rough-legged Buzzard				<i>Buteo lagopus</i>
1	Mountain Hawk Eagle	2	2	B	<i>Nisaetus nipalensis</i>
2	Common Kestrel	2	3		<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
1	Merlin	1	1		<i>Falco columbarius inisgnis</i>
2	Peregrine Falcon	1	1		<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
1	Chinese Bamboo Partridge			H	<i>Bambusicola thoracica</i>
2	Copper Pheasant	1	1		<i>Syrmaticus soemmerringii scintillans</i>
2	Green Pheasant	1	1		<i>Phasianus versicolor</i>
1	Japanese Quail	1	1		<i>Coturnix japonica</i>
1	Sandhill Crane	2	6		<i>Grus canadensis</i>
2	White-naped Crane	3	500		<i>Grus vipio</i>
2	Common Crane	1	1		<i>Grus grus lilfordi</i>
2	Hooded Crane	3	5000		<i>Grus monacha</i>
2	Red-crowned Crane	1	332		<i>Grus japonensis</i>
1	Eastern Water Rail	1	1		<i>Rallus indicus</i>
2	Ruddy-breasted Crake	1	1		<i>Porzana fusca</i>
2	Common Moorhen	4	5		<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
2	Eurasian Coot	5	32		<i>Fulica atra</i>
2	Northern Lapwing	3	36		<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
2	Grey Plover	1	100		<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
2	Long-billed Plover	2	1		<i>Charadrius placidus</i>
1	Little Ringed Plover				<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
2	Kentish Plover	2	20		<i>Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus</i>
1	Lesser Sand Plover	1	5		<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
2	Common Snipe	1	11		<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
2	Eurasian Curlew	1	4		<i>Numenius arquata</i>
2	Common Greenshank	2	3		<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
2	Green Sandpiper	2	2		<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
2	Common Sandpiper	4	6		<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
2	Dunlin	3	250		<i>Calidris alpina</i>
1	Red-necked Stint				<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>
2	Black-tailed Gull	3	30		<i>Larus crassirostris</i>
2	Common Gull	2	32		<i>Larus canus kamschatschensis</i>
2	Glaucous-winged Gull	2	30		<i>Larus glaucescens</i>
2	Glaucous Gull	3	50		<i>Larus hyperboreus</i>
1	Heuglin's Gull				<i>Larus heuglini</i>

JAPAN: Bird List...5

2	Vega Gull	2	300	<i>Larus vegae</i>
2	Slaty-backed Gull	4	500	<i>Larus schistisagus</i>
2	Pallas's Gull	1	1	<i>Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus</i>
2	Black-headed Gull	3	30	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
2	Saunders's gull	1	76	<i>Saundersilarus saundersi</i>
1	Black-legged Kittiwake	1	1	<i>Rissa tridactyla</i>
2	Common Guillemot	3	1	<i>Uria aalge</i>
2	Brunnich's Guillemot	3	10	<i>Uria lomvia</i>
2	Spectacled Guillemot	2	70	<i>Cepphus carbo</i>
2	Pigeon Guillemot	1	3	<i>Cepphus columba</i>
1	Ancient Murrelet			<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>
1	Least Auklet	1	3	<i>Aethia pusilla</i>
1	Crested Auklet			<i>Aethia cristatella</i>
2	Rock Dove/Feral Pigeon	9	59	<i>Columba livia domestica</i>
2	Japanese Green Pigeon	1	25	<i>Treron sieboldii</i>
2	Oriental Turtle-Dove	7	40	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
2	Blakiston's Fish Owl	1	1	<i>Ketupa blakistoni</i>
1	Ural Owl	2	1	<i>Strix uralensis</i>
2	Common Kingfisher	4	3	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
2	Crested Kingfisher	2	4	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>
2	Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	6	8	<i>Yungipicus kizuki</i>
2	Great Spotted Woodpecker	2	6	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
1	Black Woodpecker	1	1	<i>Dryocopus martius</i>
1	Grey-headed Woodpecker	1	1	<i>Picus canus</i>
2	Japanese Woodpecker	3	4	<i>Picus awokera</i>
2	Asian House Martin	1	350	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
2	Barn Swallow	1	6	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
2	Eurasian Skylark	4	1000	<i>Alauda arvensis japonica</i>
1	Horned Lark			<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>
2	White Wagtail	8	1000	<i>Motacilla alba lugens</i>
2	Japanese Wagtail	4	11	<i>Motacilla grandis</i>
2	Grey Wagtail	4	4	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
2	Richard's Pipit	1	4	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
2	Olive-backed Pipit	1	6	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
2	Red-throated Pipit	1	2	<i>Anthus cervinus</i>
2	Buff-bellied Pipit	3	300	<i>Anthus rubescens japonicus</i>
2	Ryukyu Minivet	2	3	<i>Pericrocotus tegimae</i>
2	Brown-eared Bulbul	9	15	<i>Microscelis amaurotis</i>
2	Goldcrest	1	1	<i>Regulus regulus</i>
1	Bohemian Waxwing			<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
2	Brown Dipper	2	4	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
2	Winter Wren	1	1	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
1	Alpine Accentor	1	3	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
2	Blue Rock Thrush	2	2	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>
1	White's Thrush			<i>Zoothera aurea</i>
2	Pale Thrush	5	10	<i>Turdus pallidus</i>
1	Brown-headed Thrush			<i>Turdus chrysolaus</i>
2	Dusky Thrush	11	50	<i>Turdus eunomus</i>
2	Zitting Cisticola	1	2	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>

