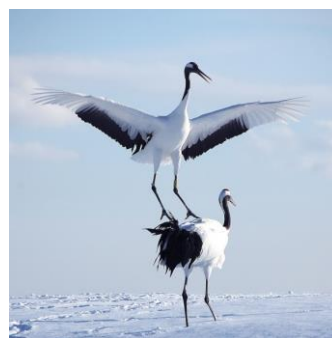


Japan

Dates: 6th – 22nd Jan 2024

Guide: Nigel Moorhouse

Price: £4500 + International Flights (c. £800-1000)



Introduction

This comprehensive winter tour is designed around the spectacular gatherings of cranes and sea eagles which make Japan their home in the winter. In addition, we shall visit some of the remoter islands of the country, where there are some very scarce endemic species, which we hope to add to our sightings.

In the itinerary are noted most of the sought-after, rarer or interesting species, but there are a plethora of others which are commonly encountered, including Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Eastern Buzzard, Oriental Turtle Dove, Large-billed Crow, Japanese Tit, Varied Tit, Brown-eared Bulbul, White-cheeked Starling, Warbling White-eye, Japanese Bush Warbler, Buff-bellied Pipit and Eastern Blue Rock Thrush.

6th Jan: Depart UK

Depart from UK.

7th Jan: Arrive Haneda – Ishigaki

Arrive at Tokyo Haneda transfer to a flight to Ishigaki. Your guide will meet you at Ishigaki Airport.

There will be some time for birding before getting to our hotel in the early evening and there will be the option for some evening birding to look for Ryukyu Scops Owl and Northern Boobook.

8th Jan: Ishigaki

These two Yaeyama islands hold a number of birds which are considered by some authorities to be separate species. Few birders visit, so little is known about the seasonality on the islands. These include Ishigaki and Iriomote Tits and Ryukyu Serpent Eagle. They also offer the opportunity to look for Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Malayan Night Heron, Ryukyu Flycatcher, and other species which are scarce in Japan, such as Purple Heron and Black-winged Kite. The island is also good for wintering thrushes including White's Thrush and Brown-headed Thrush, and species such as Eastern Yellow Wagtail

On the shore, we can look for Grey-tailed Tattler, Pacific Golden and Kentish Plovers, and Mongolian and Greater Sandplovers.

9th Jan: Ishigaki/Iriomote – Okinawa

After some additional time on Ishigaki, we will take an afternoon flight to Okinawa. On arrival, we will head north to the Yabbaru area. It will be dark as we reach the far north, but after our meal, we will be able to head out to look for Ryukyu Scops Owl (if we haven't seen it already), and, if we are lucky, roosting Okinawa Rails. Japanese Scops Owl is also a possibility. Sometimes it is possible to find Amami Woodcock.

10th Jan: Okinawa

We will spend the time around the Yanbaru Peninsula. Our target species here are the difficult and enigmatic Okinawa Rail (easy to hear, less easy to see), and the very scarce Pryer's Woodpecker. In addition to these we should be able to track down Okinawa Robin. Other species we will look for include Grey-faced Buzzard, Japanese Sparrowhawk, Black Woodpigeon, Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Pacific Swallow, Asian Stubtail and Ryukyu Minivet.

While on Okinawa, we may have time for some wader-watching in Naha, where we may find species including Grey-tailed Tattler and Mongolian Sandplover. Both Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills are usually present. We may also be able to stop off at some paddyfields, where a range of waders are usually present. These include Eastern Cattle Egret, Temminck's and Long-toed Stints and Pacific Golden Plover.

11th Jan: Okinawa – Amamioshima

After some final birding on Okinawa, we'll fly to Amamioshima. We first head to Amami Natural Forest, which is home to Lidth's Jay, Ryukyu Robin, Ryukyu Green and Japanese Wood Pigeons and Owston's Woodpecker, as well as the rare Amami Thrush. After dark we'll head out to look for Ryukyu Scops Owl and Amami Woodcock, as well as Ryukyu Spiny Rat and Amami Rabbit. If we are lucky, we may also find roosting Amami Thrush.

12th Jan: Amamioshima – Kagoshima – Izumi

In the early morning, we will head into the forest and try to locate Amami Thrush, and should also find Ryukyu Robin, and more Lidth's Jays. If we have time before our flight, we can stop along the shore near the airport, and this is good for a variety of waders, Temminck's Cormorant and Pacific Reef Herons. We have previously found both Saunders' Gull and Far-eastern Curlew here. In the afternoon, we will fly to Kagoshima on Kyushu, and bird on the way to Izumi.

13th Jan: Izumi

Much of the time in the area will be spent at Arasaki Crane Reserve. This famous area where there is the possibility of six species of crane in a spectacular gathering, including over 8000 Hooded and 2000 White-naped, accompanied by a few Sandhill and Common Cranes, and occasional Siberian and Demoiselle. The whole area is excellent, and we can hope to find Daurian Redstart, Russet Sparrow, Chinese Penduline Tit, Oriental Greenfinch, Daurian Jackdaw, Japanese Grosbeak and Chestnut-eared, Meadow and Rustic Buntings.

