



JAPAN BIRDING TOUR: SPECTACULAR WINTER BIRDS

21 FEBRUARY – 06 MARCH 2026

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Steller's Sea Eagle is one of the many spectacular highlights of this Japanese winter birding tour.

Japan is an archipelago of 6,852 islands, covering a huge area of 145,937 square miles (377,975 square kilometers) along the 'Pacific Ring of Fire', offering some world class birding. We will visit three of the five main islands (Kyushu, Honshu, and Hokkaido) on this exciting winter birding tour of Japan. This Japanese bird tour will start in Kirishima and end in Tokyo, Japan's high-tech capital and largest city (though which also offers great birding along the edge of Tokyo Bay). Although one of the most populous countries in the world, around 75% of Japan is mountainous, with much of that area uninhabitable, so the population is crammed into multiple mega-cities. Japan has a fascinating cultural history and is unlike anywhere else in the world, and we will get a great sample of this as we travel around on our Japanese birdwatching tour.

This Japanese winter birding tour is designed around the spectacular gatherings of cranes and sea eagles which make Japan their winter home, as well as a range of Japanese endemic birds on offer. The first leg of this Japan bird tour will be around the island of Kyushu, this will be the furthest southwest we venture, and here we will search for the localized **Japanese Murrelet** and the wintering hordes of **Hooded Cranes** and **White-naped Cranes**, with an accompanying cast of other winter visitors, which may include tough world birds like **Black-faced Spoonbill** and **Saunders's Gull**.



White-naped Crane will be enjoyed on our Japan birding tour.

The second leg of this Japanese birding trip will be on and around the island of Honshu, home to Tokyo. We will meander through the forests, hills, and lakes of central Honshu to seek out specials such as **Green Pheasant**, **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Japanese Green Woodpecker**, **Varied Tit**, and perhaps, if we are lucky, the shy and endemic **Copper Pheasant**. We include

visits to lakes to look for **Baikal Teal** and **Mandarin Duck**, and to a valley where endemic **Japanese Macaque** and **Japanese Serow** (a goat-antelope) make their winter home.

The final leg of this bird tour in Japan will be to the winter wonderland of Hokkaido, this will be the furthest northeast we go. Here, in a landscape dominated by dramatic volcanoes, calderas, coastal plains, and rugged peninsulas, species numbers are low, but quality is extremely high! We visit the feeding and roosting grounds of **Red-crowned Cranes**, seeing them at close range where they are easily photographed, perhaps with 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 (BirdLife International) **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 offshore boat trips will allow us to search for an array of exciting wintering seabirds, including sea ducks, loons (divers), grebes, and an assortment of alcids.

We also offer a short three-day extension to this tour which will visit Miyake-Jima (Miyake Island), a volcanic island in the Izu Archipelago, located approximately 110 miles (180 kilometers) southeast of Tokyo. This trip will make use of a ferry crossing, with a morning spent on the island looking for the specials. The purpose of this trip is to look for **Izu Thrush**, **Owston's Tit**, and **Izu Robin** on the island, as well as **Black-footed Albatross**, **Laysan Albatross**, **Short-tailed Albatross**, and **Tristram's Storm Petrel** out at sea.

Please note, depending on availability of services (and other factors beyond our control) we may have to switch the ordering of the three islands/legs of this trip. We will, however, ensure we spend the same number of nights as described below, and target the same species.



Green Pheasant, one of several Japanese endemics we will be looking for on this tour.

Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Kirishima

After your afternoon arrival at Kagoshima Airport on the southern island of Kyushu, you will be met at the airport and transferred to a hotel in the nearby town of Kirishima. Good birding can be had walking along the river just below the hotel, with **Black-tailed** and **Vega Gulls**, **Japanese Bush Warbler**, **Japanese Wagtail**, **Brown-eared Bulbul**, **White-cheeked Starling**, and even the Endangered (BirdLife International) **Black-faced Spoonbill**, all possible. Depending on arrival times, we may have time for birding in the Kagoshima Prefectural Forest where we may be lucky enough to find the rare **Copper Pheasant**. We will then meet for a group welcome dinner in the evening.

Overnight: Kirishima

Days 2 – 3. Kirishima to Izumi (Arasaki)

We will depart from Kirishima and travel north for approximately three hours to the city of Yatsushiro, located in the Kumamoto Prefecture. The coastal areas here will be searched for the globally range-restricted **Saunders's Gull** as well as an assortment of shorebirds and waterbirds. We will then make our way back south to Izumi, our base for the next two nights.



*The striking **Hooded Crane** will be enjoyed in huge numbers around Izumi.*

Izumi is home to the famed Izumi Crane Observation Centre, and this is one of the main reasons for our visit to the area and we will spend some time birding from the observation tower. This part

of Japan is famous worldwide for its winter flock of almost 15,000 cranes! Most of the flock is made up of **Hooded Cranes**, with **White-naped Cranes** being the next most abundant. Annually the flock also occasionally holds low numbers of **Common Crane** and **Sandhill Crane**, or even the exceptionally rare and Critically Endangered (BirdLife International) **Siberian Crane**, so we will carefully scan through the vast flocks to see what may be lurking among the masses!

There is plenty besides the cranes to look out for in the area. Wildfowl here might include **Common Shelduck**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Falcated Duck**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Northern Pintail**, **Common Pochard**, **Tufted Duck**, and **Greater Scaup**. While shorebirds here could include **Northern Lapwing**, **Kentish Plover**, **Long-billed Plover**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Dunlin**, **Common Snipe**, and an assortment of stints and sandpipers. Gulls could include **Black-tailed Gull**, **Vega Gull**, and **Slaty-backed Gull**. Large wading birds might include **Eurasian Spoonbill** and **Black-faced Spoonbill**. Raptors in the area could include **Osprey**, **Hen Harrier**, **Black Kite**, **Eastern Buzzard**, **Common Kestrel**, **Merlin**, and **Peregrine Falcon**.

We often see interesting passerines in the area too, such as **Bull-headed Shrike**, (Eastern) **Rook**, **Daurian Jackdaw**, **Varied Tit**, **Chinese Penduline Tit**, **Eurasian Skylark**, **Zitting Cisticola**, **Asian House Martin**, **Russet Sparrow**, **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Pale Thrush**, **Red-throated Pipit**, **Siberian Pipit**, and several bunting species, including **Yellow-throated Bunting**, **Meadow Bunting**, and **Common Reed Bunting**.



*The endemic **Japanese Green Woodpecker** can be seen around Kogawa Reservoir.*

During the day here we will visit Kogawa Reservoir (Kogawa Dam) just outside of the city. The reservoir is great for waterbirds and the nearby river holds an interesting range of species too. Woodland surrounding the reservoir is mixed and features evergreen broadleaf trees and bamboo. An interesting range of birds are possible on the reservoir here, including **Mandarin Duck**, **Baikal**

Teal, Falcated Duck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck, and Greater Scaup.

Other possibilities in the area could include **White-bellied Green Pigeon, Long-billed Plover, Common Sandpiper, Green Sandpiper, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Goshawk, Common Kingfisher, Crested Kingfisher, Japanese Green Woodpecker, White-backed Woodpecker, Brown Dipper, Ryukyu Minivet, Warbling White-eye, Red-flanked Bluetail, Daurian Redstart, Blue Rock Thrush, Japanese Wagtail, Yellow-throated Bunting,** and the tricky **Grey Bunting**. The unobtrusive and rare **Copper Pheasant** will also be searched for in these woodlands.

Overnight (two nights): Izumi



*The rather spectacular **Falcated Duck** can be found at several sites we will visit while birding in Japan.*

Day 4. Izumi to Hyuga

We will travel from Izumi to Hyuga City, likely birding a couple sites along the way, perhaps searching some beech forests, where with luck, **Copper Pheasant** can occasionally be found.

On arrival in the Hyuga area we have a range of sites to check, depending on what we are still targeting after the previous few days birding, such as Cape Hyuga, Hyuga Port, Kadogawa Harbor, and Tomi Peninsula. One of the main target species in this area is **Japanese Murrelet**. They breed nearby on Birajima Islet during the summer, an Important Bird Area (IBA) (BirdLife International) and can often be observed from the areas we will visit during our time here. Their numbers increase in the late winter and early spring as they return to the area to prepare for the onset of the breeding season.