JAPAN: Bird List...6

1	Asian Stubtail			H	<i>Urosphena squameiceps</i>
2	Japanese Bush-Warbler	2	6		<i>Cettia diphone</i>
2	Red-flanked Bluetail	3	4		<i>Luscinia cyanura</i>
2	Daurian Redstart	8	7		<i>Phoenicurus aureoreus</i>
2	Varied Tit	4	7		<i>Poecile varius</i>
2	Marsh Tit	3	5		<i>Poecile palustris</i>
2	Willow Tit	3	20		<i>Poecile montana</i>
2	Coal Tit	5	15		<i>Periparus ater</i>
2	Eastern Great Tit	7	8		<i>Parus minor</i>
2	Long-tailed Tit	5	16		<i>Aegithalos caudatus trivergatus/tephronotus</i>
2	Eurasian Nuthatch	6	4		<i>Sitta europaea</i>
2	Eurasian Treecreeper	2	2		<i>Certhia familiaris japonicus</i>
2	Chinese Penduline-Tit	1	3		<i>Remiz consobrinus</i>
2	Japanese White-eye	4	10		<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>
2	Bull-headed Shrike	6	4		<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>
1	Northern Grey Shrike				<i>Lanius excubitor</i>
2	Eurasian Jay	6	36		<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
2	Azure-winged Magpie	1	20		<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>
2	Daurian Jackdaw	1	1		<i>Corvus dauuricus</i>
2	Rook	3	600		<i>Corvus frugilegus pastinator</i>
2	Carrion Crow	13	100		<i>Corvus corone</i>
2	Large-billed Crow	13	300		<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
1	Common Raven	1	1	H	<i>Corvus corax</i>
1	Black-billed Magpie				<i>Pica pica</i>
2	White-cheeked Starling	7	20		<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
1	Common Starling				<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
2	Meadow Bunting	6	20		<i>Emberiza cioides</i>
1	Pine Bunting	1	1		<i>Emberiza leucophalos</i>
2	Chestnut-eared Bunting	1	7		<i>Emberiza fucata</i>
2	Rustic Bunting	1	2		<i>Emberiza rustica</i>
2	Elegant Bunting	1	10		<i>Emberiza elegans</i>
2	Black-faced Bunting	4	10		<i>Emberiza spodocephala personata</i>
1	Grey Bunting				<i>Emberiza variabilis</i>
2	Common Reed Bunting	3	50		<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>
2	Brambling	4	100		<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
1	Common Crossbill				<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>
1	Eurasian Siskin				<i>Carduelis spinus</i>
1	Mealy Redpoll				<i>Carduelis flammea</i>
1	Arctic Redpoll				<i>Carduelis hornemanni</i>
2	Asian Rosy-Finch	4	100		<i>Leucosticte arctoa</i>
2	Grey-capped Greenfinch	7	200		<i>Carduelis sinica</i>
2	Eurasian Bullfinch	2	4		<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
1	Pine Grosbeak	1	1		<i>Pinicola enucleator</i>
2	Hawfinch	8	22		<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>
2	Japanese Grosbeak	5	60		<i>Eophona personata</i>
1	Long-tailed Rosefinch	1	10		<i>Uragus sibiricus</i>
2	Russet Sparrow	1	94		<i>Passer rutilans</i>
2	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	11	150		<i>Passer montanus</i>