While at Izumi, we can visit Kogawa Dam, where Grey and Elegant Bunting can sometimes be found. In addition, this is a good locality for Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Red-flanked Bluetail, Mandarin Duck and Crested Kingfisher.

Heading just inland, there are number of small rivers which Long-billed Plover frequent, and just to south, we may be able to find Japanese Murrelet.

14th Jan: Izumi - Kumamoto – Tokyo

After some final birding in the Izumi area, we'll head to visit some excellent nearby mudflats, which can be filled with waders, including Pacific Golden Plover and Mongolian Sandplover. Saunders' Gull is regular and Black-faced Spoonbill is seen most years. Among the commoner duck species, Falcated Duck and Baikal Teal can often be found. There are always a number of passerines in the reeds and trees here and we need to keep an eye out for the localized race of Common Magpie (Oriental Magpie). Transfer to Kumamoto for an afternoon flight to Tokyo. After arrival in Tokyo, we leave our main luggage in lockers and take a train to Hamamatsucho. Then we take the overnight ferry to Hachijojima.

15th Jan: Ferry - Tokyo

On arrival at Hachijojima *, we will have about 30 minutes to look around the port area, where Izu Thrush is sometimes seen, and Izu Robin is possible with a lot of luck. We return by ferry to Tokyo, where we have the journey to seawatch from our large and comfortable ferry. Species vary with weather conditions, but can include Black-footed, Laysan, and Short-tailed Albatrosses, Streaked Shearwater and Tristram's Petrel, and rarer species are always possible. Between the islands on the way, Japanese Murrelet is regularly encountered.

* if the weather looks not too bad, then we may make the decision to stop on Miyakejima instead of Hachijojima, which will give us much more time to look for Izu Thrush, Izu Robin and Owston's Tit. This doesn't affect the seawatching too much, as most seabirds are seen north of Miyakejima..If the weather is bad, the ferry may be cancelled.

On arrival back at the port, we will head back to Hamamatsucho Station and take the train to Haneda, picking up our luggage before heading to the hotel.

16th Jan: Tokyo – Yoroushi

We take a morning flight to Kushiro, from where we head to nearby areas which have gatherings of Red-crowned Cranes, as well as Whooper Swans, and luck may bring us a roosting Ural Owl. We will also hope to see Japanese Wagtail and be able to check out passerine flocks.

We may have time to explore the areas near Lake Kussharo, where the woods in this area can hold wintering passerines, and, in the evening, there is a very good chance of Blakiston's Fish Owl at the ponds outside of our lodging. There is often Solitary Snipe somewhere along the river.

17th Jan: Yoroushi / Rausu

Head to the east coast for the day. Steller's and White-tailed Eagles are quite common along the shoreline. During the day, we can stop and look over harbours and Notsuke Peninsula. We may find Spectacled and Brünnich's Guillemots, and possibly Ancient Murrelets, Least Auklet and maybe rarer auks. Slaty-backed, Glaucous, Glaucous-winged and Kamchatka (Common) Gulls are all present. Ducks include Stejneger's and Black Scoters, Long-tailed Duck, Common Scaup and Harlequin Duck, and there are occasional North American species such as American Wigeon, White-winged Scoter or Canvasback. There will be a second chance in the evening for Blakiston's Fish Owl.

18th Jan: Yoroushi - Nemuro

After breakfast, we'll head to Nemuro, where we will explore the Nosappu Cape, and Lake Furen. Red-faced Cormorant is usually present among the many Pelagics, and seawatching may add Ancient Murrelet and Least Auklet. Nearby rocks can hold Rock Sandpiper. There are various hides and feeders in the area, which attract a range of passerines. If people wish and conditions allow, we can take a pelagic to get closer to some of the alcids (¥10,000 paid locally).

19th Jan: Nemuro – Furen – Tokyo - Chiba

We have some additional time in the Nemuro area, before heading back to Kushiro to catch an afternoon flight to Tokyo. On arrival, we will drive to Chiba Prefecture where we will spend the night.

20th Jan: Chiba – Karuizawa

We will head out to wetland areas close to Narita. Here we can look for species hard to find elsewhere on the tour, including Japanese Reed Bunting, Green Pheasant and Brown-headed Thrush. Lakes in the area often have Baikal Teal.

In mid-afternoon, we will head to Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps, with some potential stops en route. At Karuizawa, there are a number of trails, easily accessible on foot, which have good numbers of wintering passerines. Species include Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Brown Dipper, Japanese Grosbeak, Dusky and White's Thrushes and Elegant and Rustic Buntings. Scarcer species include Copper Pheasant, Long-tailed and Pallas' Rosefinches, and Japanese Accentor can usually be found. We can also look for Mountain Hawk Eagle.

21st Jan: Karuizawa – Tokyo

We will spend the day around Karuizawa, before heading back to Tokyo in the evening.

22nd Jan: Depart Tokyo

Departure from Tokyo.