Other species we will look for in the area include **Chinese Bamboo Partridge**, **Japanese Wood Pigeon**, **Japanese Cormorant**, **Japanese Green Woodpecker**, **Japanese Bush Warbler**, **Ryukyu Minivet**, **Warbling White-eye**, **Red-billed Leiothrix**, and **Daurian Redstart**.

Overnight: Hyuga



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

Day 5. Travel from Hyuga to Miyazaki, flight to Tokyo

We will leave Hyuga and drive back to Miyazaki (perhaps having another look for **Japanese Wood Pigeon**, if still missing), where we will connect with a flight to Tokyo.

On arrival in Tokyo, we will drive to Chiba Prefecture where we will spend the night. Depending on arrival times, we may have time to bird Lake Inbanuma where we may find **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Smew**, **Brown-headed Thrush**, and massive flocks of **Baikal Teal**.

Overnight: Narita

Day 6. Chiba to Karuizawa

This morning we will head out to some great wetland areas close to Narita. Here we can look for species hard to find elsewhere on the tour, including **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Tundra Swan**, and **Brown-headed Thrush**. Lakes in the area often have large flocks of the stunning **Baikal Teal** which are sure to impress, and we might also see **Falcated Duck** and **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**. We will look through the buntings including **Meadow Bunting**, **Common Reed Bunting**, **Rustic Bunting** and **Masked Bunting**, in the hope of finding the tricky **Ochre-rumped Bunting**.

Next, we will head towards the town of Karuizawa in Nagano Prefecture, our base for the next couple of nights. Along the way we will make some stops, including at a regular site for **Mountain Hawk-Eagle**. Nearby, we will drive some hilly, forested roads to look for **Japanese Accentor** and other forest species.

At Karuizawa, over the next couple of days, we will visit the Karuizawa Wild Bird Sanctuary (Karuizawa Yacho no Mori). The sanctuary was established in 1974 and is an area of mixed woodland including beautiful Japanese chestnut and larch trees. The sanctuary is covered by a network of paths that provide great access to this excellent and “birdy” forest. We will enjoy a range of exciting birds here during our birding sessions, and some of the highlights could include **Copper Pheasant**, **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker**, **Great Spotted Woodpecker**, **White-backed Woodpecker**, **Japanese Green Woodpecker**, **Varied Tit**, **Willow Tit**, **Coal Tit**, **Long-tailed Tit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Eurasian Treecreeper**, **Eurasian Wren**, **Brown Dipper**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Dusky Thrush**, **Daurian Redstart**, **Chinese Hwamei**, **Goldcrest**, **Japanese Wagtail**, **Japanese Grosbeak**, **Rustic Bunting**, **Yellow-throated Bunting**, **Brambling**, and **Siberian Long-tailed Rosefinch**.



Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker is rather widespread throughout Japan.

We will keep an eye on recent bird reports for any sightings of the irruptive and tricky-to-target **Japanese Waxwing** and **Bohemian Waxwing** during our time in Karuizawa.

Open farming areas will be birded for the Japanese endemic **Green Pheasant**, which can sometimes show well. Here we will also search for a variety of thrushes, buntings and finches.

Overnight: Karuizawa

Day 7. Karuizawa and snow monkeys

We will visit the famous snow monkeys at Jigokudani Yaen Koen (Monkey Park), here we can 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).

While the focus at the site will be on the amazing spectacle of the monkeys, we should also keep our eyes peeled for a range of birds that might be moving through the area, such as **Golden Eagle**, **Eurasian Jay**, **Varied Tit**, **Willow Tit**, **Goldcrest**, **Brown Dipper**, **Alpine Accentor**, **Japanese Accentor**, and **Eurasian Siskin**. Nearby ponds can hold **Baikal Teal**, **Japanese Wagtail**, and **Long-billed Plover**, so we will check those out as needed. After finishing up with the monkeys and birds around Jigokudani Yaen Koen, we will head back to Karuizawa to look for more of the birds mentioned in Day 6.

