ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Japan

Spring Highlights

11th May to 21st May 2022 (11 days)

Hokkaido Extension

21st May to 25th May 2022 (5 days)



Okinawa Rail by Glen Valentine

Our Highlights of Japan tour during spring takes in the very best of what Japan has to offer during this fabulous time of year when all of the country's resident species and summer migrants are present and actively singing, displaying and nesting – indeed a magical time to visit 'The Land of the Rising Sun'.

The wetlands and forests on Honshu support the extremely localized Japanese Marsh Warbler, Japanese Reed Bunting, Long-billed Plover, Latham's Snipe, endemic Copper and Japanese Green Pheasants, Japanese Green Woodpecker, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes, Japanese Grosbeak and Japanese Accentor, all of which will be targets on this trip. On the offshore island of Miyake-jima we hope to find the richly-coloured and endemic Izu Thrush and Owston's Tit, while other specialties include Japanese Wood Pigeon, Styan's Grasshopper Warbler and Ijima's Leaf Warbler. We conclude the main part of this Japan Spring Highlights tour in the Ryukyu Islands where we spend our time on the small islands of Okinawa and Amami in search of a host of exciting endemics and near-endemics. The endangered Okinawa (Pryer's) Woodpecker, recently discovered and highly threatened Okinawa Rail, stunning Ryukyu Robin, Ryukyu Minivet, Amami Woodcock, Lidth's Jay and Amami Thrush are just some of the islands' tantalizing species that we will be searching for during our explorations there!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

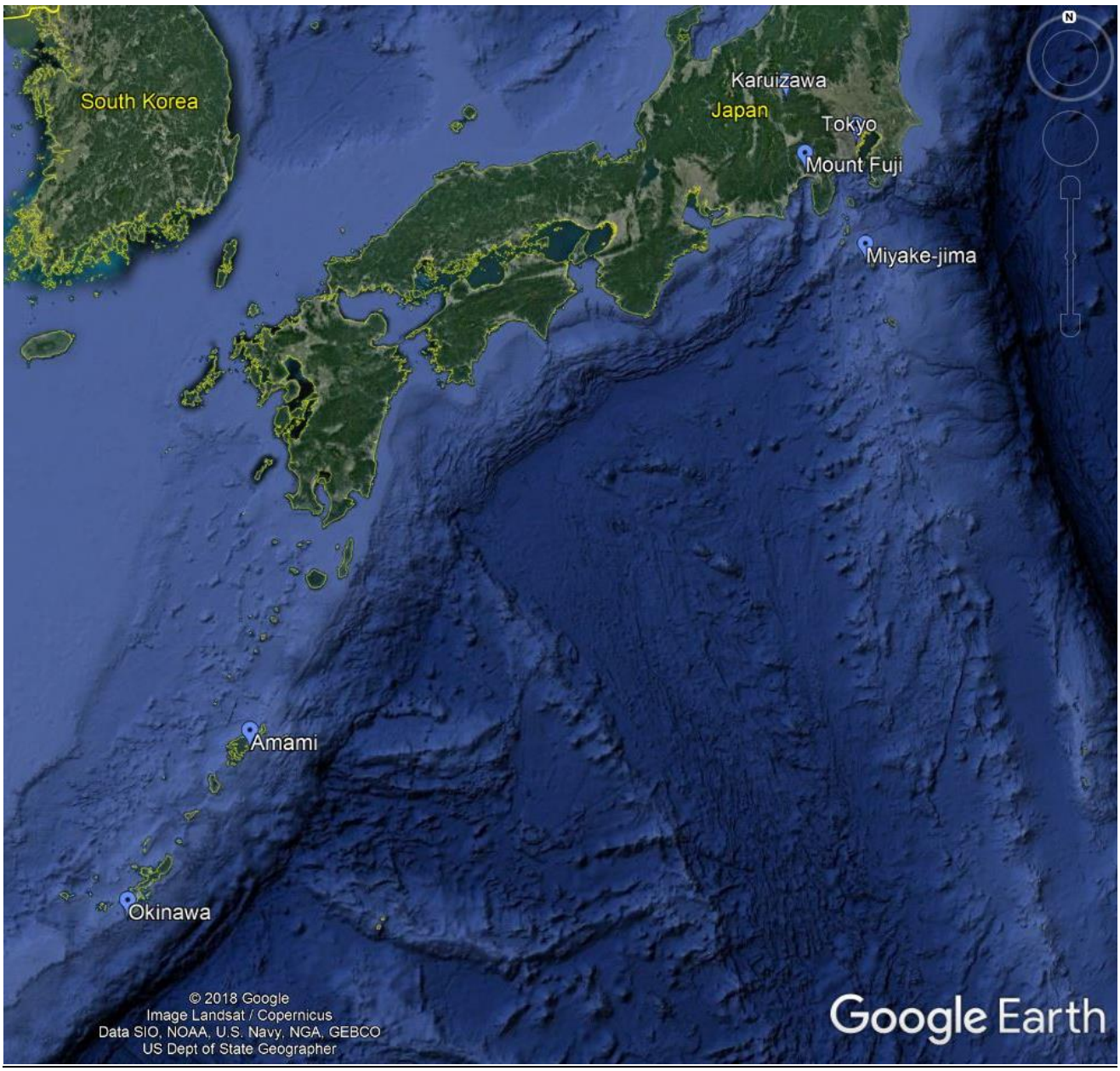
THE MAIN TOUR ITINERARY:

