



## JAPAN IN WINTER: BIRDS AND MONKEYS

23 FEBRUARY - 13 MARCH 2021



  
Birding Ecotours  
Dominic Rollinson

*Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker will be searched for in forest patches.*

During our wonderful winter Japan birding adventure we experience the diversity of three of the main islands: Kyushu, Honshu, and Hokkaido. We begin with the coasts and wetlands of the southwestern Kyushu desert in search of the endemic **Japanese Murrelet** and the wintering hordes of **Hooded Cranes** and **White-naped Cranes**, with an accompanying cast of other winter visitors, which may include **Black-faced Spoonbill** and **Saunders's Gull**. We then travel northward through the forests, hills, and lakes of central Honshu to seek out endemics such as **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Japanese Green Woodpecker**, **Varied Tit**, and perhaps, if we are very lucky, **Copper Pheasant**. We include visits to lakes to look for **Baikal Teal** and **Mandarin Duck** and to a valley where endemic **Japanese Macaque** and endemic **Japanese Serow** (a goat-antelope) make their winter home. Leaving central Honshu we continue to the most scenically beautiful part of Japan – the northernmost island of Hokkaido. Here, in a landscape dominated by dramatic volcanoes, calderas, coastal plains, and rugged peninsulas, species numbers are low, but quality is high! We visit the feeding and roosting grounds of **Red-crowned Crane**, seeing them at close range where they are easily photographed, perhaps with a **Red Fox** in the background and a **White-tailed Eagle** overhead. We see flocks of wintering **Whooper Swans** and other waterfowl, look for **Crested Kingfisher**, seek out winter roosts of **Ural Owl**, and visit a feeding site of the rare and endangered **Blakiston's Fish Owl**. During our time on the Shiretoko and Nemuro peninsulas we spend time watching arguably the world's largest and most spectacular raptor – **Steller's Sea Eagle**. Coastal sea-watching and boat trips offshore will allow us to search for an array of possible wintering or migrating seabirds, including loons, grebes, auks, auklets, murrelets, and murre.



*White-tailed Eagle — one of the two sea eagles we will hopefully encounter on this trip*

**Itinerary (18 days/17 nights)****Day 1. Arrival at Tokyo International Airport (Haneda)**

After your arrival in Tokyo, on the island of Honshu, you will check in at the Haneda Airport Hotel. This will save you expensive meet-and-greet services, since the hotel is within the domestic airport and guests can arrive and check in independently. You will have dinner at the hotel.

Overnight: Haneda Airport Hotel, Tokyo

**Day 2. Flight to Miyazaki**

We will take a domestic flight to Miyazaki on the island of Kyushu (or to Kagoshima with transfer to Miyazaki, if there is no flight to Miyazaki) in the morning. In the afternoon we will be birding the Miyazaki coast in search of **Japanese Murrelet**. In the process we might also encounter, among others, Black-eared Kite (recognized by most authorities as a subspecies of **Black Kite**), **Japanese Cormorant**, **Pacific Reef Heron**, and **Black-tailed, Vega, and Slaty-backed Gulls**.

Overnight: Miyazaki

**Day 3. Miyazaki to Izumi via Mi-ike**

In the morning we will again enjoy the varied birdlife at the Miyazaki coast. In the afternoon we will drive to Mi-ike, where we can stop to do some productive lake and forest birding, with possible sightings of **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Northern Pintail**, and **Mandarin Duck**. Other species we might encounter are **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Yellow-throated Bunting**, **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, and perhaps also **White-backed Woodpecker**. We then continue to Izumi.

Overnight: Izumi



*Truly wild Mandarin Duck may be seen on this tour.*

**Days 4 – 5. Arasaki Crane Reserve**

For two full days we will be birding the renowned Arasaki Crane Reserve near Izumi for **White-naped** and **Hooded Cranes**, also looking for the occasional **Common Crane**, **Siberian Crane**, and even perhaps a single **Demoiselle** or **Sandhill Crane**, and many other species wintering in the area, like **Rook**, **Eurasian Skylark**, **Grey-capped Greenfinch**, **Meadow Bunting**, and **White Wagtail**. We will also explore estuaries north and south for **Black-faced Spoonbill** and **Saunders's Gull**.

Overnight: Izumi

**Day 6. Flight to Tokyo, transfer to Tateshina**

Today we'll drive to Kagoshima, Kyushu, for a morning domestic flight to Tokyo's Haneda airport to begin our Kyushu island leg. Here we will collect a rental vehicle and proceed to Tateshina. In the afternoon we will be birding in the forest close to Tateshina.

Overnight: Tateshina

**Day 7. Tateshina**

We will be birding all day in the Tateshina area, looking for the likes of **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Japanese Grosbeak**, **Hawfinch**, **Grey-capped Greenfinch**, and, with some luck, even **Copper Pheasant**.

Overnight: Tateshina



*The Tateshina area should produce sightings of **Red-flanked Bluetail**.*

**Day 8. Tateshina to Katano Kamo-ike Bird Sanctuary**

Before breakfast we will be birding the forests in Tateshina. After breakfast we will drive via Lake Suwa to Komatsu in the Ishikawa Prefecture to visit the Katano Kamo-ike Bird Sanctuary to bird in the afternoon for waterfowl. We will especially be looking for **Baikal Teal**, but may

also find **Taiga** and **Tundra Bean Geese**, **Greater White-fronted Goose**, **Smew**, **Mallard**, **Northern Pintail**, and **Falcated Duck**, to name just a few.

Overnight: Kaga

### **Day 9. Kaga to Kambayashi Onsen**

In the morning we will again be birding at Katano Kamo-ike and other sites in the vicinity. In the afternoon we will drive to Kambayashi Onsen in the Nagano Prefecture.

