

Birding Japan in two weeks
November-December 2016
(Including a few observations from an Aug/Sep trip in 2016)



Blakiston's Fish Owl, Hokkaido

This report summarises a trip to Japan conducted in Nov/Dec 2016. For anyone's interest, I have added some sightings from a shorter trip in Aug/September, including birds only seen on that trip.

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The itinerary		
Date	Activity	Night
28-Nov	Tokyo-Kagoshima (evening flight), rental pick-up in Kagoshima airport, drive to Izumi.	Hotel Wing International
29-Nov	Kogawa Dam (morning), Arasaki (midday/afternoon). drive to Lake Miike area	Gokuraku Onsen
30-Nov	Lake Miike (morning), Aya Gorge (midday/afternoon), drive to Hyuga.	Guest House Pumping Surf
1-Dec	Hyuga harbour (morning), drive to Miyazaki Airport (birding en-route). Flight to Kushiro, via Tokyo. Rental pick-up Kushiro airport, drive to Furen lodge.	Furen Lodge
2-Dec	Lake Furen and small forest near the lodge (morning), rest of the day drive in area between Furen Lodge, Lake Onneto and road 142.	Furen Lodge
3-Dec	Nossaoppu (morning) and Kiritappu (afternoon).	Furen Lodge
4-Dec	Morning sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour. Drive to Rausa via Notsuka peninsula (afternoon)	Washinoyado
5-Dec	Notsuka peninsula (morning), drive to Kushiro airport via Tsurui and Akan. Flight to Tokyo	Hotel Mystays Haneda
6-Dec	Flight to Amami Oshima (12:15PM). Rental pick-up in the airport. Amami Natural Forest (afternoon) and Kinsakubaru (evening).	Amami Port Tower
7-Dec	Kinsakubaru (morning) and Mount Yuwan (afternoon and evening).	Amami Port Tower
8-Dec	Amami Natural Forest (morning). Flight (12PM) to Okinawa (arrival 5PM) via Osaka. Drive to hotel after dark	Ayano Sou
9-Dec	Kunigami area from highway 2 and north. Evening birding around the hotel	Ayano Sou
10-Dec	As above and Aha dam	Ayano Sou
11-Dec	Kin wetland, Manko wetland and triangle pool morning. Flight to Tokyo	Hotel Sunroute Ginza
12-Dec	Waters around imperial castle (morning). Flight to Copenhagen.	



Hooded Crane, Arasaki

Timing of the trips

The timing for both trips was fixed as it was in connection with two (non-birding) business trips to Tokyo. The summer trip covered Tokyo city, Kyoto city and Miyakejima (one of the Izu islands). Late summer is not very productive for those sites visited, but the trip also served as general introduction to the Japanese birds and a few endemics were picked up.

The Nov/Dec trip was more rewarding though birds were generally few in numbers (except cranes and the usual suspects) and being without guide and a first-timer to all sites visited, I had to work hard to find the desired birds. These were the endemics plus Stellars sea eagle, Blakistons fish owl and the 3 species of cranes). The last five can easily been seen already in Nov/Dec though Stellars Sea Eagle were relatively few in numbers.



White-naped Crane, Arasaki

The August-September trip (itinerary not included in this report)

Beside the endemics of Miyakejima, the most remarkably sightings were Japanese Green Pheasant just outside Tokyo and Japanese Wagtail and Japanese Grosbeak at the Kyoto Imperial Palace park. On Miyakejima, Izu Thrush, Japanese Robin and Winter Wren (dark form) were all seen around the information centre at Lake Tairo, while Japanese Woodpigeon was seen flying (never perched) over the paths leading down to the lake and flying over road 212 before and after the lake. Here Owston's Tit was also seen twice perched on the wires. 3-4 Ijima's Warblers were still to be found, while Pleske's Warblers seem to have left.

The November-December trip

This was a fully independently arranged trip and as you can imagine it was rather squeezed. One reason for writing this report is to present an itinerary for those having only around 2 weeks to cover Japan. At times the trip was a bit hectic, involving 8 domestic flights and 4 car rental periods over the 14 days. Often I had late arrivals in airports so driving after dark in unknown territory was an accepted part of this trip.

Looking back on the trip, I could have shortened my stay in Hokkaido by one day and that day should then be added to the Kyushu area. Also Okinawa could have been shortened one day (especially if a guide is used), but during winter birds are very difficult to get your eyes on there, so I

was busy throughout the stay. I prioritised to look for Japanese Murrelet in and around Hyuga harbour. This could also be reconsidered when re-thinking the trip, as it almost certainly requires a night spent in the area and given the season (and the general rarity of the bird) it was really not worth it (of course everything had been different if a lonely bird was swimming around in the harbour). Instead more time should have been spent at the beautiful Kogawa Dam, the peaceful Miike Lake and a morning at Arasaki.

Major dips on the trip were Mandarin Duck and Amami Thrush. The thrush, being notoriously difficult any time of year, is extremely hard to see or hear in December. I spent two half days in superb habitat without success. Dipping on Mandarin Duck was most likely the story of "Don't worry, I will see it later", and then suddenly you're running out of chances. It is certainly not a commonly seen duck, but I was later told that a large group of Mandarin Ducks were present somewhere on the Kogawa Dam one week before my visit. Generally my Kyushu visit was extremely squeezed and I simply did not have time to scan all flocks of ducks. After realising that the first 3 flocks were more or less the same 3-4 species of ducks, I focused on the woods and the buntings. Also the physical dimension of the dam requires a lot of time to scan every little area.

Getting around in Japan

Flying in Japan is a true pleasure. Planes are very punctual, much cheaper than the train and then airports are very widespread throughout Japan. This means that you don't need to return to the same airport for car delivery despite driving just short distances (e.g. there is less than 100km between Kagoshima airport and Miyazaki airport in Kyushu and almost all airports have several daily flights to Tokyo).

The eight domestic flights were booked in advance around mid-October. Both Japanese Airlines (JAL) and All Nippon Airways (ANA) offer flight passes where each flight costs only around 100 US\$ (up to 5 flights per company) and all their domestic flights seem to depart from Haneda Airport (much more convenient than Narita Airport from where many of the low-price companies fly from). ANA was a bit less informative about their passes but I managed to book all flights at the desired date and time. It seems like you can choose from almost all their flights. An annoying learning was that the direct flight between Amami Oshima and Okinawa (saving 4 hours) is done by a JAL sub-contractor, so these flights are not available via the pass. I decided to fly from Amami to Osaka (closer than Tokyo) and then from Osaka to Okinawa, total of 5 hours. Be aware that there are two different airports in Osaka. This counted as 2 trips (=200 US\$) and the direct Amami-Okinawa (less than an hour) would have cost me around 250US\$. Had I known this (also given the shorter day light period), I have done so. Another issue with this direct flight is that it does not appear on any search machines (at least to my knowledge) or the internet and other reports do not really disclose this.

Combined with the smooth airway connections, renting a car make travelling around Japan very easy. I had 4 different car rental periods. It is without discussion a necessity to have a car.

I used Toyota Rent-a-Car for all 4 bookings. They have a very strange booking system, with no internet booking and no emails. Despite this, they were very reliable, competitive in price and delivered good and almost new cars. Lastly, most importantly (for a compressed trip like this) and the reason why I chose them at all, is the fact that they are open significantly longer than other companies. This trip could not have been done with other companies, since I landed sometimes at 8pm. Most other companies close at 6.30 or 7pm, where Toyota Rent-a-car closes at 9pm many places.

All bookings were made over phone, they have a phone number for English speaking customers and it worked fine. You then receive a reservation number (during the phone conversation, not on mail) and this is enough. When you arrive at the airport, you go to their booth and everything is handled from there. One issue though – guess it is the same for all companies – very little English is spoken

on site. I had serious issues explaining that I had to type in my pin number when using my credit card (their first step was to say or show that it did not work and if I had another card). It seems like typing a pin is highly uncommon in Japan. Also, explaining the GPS to me led to some frustrating situations the first time. Good thing is that all 4 cars were identical and the GPS systems were the same.



Daurian Redstart, Arasaki

Short-eared Owl, Kiritappu

Spectacled Guillemot, Ochiishi Sea Cruise

The GPS system is said to be combined Japanese/English. It is mostly Japanese and if you don't write or understand Japanese, you cannot navigate the GPS as you would normally do, as addresses and cities can only be typed in Japanese. What they usually do, is that they use the phone number for the hotel/place etc. I preferred to have a local person checking that the place was actually correct, but in most, if not nearly all, cases it worked. Once I ended up 12 km away from the place, in complete darkness with no one speaking English. That did create a stressful situation, but here I experienced what others also talk about. Japanese people are extremely helpful and despite serious language barriers, things are resolved. An alternative option – especially for places more than hotels – is to use the map on the GPS, zoom in on your desired location, touch the screen, and then use the "Set a destination" function (or similarly). If you stay in remote places, I would recommend to have a detailed google map printed from home and then zoom in on the GPS and have that (at least) as a back-up to the phone number option. I never got the GPS coordinates to work. Those given by Google maps have a format that cannot be entered in the GPS in the cars. Generally about driving in Japan:

- Toll roads are expensive, but much faster. I only used toll roads in Kyushu and on Okinawa.
- The speed limits in Japan are very conservative (to put it mildly). I must admit that I often had to cross double yellow lines on the road for passing cars driving the allowed 50 km/h on a straight road where you could see 1 km ahead. Luckily, you don't see too many cars when driving early mornings in remote areas.
- Driving and steering wheel is in the left side.
- None of the visited places required a 4WD.
- Credit cards can be used at all gas station (that I visited).

Sites visited

Kyushu

I drove in completely darkness from Kagoshima airport to Izumi. Except a turning road with two Sika deer's (mother and offspring) standing in the side of the road, it was without troubles. I decided

to spend the midday next day at Arasaki (less time dependent birds), so the next morning I drove the short distance to Kogawa Dam before sunrise. I used the road just opposite the gas station to get to the dam and at the small creek after a few 100 meters, two Dippers were seen in the first sun light. First bird to see at the dam was a Crested Kingfisher, so the morning started off well. Meadow and Black-faced Buntings (ssp. *personata*) were fairly common. The dam area is simply stunning. I had it all for myself and the road all around the dam was drivable.

In Arasaki the time was dedicated mostly to the areas with 100s of cranes (maybe 10 Hooded Cranes for each White-naped, but plenty of each). I am sure that more different species can be picked up with some more scanning and also going there one morning instead of midday. I saw a Japanese Weasel near a small waterhole and in my attempt to sneak in on the animal, a Ruddy-breasted Crake was flushed up.

Hereafter I drove more or less straight to my hotel near Lake Miike. I passed Kogawa Dam again and considered to re-visit it, but I drove on. I had to prioritise finding an ATM accepting international cards as remote hotels or restaurants rarely accept credit cards. As stated elsewhere in report, bring plenty of cash from Tokyo before your arrival. It is not well spent time searching for such thing. I arrived well after dark, but the GPS took me straight to this very dark and remote area. Next morning I went to Lake Miike before sunrise. I ended up with a local guy (someone that the people at the hotel have found to me as I had written to them that I was interested in any help to locate a Copper Pheasant) and a non-birding elderly woman from the hotel (who was curious about such pre-dawn activity). So the morning was spent in this unusual constellation at the camping area at Lake Miike. None of them spoke a word English and it was just one of these funny situations that occurs in Japan. People are very friendly, curious and helpful, despite not being able to communicate. Unfortunately this local guy was not really an expert in finding any special birds (and of course not the pheasant, which he claimed was not around at all until spring), so I had to do the work myself. Ryukyu Minivet, another Crested Kingfisher and 3 Japanese Green Woodpeckers were the highlights. I didn't even try to look for Copper Pheasant. Had I been alone, I have most certainly walked the trails around the lake, but I don't know if that had been more productive than hanging around the camping area. Here I also enjoyed a light lunch when the manager of the camping/information area came with hot sweet potatoes.

After Lake Miike, I drove north and continued right along Aya Gorge. The distance from the lake to the gorge is fairly short; however, allow plenty of time to drive from the start of the gorge to Aya town. Main purpose was to accidentally bump into a Copper Pheasant, but of course I didn't. Instead I was lucky to see plenty of Elegant Buntings and on the mammal list I added Raccoon Dog (somehow diseased with naked spots on the body) and Japanese Badger. Next morning I tried for Japanese Murrelet in and around Hyuga harbour, without luck. I drove slowly south to Miyazaki Airport, but no birds of particular interest was seen (most exciting bird was the only Reef Heron of the trip). I flew to Tokyo Haneda and further on to Kushiro.

Hokkaido:

Again I drove in complete darkness, now from Kushiro Airport to Furen Lodge (around 2½ hours). Plenty of good reports are available on the internet to cover the most important sites in Eastern Hokkaido. Distances from Furen Lodge to the main sites are short. Basically you look for very few different birds, and few birds are what you will find. Except ducks, swans, geese and eagles. It was simply fantastic to have so many different ducks in their most beautiful plumage. Gadwalls, Greater Scaups, Wigeons, Harlequins, Scoters (only one Stejnegeri was seen, but plenty of Blacks), Long-tailed (I always forget how beautiful this bird is), Goldeneyes and Goosanders almost everywhere, especially from Nemuro harbour and north up to Cape Nosappu.

Then there is the Red-faced Cormorant. I was instructed by Takeyoshi Matsuo from Furen Lodge to look for it at particular rocks near the lighthouse at Cape Nosappu. It was not there – there were

not even Pelagic Cormorants at those rocks, so I started to look for all cormorants, checking for a paler beak. Apparently this is the safest way to distinguish it from the very common Pelagic Cormorant as the red colour around the eyes is not decisive. After 45 minutes I found the bird on the north side of the Cape (see bird list for details) and looking at the picture below I see many more differences that just the beak.



Red-faced Cormorant (left) with 3 Pelagic Cormorants

Another uncommon target bird is the Blakiston's Fish Owl. The “show” at Washinoyado is worth the drive, but the night before I stayed there, the owls didn't show up until early morning. However the evening I was there, the cameras were busy and it came 4-5 times before I went to bed. An alternative to this place is to find out where it hangs out nearer Furen Lodge. A bird guide took his client (but not me of course) to a place not far from Furen Lodge (10-15 km west) where they saw 2 owls. Whether they are regular at that spot (I have no idea of the precise location) is unknown to me, but it could be worth investigating other sites than Washinoyado. Or maybe such info should just remain among bird guides so they have their business. Other locations visited on Hokkaido were:

- Lake Furen
 - 4-5 Snow Buntings seen near the lodge
- Kiritappu
 - Short-eared Owl on the beach before the bridge at 43.05193, 145,06486
 - A fairly large flock what most likely were Asian Rosy Finches
 - Eastern and Rough-legged Buzzard flying over the outskirts of the village
- Small forest near Furen Lodge (43.271636, 145.484769) where I looked for White-backed Woodpecker (without luck, but it should be there)
- Bridge at 43.209409, 145.495978 where I saw my first Steller's Sea Eagle (4 birds together with one white-tailed sea-eagle, that almost looked like a kite in comparison)
- Driving along road 42 between road 953 and Ochiishi
 - Hazel grouse that froze completely in the middle of the road when it saw my driving

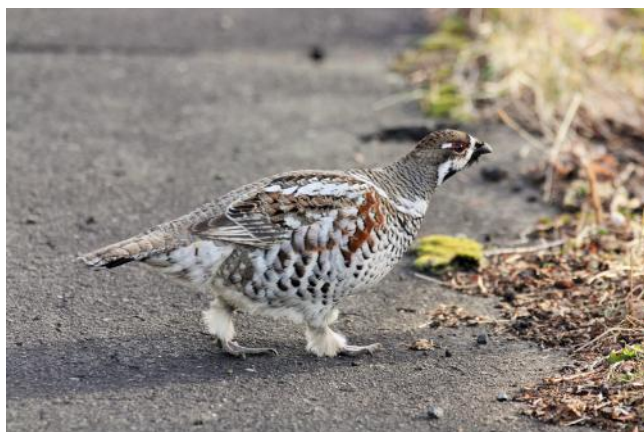
car. It later walked very slowly to the side and disappeared.

- Ochiishi harbour and sea cruise from there
 - The sea cruise was a bit disappointing, but it is a difficult season with birds more plain looking than in spring/summer. Only lifer was Spectacled Guillemot, since Ancient Murrelet was seen from Cape Nosappu.
 - According to Takeyoshi Matsuo, the Habomai Cruise can be a bit more rewarding (going out from another place more north) but that cruise was not going that morning since the captain (apparently) had an accident. Also, none of the cruises go out in bad weather and even if the weather seems fine on land, the sea might still be rough.

Notsuke Peninsula is best visited on the way to or from Washinoyado (if going there). It is a fairly long drive from Furen Lodge and when visited there were surprisingly few birds. My main target was Asian Rosy Finch (a bird I had expected to find easily, but it proved to be very difficult). When visiting the peninsula in the afternoon on my way to Washinoyado, I spent around an hour driving forth and back the outer part of the peninsula (with stops where I left the car for more thorough searches) and I did not see any rosy finch at all. Next morning on my way to Kushiro Airport I got my eyes on a small flock of Rosy Finches, but only after another 90 minutes search. Good thing is that Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles were rather common sitting on the electricity poles and the large stones towards the sea.

In Washinoyado, the main attraction is the owl, I came late and left early so did not look for other birds. A Rough-legged Buzzard flew low over the road in the outskirts of Rausa when I arrived.

Tsurui and Akan were areas visited a bit in a rush. I saw 10-15 Red-crowned Cranes near Tsurui and then I focused more on getting to the airport.