Day 1	**Arrival in Tokyo**
Day 2	**Tokyo and Tonegawa to Karuizawa**
Day 3	**Karuizawa area**
Day 4	**Karuizawa to Gotemba via Mount Fuji**
Day 5	**Gotemba to Tokyo and flight to Miyake-jima**
Day 6	**Miyake-jima and ferry to Tokyo**
Day 7	**Tokyo to Amami Oshima**
Day 8	**Amami Oshima**
Day 9	**Amami Oshima to Okinawa**
Day 10	**Okinawa**
Day 11	**Final departure**

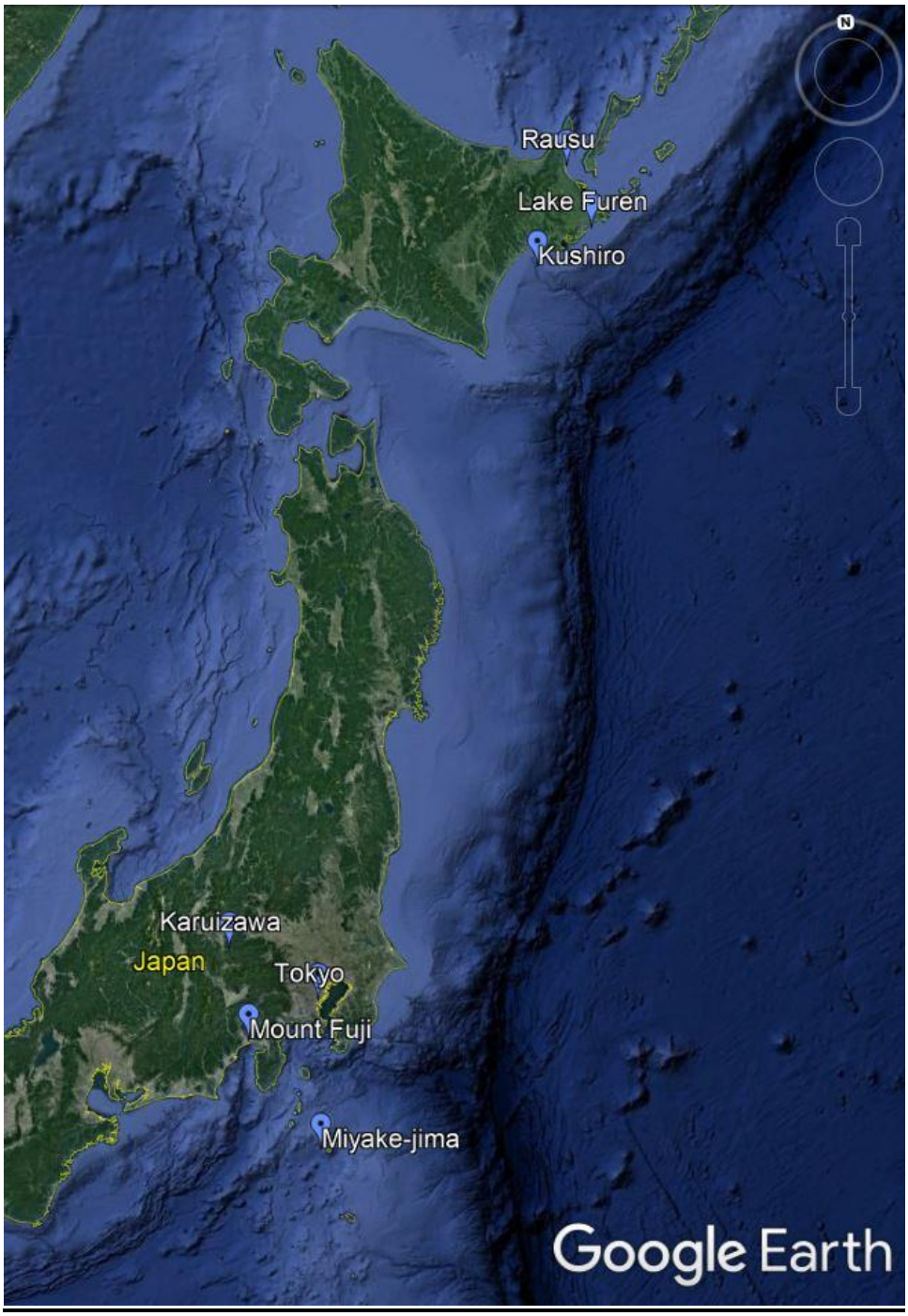
HOKKAIDO EXTENSION ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Kushiro, Hokkaido**
Day 2	**Nemuro, Lake Furen and Kiritappu areas to Rausu**
Day 3 & 4	**Rausu area**
Day 5	**Rausu to Kushiro, flight to Tokyo and departure**

TOUR ROUTE MAP – MAIN TOUR



TOUR ROUTE MAP – EXTENSION



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker by Rich Lindie

Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo. Today is essentially set aside as an arrival day, you are welcome to arrive at any time today and we will meet in the evening for a delicious introductory dinner at a restaurant close to our accommodation.

Day 2: Tokyo and Tonegawa to Karuizawa. This morning we will begin our search for two extremely localized species whose breeding ranges are centred on the remaining wetlands and reedbeds in the greater Tokyo area. These are the extremely scarce, range-restricted and little-known Japanese Marsh Warbler and the attractive, black-headed Japanese Reed Bunting. We may have to put in a fair amount of time and effort to find the Reed Warbler, although they do often perform their aerial display flight above the reeds at this time of year and our chances of seeing this rarity are excellent. Grey-faced Buzzards are sometimes seen perched up in the adjacent tall trees or on neighbouring powerlines along with Black Kite (sometimes split as Black-eared), Oriental Turtle Dove, the near-endemic Brown-eared Bulbul, White-cheeked Starling, attractive Bull-headed Shrike, Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch and Eurasian Tree Sparrow and if we are extremely fortunate we may even encounter a Eurasian Bittern, a rare species in Japan. Yellow Bittern is more regular and is often seeing skulking in dense reedbeds or in low flight between reed clumps. Common Snipes lurk at the water's edge along with Oriental Reed and Black-browed Reed Warblers, while Eurasian Skylarks (sometimes split as Japanese Skylark) is likely to be seen and heard in the surrounding fields. Great Cormorant, Great Egret, Grey Heron, Little Grebe and Eurasian Coot occupy the open water habitats.