Overnight: Karuizawa



*We will enjoy spending time with **Japanese Macaques** as they bathe in the hot springs of Jigokudani.*

Day 8. Karuizawa to Tokyo, flight to Kushiro, Hokkaido, and transfer to Tsurui

We will spend the some of the morning around Karuizawa looking for the birds mentioned above, before heading back to Tokyo. From Tokyo, we will catch our flight to Kushiro on the incredible island of Hokkaido. We will arrive in the evening and head to our hotel for the night.

Overnight: Tsurui

Day 9. Tsurui to Yoroushi

This morning we will visit Tsurui-Ito Tancho Sanctuary, the world famous **Red-crowned Crane** site, and what a spectacular sight they are! Though the cranes will be the main targets here, there are a few other interesting birds to look out for in the local area, such as **Whooper Swan**, **Common Crane**, **Ural Owl** (with luck we might find a roosting bird), **White-tailed Eagle**, **Crested Kingfisher**, **Marsh Tit**, **Willow Tit**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, **Oriental Greenfinch**, (Common) **Redpoll**, **Asian Rosy Finch** and the irruptive and unpredictable **Bohemian Waxwing**. We will also hope to see **Japanese Wagtail**. Today we could also see the magnificent **Steller's Sea Eagle** for the first time on the tour, certain to be a tour highlight.



Red-crowned Crane, one of the most elegant birds to be enjoyed while birding in Hokkaido, surely one of the most graceful birds in the world too?

As we travel north from Tsurui towards the Yoroushi area (our base for the next couple of nights), we will pass by Lake Kussharo and Lake Mashū and we will look out along the way for the ginormous duo of both **Steller's Sea Eagle** and **White-tailed Eagle**. Here, we will likely enjoy good looks at **Whooper Swans** on the lake and bird the woodlands for **Black Woodpecker** and an assortment of finches.

In the evening, we will try to find another one of our big tour targets, the huge and Endangered (BirdLife International) **Blakiston's Fish Owl**. They inhabit mature boreal forest close to rivers and streams within which they forage, mainly on fish, occasionally in the ponds outside our lodging (but it can be a very long nocturnal wait). There is also often a **Solitary Snipe** in the area too.

Overnight: Yoroushi

Day 10. Yoroushi / Rausu (Shiretoko Peninsula)

We have a full day birding the fascinating Shiretoko Peninsula and nearby area, and it promises to be an exciting experience. We will take a boat cruise for a couple of hours along the picturesque Rausu Coast and within the Nemuro Strait (it is really magnificent scenery). During the winter, drift ice is usually present, this ice brings with it plankton which in turn attracts fish, which further attracts a range of amazing birds (and whales later in the year). During the winter, the area becomes the best place in the world for observing the magnificent **Steller's Sea Eagle**, one of the main targets of the day.

This trip could well be one of the tour highlights (and that is quite something, given what we will have already experienced!). Along with excellent looks at the sea eagles, we could find other exciting species like **White-tailed Eagle**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Common Goldeneye**, **Common Murre** (Common Guillemot), **Spectacled Guillemot**, **Black-tailed Gull**, **Slaty-backed Gull**, **Glaucous Gull**, **Glaucous-winged Gull**, **Common** (Kamchatka) **Gull**, **Red-throated Loon** (Red-throated Diver), **Black-throated Loon** (Black-throated Diver), **Pacific Loon** (Pacific Diver), **Pelagic Cormorant**, and **Japanese Cormorant**.



Blakiston's Fish Owl is one of the special targets on this tour.

We will also spend time birding from land, and will visit the excellent Notsuke Peninsula, where we will call in to the Notsuke Peninsula Nature Center. Here we are likely to see several species already enjoyed during the morning or earlier in the tour, but others may include (Black) **Brant Goose**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Stejneger's Scoter**, **Black Scoter**, **Smew**, several alcids, gulls, loons (divers), and cormorants, **Steller's Sea Eagle**, **Asian Rosy Finch**, and **Snow Bunting**. If conditions are right, we could get sightings of migrating alcids from land, with **Common Murre**

(Common Guillemot), **Thick-billed Murre** (Brünnich's Guillemot), **Spectacled Guillemot**, **Pigeon Guillemot**, **Least Auklet**, and **Crested Auklet** all possible.

In the evening we will again try for **Blakiston's Fish Owl** at our accommodation, where we hope again to get good views of this mega bird.