Hazel Grouse, Hokkaido



Steller's Sea Eagle, Hokkaido

Amami-Oshima:

Coming from the harsh weather of the Hokkaido winter it is a true pleasure to fly over the forest covered subtropical island of Amami-Oshima. Actually I was happily surprised to see *how* covered it was with forest. Having only an hour of light left after arrival I decided to visit the Amami Natural Forest which is almost on the route from the airport to the hotel in Naze. One advice it not to follow the GPS to the forest as it takes the shortest route. This turned out to be completely blocked by the type of road work that seemed not to be finalised shortly. Just follow the signs saying Amami Natural Forest. Beside a Ryukyu Robin, I saw no new birds and I started to worry if these few target birds would be difficult. I heard Lidth's Jays but it was getting dark and they didn't show. I decided to return to this forest the last morning before my departure.

Many things are written about orientation on the island and finding the right roads. I found this to be

very straightforward and I only drove on perfectly paved roads and I was back in Naze by 10pm the latest both evenings/nights. Below is a description of the two sites visited.

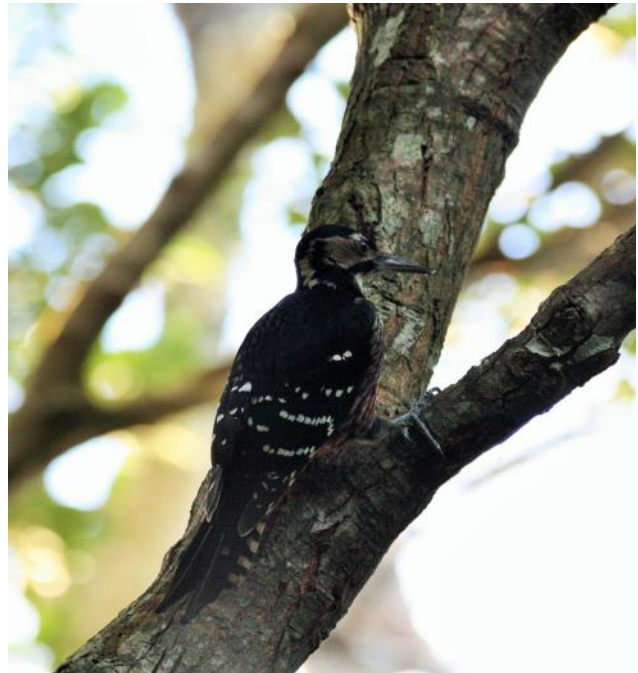
Kinsakubaru Virgen Forest

After check-in at the hotel, I drove straight up to the Kinsakubaru Forest Trail on my first day. I used the left turn at 28.378797, 129.448656 where a sign clearly says 'Kinsakubaru Virgen Forest'. I followed this road to a T-cross where I drove right. After a bit more than 1 km, it seems clear that there is a parking area and I did not drive beyond that. Here the map of the GPS is very useful. As a continuation of the afternoon visit at the Amami Natural Forest, I saw no birds at all. No owls seemed to call and no signs of the woodcock (not sure how easy it is here compared to Mount Yuwan). Same goes for black rabbit, not a single sign of that animal as well. However, it is a fantastic and a bit spooky experience to walk these tracks in complete darkness only with the light from a strong torch. I returned (maybe too early for the rabbit and the woodcock) at around 8.30pm and had great food in Naze.

Next morning, at sunrise, I returned to the exact same spot as the night before. Ryukyu Robins were around, but not posing as described in other reports (again the timing of the year might be of importance). I got my eyes on my first Lidth's Jays, a noisy group of 3-4 birds. A Ryukyu Green Pigeon flew over (never saw any of the two species of Green Pigeons perched). Instead I was lucky to have a Black Woodpigeon perched fairly close for a long time (meaning more than 2 seconds). Despite intense searches in what seems to be perfect habitat I did not even hear one single call from the Amami Thrush. I gave up on the thrush, returned to the main road and had a quick lunch and continued straight to Mount Yuwan.



Black Woodpigeon, Kinsakubaru Virgen Forest



Owston's Woodpecker, Amami Natural Forest

Mount Yuwan

The road to the top of the mountain is also easy to follow. Taking the left turn at 28.364618, 129.343138 will take you to the parking lot at the top of the mountain if you follow the Mount Yuwan signs. The Amami Forest Police Station is a good indication that you are on the right way. My target birds were Ryukyu Scops Owl and Amami Woodcock and then to see the Black Rabbit. While waiting for the required sunset, I looked (again) very dedicated for Zoothera habitat but I could not locate one single Amami Thrush nor a call. Naturally few birds were singing and I saw very few birds. Lidth's Jay seemed to be the easiest of the endemic to see (even the Robins were almost absent). I prepared for the evening and drove up at the top of the mountain (where there is a parking

lot). Enjoying the solitude and the great view and fresh air, I waited until just after sunset and then drove slowly down the mountain with all windows down. At the upper part I had 2 Black Rabbits slowly jumping around in front of me and 1 Amami Woodcock (it took off immediately). Further down I briefly saw two more Woodcocks. Around 3 km from the main road, I stopped for a call I remembered from the App 'Aves Vox'. I quickly got my bins on a perfectly perched Ryukyu Scops Owl. After a long day I happily returned for another great dinner in Naze.

Next morning, at my return to Amami Natural Forest (the sunrise is beautiful from the tower), the birding was more rewarding with a group of noisy Lidth's Jays and the target bird Ownston's Woodpecker just 20 feet away pecking for a minute before it took off. This was near the information office. Also a Ryukyu Green Pigeon flew over. Last memorable bird to be seen on Amami-Oshima was a Chinese Pond Heron flying over the road just before the airport (at a place with some wild vegetation possible with water/swamp to the left of the road).

Okinawa:

Before I got out of Naha airport in my car, it was already dark and I had a fairly long drive with a destination that turned out to be very difficult to find. If you choose to stay at Ayano Sou, then get acquainted with the exact position on Google Maps. The phone number posted on Booking.com led me 12 km's in the wrong direction. The village is called Genka and it is simply to turn right at route 14 after Nago, keep right when the road bends and turn right just after the river. I never saw the place during the day (not even at dawn or dusk), but I can recommend it being very affordable, beautifully placed with forest around and still close to the northern part of the island. If you are a single person travelling, make sure you pay the one-person price (around 25\$ per night). It seems like Booking.com charges a double room price, but this is negotiable on site (only cash). The place is not really a hotel with a nice reception etc and another report states that the owner was not present when they arrived. They recommended to arrive early. Still I can recommend it.

Besides the drive back to the airport the last day (where visiting Kin Wetlands, Manko wetlands and the triangle pool just south of the airport), I spent all time in the very northern part of Okinawa.

The two target birds turned out to be extremely difficult to see. Okinawa rails are certainly around. The first morning along route 2 by the side road at 26.760960, 128.257170, I heard minimum 4 different birds what appeared to be less than 10 meters away. Unlike summers where they come out on the road to feed on insects they now behaved like rails (since these insects are not there in winters). Didn't get to see a glimpse of one bird and crazy thoughts of just walk in to scare them off crossed my mind, but I behaved.

Later the same day, along route 70 just 3-4 km north from the exit to the small village of Ibu, I met a local biologist. He was counting rails crossing the road at a certain 'popular' place and I was not surprised to learn that he had not seen a rail in more than 3 weeks at that place. He informed me about what he considered the best place to see rails in winter. Here it is: You need to take the right exit to the village of Ibu (just after Ada when coming from the south). It is clearly marked with a big road sign. Drive until you reach the outskirts of the village and you will pass a small bridge with water on the left hand. Here the rails sometimes come to drink at dusk. I returned to this place one hour before dusk and waited. In the meantime a common kingfisher sat beautifully on a rock. Just before dusk the rails started to call very close and they continued until completely dark (apparently they sometimes cross the road to reach the water). However, no birds showed themselves and I kept a good distances. After dark I simply walked in with my torch and crawled up the small steep shoulder to the vegetation and suddenly my torch caught the clearly black-and-white belly and a set of red legs of a rail. Shortly after, I found another one in the same area. I was not elegant however I avoided entering the denser vegetation and I got my bird. I have expected and hoped to see it in a different way, but given the season and without a local guide I had to be satisfied with this view.

Next day was dedicated to the woodpecker (of course still hoping to have a random encounter with a rail). I stopped at the only huge bridge on road 2. After 20-25 minutes a large woodpecker flew among the trees on the southeast direction of the bridge. Being the only large woodpecker on the island this bird must have been the Okinawa Woodpecker but I was of course not satisfied with the view. I was not able to find this bird again despite having the scope up on the narrow bridge. Later came a car and that turned out to be a very important car. The Swedish birder inside the car of course stopped when he saw this strange person dangerously navigating a scope on the bridge. This was the only birder and the only foreigner I saw on the Ryukyu Islands.

It turned out that the day before this Swedish birder had been taken by a local guide to a place in the early morning to watch Okinawa rails at a small pool and later that day he was taken to a spot much more north than I have ever looked for the woodpecker (or any other birds) where they have had glimpses of an Okinawa Woodpecker. As you can reckon, in winter we are dealing with a rare bird to see.

We continued together and after a few wrong turns (it was all about remembering the exact tiny road) we found the road and after less than 1 km we stopped and left the car. After 5 minutes an Okinawa Woodpecker showed itself perfectly pecking in a tree 30 meters away. We had prolonged views and there might have been 2 birds as we had several sightings. It has a rather cryptic behaviour and seems to be rather shy. However, this fantastic lifer was in the basket and my mission in the north was complete. Looking at google maps I am almost certain that this exact road is that at 26.825334, 128.305486, however the main message here is that these more northern side roads are excellent for birding (and we tried a few finding the right one).

We continued north to Cape Hedo. Beside a few Japanese Bush Warblers and 2 inter-acting Ospreys there was nothing of interest beside the beautiful scenery. Further south we saw a Chinese Bulbul and a Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (!) on the electric wires near the JAL Private Resort Okuma. Later that evening, we met at my hotel to look for Scops Owls. See text under the bird list.

Next morning I had another pre-dawn departure arriving at the Kin Wetland just after sunrise. This whole area was surprisingly pleasant. I went there to find Eastern Yellow Wagtail (a lifer) and got Long-toed Stint (3) as a bonus. The whole area deserved much more time than I could afford (a feeling I left many places with). The boardwalk along the river is a nice construction. Other birds were some Zitting Cisticolas and a Long-billed Plover. I am not aware how rare this is on Okinawa, I just remember how we struggled to see this species in Northern India once.

After Kin Wetlands, it is easy to go straight to the Triangle pool for Black-faced Spoonbill. There were 8 birds in this tiny polluted pool. At Manko wetland I saw no spoonbills, however a guy in the info centre informed me that a juvenile most likely was hiding somewhere. Best option seems to be the triangle pool at 26.172659, 127.656076.

Tips and tricks

- Most of my breakfasts and lunches were purchased in 7/11 or the local counterpart Lawson. I tend to prefer 7/11 for the selection, but also because their ATMs more often seem to accept international credit cards for cash withdrawal.
- In the city of Izumi and the area around, I was not able to find an ATM for international VISA/MasterCard withdrawals (not even banks). On my way east towards Miike Lake, I found a 7/11 accepting international cards, which was rather lucky as I was out of cash and the accommodation and restaurants for the next 2 days only accepted cash. My advice is to carry plenty of cash, crime rate is low and many local accommodations and restaurants only accept cards.

- Outside Tokyo it seems to be very uncommon practice to use pin code with your credit card. They often asked for another card as they claimed (or gestured) that the card did not work. I often spent frustratingly long time explaining/gesturing the typing of a pin code. Some did not even know how to handle a transaction with a pin code.
- I can recommend all the hotels/places I stayed, especially the Onsen near Miike Lake. No one speaks a word English, but it is a fantastic experience bathing in the mineral hot springs with a bunch of naked Japanese men. Also the food at the restaurant is excellent. The stay is worth the price and it is very close to Lake Miike.
- Be aware that the Guest House Pumping Surf in Hyuga is a two bed dormitory, but I was the only one staying there (out of season), so it turned out to be a very good deal for around 20 US\$. Also, this place is very difficult to find using the GPS. It will take you very near, but the last 100-150 meters are complicated, especially in darkness. Check beforehand on Google maps.
- Also, the place I stayed in on Okinawa. It is very affordable and Scops owls just 50 meters away. It is not easy to find with the GPS alone the first time, hereafter it is easy. The phone number directed me 12 km in the wrong direction. Again, check on Google maps beforehand. It is worth saving the money compared to Ada Garden Hotel, which is much more expensive and looked a bit unwelcoming (but closer to the birds).
- It took me some searching before I found a useful bird voice app to my iPhone. Aves Vox will do the work for you. You can easily download voices for offline use. Presently there seems to be only one version and that is free.



Mount Fuji, from the Tokyo-Amami flight

BIRD LIST (* = only seen/heard on the August/September trip)

1. **Hazel Grouse** (*Tetrastes bonasia*)
One along road 142 near the road 953 junction, Hokkaido
2. **Chinese Bamboo Partridge*** (*Bambusicola thoracicus*)
Miyakejima (heard only)
3. **Japanese Green Pheasant*** (*Phasianus versicolor*)
Party of 3 at the marshes just northeast of Lake Teganuma, east of Tokyo
4. **Brent Goose** (*Branta bernicla*)
Notsuke on from the very tip of the peninsula (50+)
5. **Mute Swan** (*Cygnos olor*)
Imperial Palace bassin, Tokyo
6. **Whooper Swan** (*Cygnus cygnus*)
Hokkaido (common)
7. **Gadwall** (*Anas strepera*)
Imperial Palace western basin, Tokyo (50+), seen in small numbers throughout the trip
8. **Falcated Duck** (*Anas falcata*)
Imperial Palace western basin, one pair end-Nov, 15 pairs mid-Dec.
9. **Eurasian Wigeon** (*Anas penelope*)
Imperial Palace western basin (100+), seen in small numbers throughout the trip
10. **Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
Small numbers throughout the trip
11. **Eastern Spot-billed Duck** (*Anas zonorhyncha*)
Common throughout the trip
12. **Northern Shoveler** (*Anas clypeata*)
Arasaki and the Triangle pool, Okinawa
13. **Northern Pintail** (*Anas acuta*)
Kiritappu, Hokkaido
14. **Eurasian Teal** (*Anas crecca*)
Arasaki, Kyushu
15. **Common Pochard** (*Aythya ferina*)
Imperial Palace western bassin, Tokyo
16. **Tufted Duck** (*Aythya fuligula*)
Imperial Palace western bassin, Tokyo
17. **Greater Scaup** (*Aythya marila*)
Common especially at coasts on Hokkaido
18. **Harlequin Duck** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*)
Fairly common at coasts on Hokkaido
19. **Stejneger Scoter/white-winged scoter** (*Melanitta deglandi stejnegeri*)
Only one seen from coast near Nemuro
20. **Black Scoter** (*Melanitta americana*)
Fairly common at coasts on Hokkaido
21. **Long-tailed Duck** (*Clangula hyemalis*)
Small numbers at coasts on Hokkaido
22. **Common Goldeneye** (*Bucephala clangula*)
Common at coasts on Hokkaido
23. **Goosander** (*Mergus merganser*)
Fairly common at coasts on Hokkaido
24. **Red-throated Diver** (*Gavia stellata*)
2 seen from the coasts on Nemuro
25. **Black-throated Diver** (*Gavia arctica*)
A few seen from the coasts on Nemuro peninsula and from sea cruise
26. **Streaked Shearwater*** (*Calonectris leucomelas*)

1000s on ferry from Miyakejima-Tokyo ferry in September

27. **Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)

Imperial Palace, Tokyo and throughout the trip in small numbers

28. **Red-necked Grebe** (*Podiceps grisegena*)

1 in the Tokyo harbour

29. **Black-faced Spoonbill** (*Platalea minor*)

8 in the Triangle pool, Okinawa

30. **Striated Heron** (*Butorides striata*)

1 at Kogawa Dam and 1 in Kin wetlands, Okinawa

31. **Black-crowned Night Heron*** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)

One flying over Lake Teganuma, eastern part, where it narrows in, east of Tokyo

32. **Chinese Pond Heron** (*Ardeola bacchus*)

One flying over the road near Amami airport and then one later the same day flying over the highway on Okinawa near the airport

33. **Grey Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*)

Seen throughout the trip

34. **Great White Egret** (*Casmerodius albus*)

Seen in small numbers throughout the trip

35. **Intermediate Egret** (*Mesophoyx intermedia*)

A few on Amami Oshima and Okinawa

36. **Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*)

Seen throughout the trip

37. **Pacific Reef Heron** (*Egretta sacra*)

1 seen along the coast just north from Miazaki airport

38. **Great Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Seen throughout the trip

39. **Temnick's Cormorant*** (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*)

1 seen from ferry at some rocks when leaving Miyakejima

40. **Pelagic Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*)

Common on Nemuro Peninsula

41. **Red-faced Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax urile*)

1 seen among 100s of Pelagic Cormorants at Cape Nossappu (looking down the rocks from Bokyonomisaki Park near the rusty arch)

42. **Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*)

Uncommon, seen once (location not noted)

43. **Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*)

One flying over Kin Wetland, Okinawa

44. **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

Surprisingly common throughout the trip

45. **Black-eared Kite** (*Milvus lineatus*)

Most common raptor, seen everywhere

46. **White-tailed Sea Eagle** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*)

10+ seen on Hokkaido

47. **Steller's Sea Eagle** (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*)