In the afternoon we will depart the Tokyo and Tonegawa areas and make our way westwards into the picturesque mountains surrounding the quaint and bird-rich town of Karuizawa, our base for the next two nights. This afternoon we may have time for some initial explorations around town where we have a reasonable chance of finding several noteworthy species such as the endemic Japanese Green Woodpecker, the tiny Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Eastern Buzzard, Long-tailed, Japanese, Willow, Varied and Coal Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Japanese White-eye, Eurasian Jay, Grey and Japanese Wagtails, Common Cuckoo, Pacific Swift and Asian House Martin.



Copper Pheasant (female) by Glen Valentine

Day 3: Karuizawa area. Karuizawa is situated in the forested mountains of central Honshu to the west of Tokyo and is one of the country's prime birding localities. Most of our



Red-flanked Bluetail by Dennis Braddy

time will be spent along the network of forest trails and tracks in and around the town searching for several rare and elusive species that include Copper Pheasant, Ural Owl and Japanese Yellow Bunting. We stand a good chance of seeing the bunting but we'd have to be very fortunate to encounter the pheasant and the owl. Copper Pheasant is at least much more readily seen during the frigid winter months when they venture down into the warmer valleys around Karuizawa town. While searching for these specialties we will also keep a lookout for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Lesser Cuckoo, Ashy Minivet, the scarce and shy Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes, charismatic Brown Dipper, miniscule Eurasian Wren, the brilliant Siberian Blue Robin, the shy Asian Stubtail, beautiful Narcissus and Blue-and-white Flycatchers, Asian Brown Flycatcher and the scarce, attractive and impressive Japanese Grosbeak.

A trip to a nearby river may produce the beautiful but scarce and shy Mandarin Duck, Crested Kingfisher and the rare Long-billed Plover, while we also hope to find Chestnut-eared and Meadow Buntings, Japanese Green Pheasant, Siberian Stonechat, Azure-winged Magpie, Large-billed and Carrion Crows and the colourful and localized Chestnut-cheeked Starling in the surrounding scrub, bushes, trees and fields. Another specialty that we hope to encounter here in the late afternoon or early evening is the migratory Latham's Snipe that breeds in central and northern Japan between April and August.

Day 4: Karuizawa to Gotemba via Mount Fuji. After some final birding in the Karuizawa area we will drive south to Gotemba for an overnight stay. This afternoon we will arrive at the magnificent Mount Fuji and begin our birding of the coniferous and deciduous forest that cloaks the lower northern and eastern slopes of the mountain. Target species in these tall forests include White-bellied Green Pigeon, Northern (Rufous) Hawk-Cuckoo, Red-flanked Bluetail, Eastern Crowned and Japanese Leaf Warblers, Goldcrest, Eurasian Bullfinch (the race here sometimes split as Grey-bellied Bullfinch) and Black-faced Bunting, while we may also encounter more common and widespread species such as Oriental Cuckoo, White Wagtail and Olive-backed Pipit.



Long-billed Plover by Rich Lindie

Day 5: Gotemba to Tokyo and flight to Miyake-jima. The majestic Mount Fuji, Japan's highest volcano at 3776m (12388ft) and one of the world's most famous and impressive mountains will be an imposing site throughout the day, adding a whole new dimension to today's birding experience. This morning we will target the localized Japanese Accentor that moves up in elevation from the surrounding forested valleys during the summer months to



Varied Tit by Dennis Braddy

breed in the scrubby alpine habitat around the treeline of Mt. Fuji and surrounding mountains. While searching for the accentor we are likely to encounter many of the species mentioned for yesterday afternoon and we might also be fortunate to find Siberian, Japanese and Brown-headed Thrushes. In the afternoon we will drive back to Tokyo from where we shall take a short flight to the small island of Miyake-jima, one of the seven small volcanic islands that make up the Izu Islands chain.

Day 6: Miyake-jima and ferry to Tokyo. We have a full morning to explore the island and find the key species on offer here. Miyake-jima supports several highly localized specialties and we'll be searching intently for these species during our time on the island. The striking Izu Thrush will be one such species and fortunately it is pleasantly common as is Ijima's Leaf Warbler, a species that only breeds on the Izu Islands and is virtually unknown on its non-breeding grounds, presumably the Philippines. Another Izu specialty is the Styan's Grasshopper (Pleske's) Warbler and this small-island specialist skulks about in the dense coastal vegetation. Other target species include the large, handsome and localized Japanese Wood Pigeon, Japanese Bush Warbler and the eye-catching Owston's (Izu) Tit (recently split from Varied Tit). We will also be on the lookout for the gorgeous Japanese Robin and covies of Chinese Bamboo Partridge, although this attractive game-bird has been introduced here.

This afternoon we will take the ferry back to Tokyo for an overnight stay. We hope to encounter a number of seabirds during this afternoon's journey with good chances of Streaked Shearwaters. Scanning the ocean we might pick up Tristram's Storm-Petrel, Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Red-necked Phalarope and Black-footed and Laysan Albatrosses, and with some luck, the range-restricted Japanese Murrelet.

Day 7: Tokyo flight to flight to Amami Oshima. This morning we'll board our flight south to the island of Amami Oshima. We can expect to arrive on the subtropical island of Amami in the afternoon, after which we'll begin the fairly short drive across this small island towards the tiny city of Naze, our comfortable base for the next two nights on the island.



Japanese Murrelet by Glen Valentine

En route to Naze we should have time to make a short stop in at a forested area fairly close to Naze where we hope to encounter one of Amami's most prized and sought-after endemics, the vibrantly coloured Lidth's Jay. Other noteworthy species on offer here include



Ryukyu Scops Owl by David Hoddinott

the scarce and unobtrusive Japanese Wood Pigeon, Ryukyu Minivet, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and Japanese White-eye. The interior forests of the island host some spectacular endemics and we will work hard to try and locate every single one of these specialities during our stay here. In the late afternoon, we will head out to the Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve that protects the lush, extensive and verdant forests that cloak the hills above Naze. Here we hope to locate the rare and endemic Amami Thrush. As dusk approaches, we will search the gravel roads for the endemic Amami Woodcock, Ryukyu Scops Owl and if we are extremely lucky maybe even the little known and seldom-recorded Japanese Scops Owl.

Day 8: Amami Oshima. We have the entire day to explore the Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve in search of Amami's fabulous endemics. In the early morning we shall watch out for Amami Woodcock and Amami Thrush along the gravel, forest tracks and road-edge should we not have found them yesterday evening. We'll also have another excellent chance of finding the beautiful Lidth's Jay. This attractive corvid is reasonably common here but fairly shy and sometimes difficult to observe. However, we are almost certain to achieve excellent views of these gems during our time on the island. Other species that we will be on the lookout for this morning include the endemic *owstoni* subspecies of White-backed Woodpecker that is likely to be split as Owston's Woodpecker, the scarce and furtive Japanese Wood Pigeon, very shy Whistling Green Pigeon, the rare, endemic *owstoni* subspecies of Narcissus Flycatcher that is sometimes split as Ryukyu Flycatcher, the scarce and shy *komadori* subspecies of Ryukyu Robin that may be split in future as Amami Robin, Varied and Japanese Tits and Japanese White-eye.

This evening, we have a chance for a second nocturnal excursion in search of the island's scarce nocturnal endemics; we may also find the black Amami Rabbit, an endangered and endearing species endemic to this island.