Overnight: Kambayashi Onsen

### **Day 10. Kambayashi Onsen to Karuizawa**

In the morning we will visit the famous snow monkeys at Jigokudani Yaen Koen (Monkey Park) to watch the endemic **Japanese Macaques** frolic in the snow and soak in the hot springs. We will also be looking here for **Japanese Serow** (a goat-antelope). In the afternoon we will transfer to Karuizawa.

Overnight: Karuizawa

### **Day 11. Karuizawa Bird Sanctuary**

We will spend all day birding in the Karuizawa Bird Sanctuary. In this area we might encounter **Willow**, **Great**, **Long-tailed**, **Varied**, and **Coal Tits**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Chinese Hwamei**, **Japanese Accentor**, **Brown-eared Bulbul**, **Long-tailed Rosefinch**, **Japanese Green**, **Japanese Pygmy**, and **Great Spotted Woodpeckers**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Hawfinch**, **Japanese Grosbeak**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Brown Dipper**, and perhaps even **Copper Pheasant**.

Overnight: Karuizawa



*Daurian Redstart adds a splash of color to the Japanese woodlands.*

**Day 12. Karuizawa to Tokyo via Ura-Myogi, flight to Kushiro**

Before breakfast we will have a last spot of birding the Karuizawa Bird Sanctuary. After breakfast we will visit the Ura-Myogi area, where we might have a second chance for **Baikal Teal** among other waterfowl like **Mandarin** and **Eastern Spot-billed Ducks**, or we may encounter terrestrial species like **Russet Sparrow**, the local subspecies of **Eurasian Bullfinch** (Grey-bellied Bullfinch), **Eastern Buzzard**, **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Japanese Bush Warbler**, **Azure-winged Magpie**, and **White-cheeked Starling**. Then we will drive to Tokyo's Haneda Airport and take an afternoon domestic flight to Kushiro on east Hokkaido island. After collecting our rental vehicle we will drive to Tsurui.

Overnight: Tsurui



*A pair of Eastern Spot-billed Ducks.*

**Day 13. Tsurui Crane Sanctuaries, transfer to Kawayu**

Tsurui is home to Japan's very best crane sanctuaries. We will visit **Red-crowned Crane** roosting and foraging areas, and we'll probably also encounter local or migrant birds like **Meadow Bunting** and **Pallas's Rosefinch**. In this area we will also look for **Ural Owl** roosting sites and search rivers for **Crested Kingfisher** and other wintering riparian species. A short one-hour drive will take us to Kawayu in the afternoon.

Overnight: Kawayu

**Day 14. Kawayu to Rausu**

Today we will be birding locally in the morning around Lake Kawayu, looking for **Black** and **White-backed Woodpeckers** and **Common Redpoll**, and also on our way to the Sea of Okhotsk coast for winter waterfowl, ending the day on the wild Shiretoko Peninsula for **Steller's Sea Eagle**. An evening watch will see us trying to find **Blakiston's Fish Owl**.

Overnight: Rausu

**Day 15. Rausu**

We have a full day birding the fascinating Shiretoko Peninsula. Our main target here is, of course, **Steller's Sea Eagle**. But we will also keep our eyes open for **White-tailed Eagle**, **Brown Dipper**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Long-tailed Duck**, the local subspecies of **White-winged Scoter** (Stejneger's Scoter), **Common** and **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Pelagic Cormorant**, **Whooper Swan**, and **Glaucous** and **Glaucous-winged Gulls**, as well as an occasional rare visitor like **Surf Scoter**. In the evening we will again try for **Blakiston's Fish Owl**.

Overnight: Rausu



*One of the biggest targets of the trip — Steller's Sea Eagle*

**Days 16 – 17. Nemuro**

In the morning of day 16 we will drive to Nemuro on the Nemuro Peninsula, yet another stunningly scenic peninsula jutting out into the Okhotsk Sea, where we will stay for two nights. On the drive and in the Nemuro area we should watch for **Black Scoter**, **Red-faced Cormorant**, **Slaty-backed** and **Black-tailed Gulls**, **White-tailed Eagle**, and **Asian Rosy Finch**. We will take two boat trips from Ochiishi for seabirds; on these trips many alcids, sea ducks, and cormorants can be seen. In particular we will keep an eye out for **Ancient Murrelet**, **Rhinoceros Auklet**, **Spectacled** and **Pigeon Guillemots**, **Common Murre**, **Black-throated Loon**, and **Red-necked Grebe**. We will also do some birding around Lake Furen.

Overnight: Nemuro

**Day 18. Nemuro to Kushiro, flight to Tokyo, departure**

Today we will return to Kushiro for a domestic flight to Tokyo (Haneda) for our connections home.

*Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.*

<b>Duration:</b>	18 days
<b>Limit:</b>	4 – 8
<b>Dates:</b>	23 February – 13 March 2021
<b>Start:</b>	Tokyo
<b>End:</b>	Tokyo
<b>Prices:</b>	Japanese Yen ¥1,141,019 per person sharing for 7 – 8 participants 2021 ¥1,186,646 per person sharing for 6 participants 2021 ¥1,472,305 per person sharing for 4 – 5 participants 2021

**Single supplements:** ¥110,175 2021

**Price includes:**

17 breakfasts and 17 dinners  
Accommodation  
Guiding fees  
All transport while on tour  
Boat trips in Nemuro for two days  
Jigokudani Monkey Park  
Domestic flights: Haneda – Miyazaki, Kagoshima – Haneda, Haneda – Kushiro, Kushiro – Haneda (value about \$1000)

**Price excludes:**

International flights  
Meals not mentioned above  
Drinks  
Laundry  
Porterage  
Personal insurance  
Gratuities  
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts