



JAPAN BIRDING TOUR: SPECTACULAR WINTER BIRDS

18 FEBRUARY–02 MARCH 2028

18 FEBRUARY–03 MARCH 2029



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

Overview

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, which also offers great birding along the edge of Tokyo Bay. Although Japan is one of the most populous countries in the world, around 75% of its land areas 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. We will experience some of this fascinating culture as we travel throughout Japan 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 large wintering flocks of **Hooded Cranes** and **White-naped Cranes**, along with a variety 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 our northeasternmost destination. Here, in a landscape dominated by dramatic volcanoes, calderas, coastal plains, and rugged peninsulas, species numbers are lower than in other areas in the country, but the 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, possibly with a **White-tailed Eagle** overhead. We will see flocks of wintering **Whooper Swans** and other waterfowl, look for **Crested Kingfishers**, seek out winter roosts of **Ural Owls**, and visit a feeding site for 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 seawatching and offshore boat trips (weather permitting) will allow us to search for an array of exciting wintering seabirds, including sea ducks, loons (divers), grebes, and an assortment of alcids.

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.*

Detailed Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Kirishima (Kyushu)

After arriving at Kagoshima Airport on the southern island of Kyushu, you will self-transfer the short distance to a hotel in the nearby town of Kirishima. Excellent 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 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. This is a major highlight of our visit, 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!

Beyond the cranes, the area offers excellent birding and a variety of waterfowl, including **Common Shelduck**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Falcated Duck**, **Eurasian Wigeon**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, **Northern Pintail**, **Common Pochard**, **Tufted Duck**, and **Greater Scaup**. Shorebirds 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 may 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 elusive **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 Kagoshima; flight to Tokyo (Honshu)

We will travel from Izumi back to Kagoshima, with stops at a couple of birding sites along the way, perhaps searching some beech forests where, with luck, **Copper Pheasant** can occasionally be found. We may also have additional time to bird around Izumi and enjoy one final look at the spectacular cranes.

We will take an afternoon flight between Kagoshima and Tokyo, spending the night in Tokyo.

Overnight: Tokyo



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

Day 5. Tokyo to Karuizawa

We will depart Tokyo in the morning and head to some great wetland areas close to the city. Here we can look for species that are hard to find elsewhere on the tour, including **Eastern Marsh Harrier**, **Tundra Swan**, and **Brown-headed Thrush**. Lakes in the area often have 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 along hilly, forested roads in search of **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. Our birding sessions here may produce a variety of exciting species, 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 Waxwing is an irruptive species and we will hope to find them during the tour.

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

Overnight: Karuizawa

Day 6. Karuizawa and snow monkeys

We will spend the early morning birding around Karuizawa and in the afternoon we can visit the famous snow monkeys (**Japanese Macaques**) at Jigokudani Yaen Koen (Monkey Park). At the park, we can watch the endemic monkeys frolic in the snow and soak in the hot springs. We will also be looking out for **Japanese Serow** (a goat-antelope). While the focus at the site will be on the interesting spectacle of the monkeys, we should also watch for a variety of bird species 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**.

Overnight: Karuizawa

Day 7. Karuizawa to Tokyo

We will spend time during the morning around Karuizawa looking for the birds mentioned above, before heading back to Tokyo, where we will arrive in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Tokyo



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

Day 8. Fly Tokyo to Kushiro (Hokkaido); travel to Nemuro

We will take a morning flight between Tokyo and Kushiro. From Kushiro, we will drive east to the town of Nemuro, where we will make a start on the birds listed for Day 9.

Overnight: Nemuro

Day 9. Birding Nemuro

We will spend the full day (and the previous afternoon) birding around the Nemuro Peninsula searching for a variety of birds, including the rare **Rock Sandpiper**, **Common (Kamchatka) Gull**, **Red-faced Cormorant**, **White-tailed Eagle**, **Steller's Sea Eagle**, **Rough-legged Buzzard**, **Ural Owl**, **Short-eared Owl**, **Lapland Longspur** (Lapland Bunting), and the elusive **Asian Rosy Finch**.

If weather conditions allow, we will take an exciting boat trip from Habomai Harbor, where we may encounter a variety of sought-after 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**.

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.

Overnight: Nemuro

Day 10. Nemuro to Rausu via Shiretoko Peninsula

We will spend a full day birding as we travel from Nemuro to Rausu and we will go via 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 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.

Our journey north follows the coastline, with stops at several harbors and bays along the way, as we continue to search for a wide range of ducks, alcids, gulls, and more.

Overnight: Rausu



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

Day 11. Rausu Boat Trip and travel to Yoroushi

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. The ice brings with it plankton, which attracts fish and, in turn, a variety of spectacular 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 boat trip could well be one of the tour's major 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**.

In the afternoon we will check in to our very comfortable and traditional onsen accommodation. In the evening, after enjoying a fantastic meal, 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). **Solitary Snipe** is also found in the area.

Overnight: Yoroushi



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

Day 12. Yoroushi

We will spend the day birding around Yoroushi. We will have some time to enjoy the feeders at the accommodation, where we will hope for good views of some woodland birds. Depending on how tired we might be after the fish owl vigil, we might be able to venture further afield, to sites at [Lake Kussharo](#) and [Lake Mashū](#), where in addition to the incredible landscapes, we might again see 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. We may even pick up a **Red-crowned Crane** while driving around.

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

Day 13. Yoroushi to Kushiro via Tsurui; fly to Tokyo (Honshu)

After breakfast, we will reluctantly depart our accommodation and visit Tsurui-Ito Tanchō Sanctuary, the world-famous **Red-crowned Crane** site. The cranes are a spectacular sight! 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 make our way back to Kushiro, where we will catch our flight back to Tokyo for the final night of the tour.

Overnight: Tokyo



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?

Day 14. Departure from Tokyo

We do not have any birding scheduled this morning, and you can catch your international flight from Tokyo, with the Haneda International Airport being the closest airport to our hotel. The final meal of the tour will be breakfast, and hotel check-out time will be mid-morning.

If you would like to extend your stay in Tokyo before departure, 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), and Funabashi Seaside Park. You could also visit cultural highlights such as Meiji Jingu Shrine or simply enjoy a day exploring this vibrant, modern city.

Overnight: Not included



*The attractive **Varied Tit** is sure to be a popular sight during our Japanese birding tour.*

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.

Tour Details

Duration:	14 days / 13 nights
Group size:	6–10
Dates:	18 February–02 March 2028 18 February–03 March 2029
Start:	Kirishima
End:	Tokyo
Prices:	US\$ 9,890 per person sharing – based on 6–10 participants (2028) which includes the domestic flights occurring within the tour US\$ 10,750 per person sharing – based on 6–10 participants (2029) which includes the domestic flights occurring within the tour
Single supplements:	US\$ 780 (2028) US\$ 860 (2029)

The costs of this trip are tied to the Japanese Yen, and in the unlikely chance that the US\$/Yen exchange rate changes more than we expect, there is a chance there will be a price adjustment.

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 (Kagoshima to Tokyo, Tokyo to Kushiro, and Kushiro to Tokyo)
Meals (from dinner on Day 1 until breakfast on Day 14)
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 a visa is 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
Drinking water – tap water is safe to drink in Japan, please bring a refillable water bottle
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 confirmed as a guaranteed departure. We therefore 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.