Fairly common (still early), 12-15 seen on Hokkaido

48. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*)

Cape Nossappu (Bokyonomisaki Park near the rusty arch)

49. **Grey-faced Buzzard** (*Butastur indicus*)

Common on Amami Oshima and fairly common on Okinawa

50. **Eastern Buzzard** (*Buteo japonicus*)

1 seen at Kiritappu, Hokkaido

51. **Rough-legged Buzzard** (*Buteo lagopus*)

One near Rausa and one at Kiritappu, Hokkaido

52. **Mountain Hawk Eagle** (*Nisaetus nipalensis orientalis*)

One flying over Lake Miike

53. **Okinawa Rail** (*Gallirallus okinawae*)

2 birds seen at dusk near the village of Ibu

54. **Ruddy-breasted Rail** (*Porzana fusca*)

One bird flushed up at Arasaki

55. **Common Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*)

A few birds on Okinawa

56. **Common Coot** (*Fulica atra*)

Seen throughout the trip in small numbers

57. **White-naped Crane** (*Grus vipio*)

Arasaki

58. **Hooded Crane** (*Grus monacha*)

Arasaki

59. **Red-crowned Crane** (*Grus japonensis*)

Tsurui, near Kushiro airport

60. **Black-winged Stilt** (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Tokyo (August) and Triangle pool (Okinawa)

61. **Grey Plover*** (*Pluvialis squatarola*)

Kaisai Rinkai Park in August

62. **Long-billed Plover** (*Charadrius placidus*)

Kin Wetland, Okinawa

63. **Mongolian Plover*** (*Charadrius mongolus*):

Tokyo (September)

64. **Amami Woodcock** (*Scolopax mira*)

3 birds on Mount Yuwan

65. **Common Snipe** (*Gallinago gallinago*)

4 flushed at Arasaki and 2 at Kin Wetland, Okinawa

66. **Whimbrel** (*Numenius phaeopus*)

Kin Wetland, Okinawa

67. **Eurasian Curlew** (*Numenius arquata*)

Manko Wetland, Okinawa

68. **Common Greenshank** (*Tringa nebularia*)

Kin Wetland, Okinawa

69. **Grey-tailed Tattler*** (*Tringa brevipes*)

Tokyo (September)

70. **Common Sandpiper** (*Actitis hypoleucos*)

Ada Town, Okinawa

71. **Ruddy Turnstone*** (*Arenaria interpres*):

Tokyo (September)

72. **Long-toed Stint** (*Calidris subminuta*)

3 at Kin Wetland, Okinawa

73. **Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*)

Tokyo (September)

74. **Black-tailed Gull** (*Larus crassirostris*)

Throughout the trip (most common of the large gulls)

75. **Glaucous Gull** (*Larus hyperboreus*)

Common on Hokkaido

76. **Vega Gull** (*Larus vegae*)

Hyuga harbour

77. **Slaty-backed Gull*** (*Larus schistisagus*)

Tokyo (September)

78. **Black-headed Gull** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*)

Common throughout the trip

79. **Black-legged Kittiwake** (*Rissa tridactyla*)

2-3 from coast at Cape Nossappu

80. **Common Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*)

Sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour

81. **Pigeon Guillemot** (*Cephus columba*)

Sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour

82. **Spectacled Guillemot** (*Cephus carbo*)

Sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour

83. **Ancient Murrelet** (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*)

Sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour and seen from coast at Cape Nossappu

84. **Rhinoceros Auklet** (*Cerorhinca monocerata*)

Sea cruise from Ochiishi harbour

85. **Rock Dove** (*Columba livia*)

86. **Black Woodpigeon** (*Columba janthina*)

Seen on Miyake-jima (August) and Amami Oshima.

87. **Oriental Turtle Dove** (*Streptopelia orientalis*)

Seen throughout the trip

88. **White-bellied Green Pigeon** (*Treron sieboldii*)

2 flying over at Lake Miike

89. **Ryukyu Green Pigeon** (*Treron riukuensis*)

Seen only on Amami Oshima (4-5 flying overhead)

90. **Japanese Scops Owl** (*Otis semitorques*)

I had prolonged view of an insect hunting bird. It was seen near my accommodation in the village of Genka, Okinawa. This bird was seen when I returned with a Swedish birdwatcher to look for the Nansei Shoto sub species (*O. pryeri*) (see below). We were not able to find *O. pryeri* but got *O. semitorques* instead.

91. **"Ryukyu" Scops Owl** (*Otis pryeri*)

Included even not officially split from above. However, the redder appearance (incl. the eyes) was very pronounced (shaken documentation photo available)

92. **Elegant Scops Owl** (*Otus elegans*)

Mount Yuwan, Amami Oshima

93. **Blackiston's Fish Owl** (*Bubo blakistoni*)

Washinoyado, Rausa

94. **Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*)

1 seen at the beach at Kiritappu, Hokkaido

95. **Common Kingfisher** (*Alcedo atthis*)

Seen throughout the trip in suitable habitat

96. **Crested Kingfisher** (*Megaceryle lugubris*)

2 at Kogawa Dam and 1 flying over Miike Lake

97. **Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker** (*Yungipicus kizuki*)

First seen in Tokyo in various parks, but seen throughout the trip, including Miyake-Jima, on Amami Oshima (Y.k. Amamii) and even sitting on an electric wire on Okinawa

98. **Pryer's Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos noguchii*)

2 birds northern Okinawa (around 1 km up the road starting at 26.49308, 128.18194)

99. **Ownston's (White-backed) Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos ownstoni*)

Amami Natural Forest, Amami Oshima

100. **Great Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos major*)

Several near Furen lodge (also at their feeder), Hokkaido

101. **Japanese Woodpecker** (*Picus awokera*)

A noisy party of 3 at Lake Miike camp ground was only sighting of this bird

102. **Ryukyu Minivet** (*Pericrocotus tegimai*)

1 at Lake Miike and then 1 on each island of Amami Oshima and Okinawa

103. **Bull-headed Shrike** (*Lanius bucephalus*)

Seen in small numbers throughout the trip (except on Hokkaido)

104. **Eurasian Jay** (*Garrulus glandarius*)

Japanese Jay (*japonicus*) at Kogawa Dam and the clearly distinctive Brandt's Jay (*brandtii*) near Furen Lodge.

