

# Japan

Dates: 10<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Guide: Nigel Moorhouse



## Introduction

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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.

## 10<sup>th</sup> Jan: Haneda – Ishigaki

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Fly from Haneda to subtropical Ishigaki. Here there are 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 Tit and the scarce Iriomote Tit, as well as Ryukyu Serpent Eagle. They also offer the opportunity to look for Ryukyu Green Pigeon, Malayan Night Heron, Ryukyu Flycatcher, and other species which are restricted 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 Sandpipers.

In the evening, there will be the option for some evening birding to look for Ryukyu Scops Owl and Northern Boobook, and, with a lot of luck Slaty-legged Crake.

## 11<sup>th</sup> Jan: Ishigaki

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All day to find any species we are missing.

## 12<sup>th</sup> Jan: Ishigaki/Iriomote – Okinawa

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After some additional time on Ishigaki, we will take the short flight to Okinawa.

On arrival, we will head north to the Yanbaru area. It will be getting 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 of the distinct *pryeri* race is also a possibility. Sometimes it is possible to find Amami Woodcock.

## 13<sup>th</sup> Jan: Okinawa

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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 and other coastal areas. Here, 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.

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*14<sup>th</sup> Jan: Okinawa – Amamioshima*

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After some final morning birding on Okinawa, we'll head back to Naha and fly the short distance to Amamioshima. We first head to a forested area, 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.

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*15<sup>th</sup> Jan: Amamioshima – Kagoshima – Izumi*

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In the early morning, we will have time to search for any species which we are missing. If we have time before our flight, we can also 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 take another short flight to Kagoshima on Kyushu. On arrival, after collecting our vehicle, we will head north to we'll head north to visit some excellent nearby mudflats, where 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) before heading to Izumi for the night.

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*16<sup>th</sup> Jan: Izumi*

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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. The whole area is excellent, and we can hope to find Daurian Redstart, Russet Sparrow, Chinese Penduline Tit, Oriental Greenfinch, Daurian Jackdaw, 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.

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*17<sup>th</sup> Jan: Izumi - Kagoshima – Tokyo*

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After some final birding in the Izumi area, head back to Kagoshima for an afternoon flight to Tokyo, from where we will take an evening ferry to the Izu Islands.

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*18<sup>th</sup> Jan: Ferry - Tokyo*

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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 occasional Tristram's Petrel, and rarer species are always possible. Between the islands on the way, Japanese Murrelet is regularly encountered. We arrive back in Tokyo in the evening and head to our hotel.

Note that if the weather is bad, the ferry can be cancelled. If this happens, we will spend time in some parks in Tokyo which are good for birding.

\* if the weather looks OK, 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.

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*19<sup>th</sup> Jan: Tokyo – Nemuro*

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We take a morning flight to Kushiro from where we head to nearby areas which have gatherings of Red-crowned Cranes, 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 will continue 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 irregularly. Asian Rosy Finch is normally encountered somewhere on the way.

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*20<sup>th</sup> Jan: Nemuro - Yoroushi*

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If people wish and conditions allow, we can take a pelagic to get closer to some of the alcids (c. ¥10,000 paid locally).

We will then head up the east coast where Steller's and White-tailed Eagles are quite common along the shoreline. During the day, we can stop and look over harbours and peninsulas. 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.

In the evening, we settle into our lodge, where Blakiston's Fish Owl is a regular visitor.

*21<sup>st</sup> Jan: Yoroushi*

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We will be able to enjoy the feeders at the lodge in the morning, where species include Brandt's (Common) Jay and several other passerines. We will have the rest of the day to explore nearby areas to find any species which we may have missed, and the evening will give us another opportunity for Blakiston's Fish Owl.

*22<sup>nd</sup> Jan: Yoroushi – Furen – Tokyo – Chiba*

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After breakfast, we will head to Kushiro to catch a flight to Tokyo. We will then head to Chiba, where we will explore wetland areas. Here we can look for species hard to find elsewhere on the tour, including Japanese Reed Bunting, Green Pheasant and Brown-headed Thrush. Wildfowl are abundant, and can include Baikal Teal, Smew, Falcated Duck, Whooper and Bewick's Swans, and occasionally geese, such as Snow, Cackling and Greater White-fronted.

*23<sup>rd</sup> Jan: Chiba – Karuizawa*

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In the morning, we will look over some local areas before heading to Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps. We will potentially make some potential stops en route to look for the tricky Mountain Hawk Eagle and Grey Bunting. At Karuizawa, there are usually good numbers of wintering passerines. Species include Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Brown Dipper, Japanese Grosbeak, Hawfinch, Dusky Thrush, Japanese Accentor, and Elegant and Rustic Buntings. Scarcer species possible include the very elusive Copper Pheasant, Long-tailed and Pallas' Rosefinches, and Japanese Waxwing (if it is a waxwing year).

*24<sup>th</sup> Jan: Karuizawa – Tokyo*

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We will spend the day around Karuizawa, looking for any species which we have missed, before heading back to Tokyo in the afternoon, birding en route if there is something turns up.

*25<sup>th</sup> Jan: Depart Tokyo*

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Transfers for your flights before departure from Tokyo.