Overnight: Yoroushi



*The list of spectacular birds in Japan is long and **Steller's Sea Eagle** is normally right at the top of this list.*

Days 11 – 12. Yoroushi to Nemuro

On one of the mornings (weather dependent) we will head to Nemuro on the scenically spectacular Nemuro Peninsula jutting out into the Okhotsk Sea, another excellent birding area. If weather conditions allow, we will take an exciting boat trip from Habomai Harbor, where we may again see a range of most-wanted sea ducks, grebes, loons (divers), gulls, and alcids. Possibilities in the harbor and on the boat trip include **Harlequin Duck**, **Stejneger's Scoter**, **Black Scoter**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Red-breasted Merganser**, **Red-necked Grebe**, **Pigeon Guillemot**, **Spectacled Guillemot**, **Least Auklet**, **Crested Auklet**, **Slaty-backed Gull**, **Glaucous-winged Gull**, **Pacific Loon** (Pacific Diver), **Red-faced Cormorant**, and **Pelagic Cormorant**.

Over these two days we will also spend time birding on land around the Nemuro Peninsula looking for a range of birds, including the rare **Rock Sandpiper**, **Common (Kamchatka) Gull**, **Red-faced Cormorant**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Steller's Sea Eagle**, **Rough-legged Buzzard**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), and the elusive **Asian Rosy Finch**. Additional sites that we will

likely check during the day (and potentially the following morning) include Lake Furen, Nemuro Harbor, and the Shunkunitai Wild Bird Sanctuary, it is another great birding area.

Overnight: Nemuro



*Gulls abound in Japan, such as this **Saunders's Gull**.*

Day 13. Nemuro to Kushiro and flight to Tokyo

We will have some additional time in the Nemuro area before gradually make our way back to Kushiro and catching our flight back to Tokyo.

Overnight: Tokyo

Day 14. Departure from Tokyo

We don't have any birding scheduled this morning and you can catch your international flights from Tokyo, with the Tokyo's Haneda International Airport being the closest airport to our hotel.

If you are joining our short, three-day Miyake-Jima trip to look for pelagic birds and the Miyake-Jima specials, you can spend the day at your leisure. You could perhaps go birding at some of Tokyo's many fantastic birding sites, such as Ueno Park, Kasai Rinkai Park, Tokyo Port Wild Bird Park/Oi Bird Park, Funabashi Seaside Park, take in some of Tokyo's many cultural highlights, (Meiji Jingu Shrine) and shrines, or perhaps just enjoy spending the day in this fast-paced and modern mega city.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually only 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. In addition, we sometimes must use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling and other factors.

Duration:	14 days / 13 nights
Group Size:	6 - 10
Dates:	21 February - 06 March 2026 21 February - 06 March 2027
Start:	Kagoshima Airport
End:	Tokyo
Prices:	US\$TBC per person sharing – based on 6 - 10 participants (2026) which includes the domestic flights occurring within the tour US\$TBC per person sharing – based on 6 - 10 participants (2027) which includes the domestic flights occurring within the tour
Single Supplements:	US\$TBC (2026) US\$TBC (2027)

In the event of fewer than six participants signing up to the tour there will be the option of a surcharge to guarantee departure. The amount of the surcharge will depend on how many participants are signed up to the tour and will occur if all participants agree.

Price includes:

All accommodation (Day 1 until Day 13 as described above, or similar)
Domestic flights during tour (Miyazaki to Tokyo, Tokyo to Kushiro, and Kushiro to Tokyo)
Meals (from dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 14)
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader
Local bird and wildlife guide fees
Birdwatching site entrance fees (including all national park fees) and travel permits
Boat trips as referred to in itinerary

Price excludes:

International flights to Kagoshima (Kyushu) and from Tokyo (Honshu). See important note on flights below
Airport transfers at beginning and end of tour
Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)
Visa fees if visa required
Departure tax
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls etc.

Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Customary gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))

International flights note:

Please be aware that the exact tour route will not be known until the tour is a guaranteed departure, therefore we ask that you do not purchase your international flight tickets until we have confirmed the final route with you. It is possible that the tour might start at a different location from that advertised above, depending on a range of circumstances beyond our control. Once we have confirmed the route, we will advise you so you can purchase your flight tickets.