105. **Lidth's Jay** (*Garrulus lidthi*)

Amami Natural Forest, Mount Yuwan and Kinsakubaru

106. **Azure-winged Magpie** (*Cyanopica cyanus*)

Kaisai Rinkai Park in August and Hibya park central Tokyo in November

107. **Daurian Jackdaw** (*Coloeus dauuricus*)

Aya Town, Kyushu

108. **Rook** (*Corvus frugilegus*)

Arasaki

109. **Carrion Crow** (*Corvus corone*)

Tokyo

110. **Large-billed Crow** (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)

Seen throughout the trip

111. **Bohemian Waxwing** (*Bombycilla garrulus*)

Small group at lake Furen

112. **Eastern Great Tit** (*Parus minor*)

Seen throughout the trip in small numbers

113. **Coal Tit** (*Periparus ater*)

Parks of Tokyo

114. **Varied Tit** (*Poecile varius*)

Seen throughout the trip, including parks of Tokyo

115. **Ownston's Tit** (*Poecile owstoni*)

Miyakejima

116. **Marsh Tit** (*Poecile palustris*)

Near Lake Furen, Hokkaido

117. **Willow Tit** (*Poecile montanus*)

Near Lake Furen, Hokkaido

118. **Barn Swallow** (*Hirundo rustica*)

Throughout the trip

119. **Pacific Swallow*** (*Hirundo tahitica*)

One flying over lake at Miyakejima

120. **Long-tailed Tit** (*Aegithalos caudatus*)

Seen throughout the trip

121. **Zitting Cisticola** (*Cisticula juncidis*)

2 seen at Kin Wetlands, Okinawa

122. **Chinese Bulbul** (*Pycnonotus sinensis*)

Kin Wetland and near JAL private resort Okuma, Okinawa

123. **Brown-eared Bulbul** (*Microscelis amaurotis*)

Seen at almost all sites visited, most common in the parks of Tokyo

124. **Japanese Bush Warbler** (*Cettia diphone*)

Seen throughout the trip in small numbers

125. **Eastern Crowned Warbler*** (*Phylloscopus coronatus*)

Kyoto, Imperial Garden

126. **Ijima's Warbler*** (*Phylloscopus ijimae*)

3-4 birds seen on Miyakejima (August, which is late to still see this bird)

127. **Red-billed Leiothrix** (*Leiothrix lutea*)

Small groups seen at Kogawa Dam

128. **Japanese White-eye** (*Zosterops japonicus*)

Seen throughout the trip

129. **Winter Wren*** (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)
Heard several times (and not followed up), but seen well on Miyakejima (*T.t. fumigatus*)
130. **Eurasian Nuthatch** (*Sittia europaea*)
Furen Lodge, incl feeder, Hokkaido
131. **White-cheeked Starling** (*Sturnus cineraceus*)
Seen throughout the trip
132. **Eyebrowed Thrush** (*Turdus obscurus*)
One bird seen near Highway 2, Okinawa
133. **Pale Thrush** (*Turdus pallidus*)
The common thrush, seen throughout the trip
134. **Brown-headed Thrush** (*Turdus chrysolaus*)
Only seen in Hibya park in central Tokyo in November
135. **Izu Thrush*** (*Turdus celanops*)
Miyakejima, near the info center at Lake Tairo
136. **Dusky Thrush** (*Turdus eunomus*)
In Tokyo and near small forest Furen Lodge, Hokkaido
137. **Japanese Robin*** (*Luscinia akahige*)
Miyakejima only
138. **Ryukyu Robin** (*Luscinia komadori*)
Seen on both Amami Oshima and Okinawa (*L.k. namiyei*)
139. **Red-flanked Robin** (*Luscinia cyanura*)
1 bird at Lake Miike
140. **Daurian Redstart** (*Phoenicurus aureus*)
Fairly common throughout Kyushu
141. **Blue Rock Thrush** (*Monticola solitarius*)
Seen almost at all sites visited, always near water
142. **Brown Dipper** (*Cinclus pallasii*)
2 birds at Kogawa Dam, 1 bird in the stream at Washinoyado
143. **Russet Sparrow** (*Passer rutilans*)
Large flocks on wires at Arasaki
144. **Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*)
Throughout the trip
145. **Eastern Yellow Wagtail** (*Motacilla tschutschensis*)
Kin Wetland, Okinawa
146. **Grey Wagtail** (*Motacilla cinerea*)
Fairly common from Kyushu and south
147. **White Wagtail** (*Motacilla alba*)
Seen in small numbers throughout the trip
148. **Japanese Wagtail*** (*Motacilla grandis*)
Only seen in Kyoto in August
149. **Olive-backed Pipit** (*Anthus hodgsoni*)
2 birds at Lake Miike
150. **Oriental Greenfinch** (*Carduelis sinica*)
Seen in small numbers throughout the trip
151. **Asian Rosy Finch** (*Leucosticte arctoa*)
Notsuka peninsula and possible a flock at Kiritappu
152. **Japanese Grosbeak*** (*Eophona personata*)
Only seen August in Kyoto
153. **(Siberian) Meadow Bunting** (*Emberiza cioides*)
Miyake-Jima (August) and Kogawa Dam
154. **Elegant Bunting** (*Emberiza elegans*)
Aya Gorge (where locally fairly common)
155. **Black-faced Bunting** (*Emberiza spodocephala personata*)

Kogawa Dam and Aya Gorge

156. **Grey Bunting** (*Emberiza variabilis*)

1 bird seen kogawa Dam

157. **Snow Bunting** (*Calcarius nivalis*)

4-5 birds seen on the peninsula near Furen lodge, Hokkaido



Japanese Badger, Aya Gorge