Amami Woodcock by David Hoddinott

Day 9: Amami Oshima to Okinawa. This morning we board our flight to the city of Naha, on the southern end of Okinawa Island. We are likely to arrive in the mid-morning after which we will begin the drive up to the northern end of the island where we can expect to arrive in the early afternoon in time for some initial explorations of the surrounding forest. Here we have a good chance of picking up a few Ryukyu endemics such as Ryukyu Minivet, Whistling (Ryukyu) Green Pigeon, and the stunning Ryukyu Robin,



The *komadori* subspecies of Ryukyu Robin by David Hoddinott

represented here by the *namiyei* subspecies that may soon be split as Okinawa Robin. This evening we can try for Ryukyu Scops Owl along the forested roads near our accommodation and we even have a chance of encountering the little known Japanese Scops Owl (recently split from Collared Scops Owl), Northern Boobook and Okinawa Rail on its night roost.

Day 10: Okinawa. Our main target species early this morning will be the stunning Okinawa Rail, a bird described to science only as recently as 1981, should we not have encountered it on last night's excursion. We are likely to hear them calling in the area and with patience and perseverance and the knowledge of the most reliable "hang-outs" for this rare species, we stand an excellent chance of obtaining a view of one of these skulking, flightless rallids. They sometimes come to the road-edge and forest-edge in the early morning to feed but if we cannot find one at or just after dawn we will search again this evening when singletons and pairs can sometimes be seen roosting on fairly open branches at the edge of the forest and sometimes even within arm's reach from the road-edge. The name 'Yanbaru' means 'Mountains and fields', and we have a full day and a half to explore this scenic and well-forested part of the island that is mostly encompassed within the Yanbaru National Park. The star bird in the 'Itajii', or evergreen oak forests, is probably the rare and furtive Okinawa (Pryer's) Woodpecker, the rarest extant woodpecker on earth. This mega-rarity is listed as critically endangered and is one of the rarest birds on Earth with an estimated population of fewer than 600 individuals! This island, along with Amami-Oshima is also known for its large population of 'Habu', a species of viper that is fairly commonly seen, especially at night.



Lidth's Jay by Glen Valentine

Day 11: Final departure. We will head to the airport to connect with our departure flights home or for those continuing on the Hokkaido Extension; we'll fly up to Tokyo and then onwards to Kushiro.

Hokkaido Extension



Red-crowned Crane by David Hoddinott

Japan's northern-most island of Hokkaido probably ranks as the country's most scenic and is certainly Japan's most rugged and wilderness-rich island. Home to a number of north-east Asia's most iconic birds, we will explore the eastern side of the island in search of mouth-watering species such as the magnificent Red-crowned (Japanese) Crane, Hazel Grouse, Black Woodpecker, Ural Owl, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Middendorff's and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warblers, Japanese Robin, Siberian Rubythroat, Grey Bunting and the regal Blakiston's Fish Owl amongst a wealth of other great birds and wildlife.

Day 1: Arrival in Kushiro, Hokkaido and drive to Nemuro. This afternoon we arrive in Kushiro, a large city on southern Hokkaido. After arriving we'll begin the drive north along the east coast of the island towards the city of Nemuro, our comfortable base for the next two nights.

Day 2: Nemuro, Lake Furen & Kiritappu areas. The lush forests around Kiritappu and the extensive Lake Furen with its wetland environs will be our focal points today. Here we are likely to encounter several fantastic species that we may have already seen on Honshu such as White-bellied Green Pigeon, Japanese Robin and Narcissus Flycatcher but we'll also be on the lookout for a number of other specialties that lurk in the verdant coniferous and deciduous forests that cover large parts of this area.

One elusive species we can try and track down is Hazel Grouse. Other species we'll be on the search for include the impressive Black Woodpecker, the uncommon and shy Siberian Thrush, Sakhalin Leaf Warbler and the furtive Grey Bunting. Other noteworthy species include the striking White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Marsh Tit, Grey-headed Bullfinch, Hawfinch and Eurasian Siskin. If we are fortunate, we may even encounter a Eurasian Woodcock standing motionless alongside a boggy forest stream or scurrying quickly across the leaf-litter.



Siberian Rubythroat by Adam Riley

At night we will can try to find the beautiful Ural Owl, a rare and elusive denizen of these cool, temperate forests. We also stand a chance of finding Oriental Scops Owl and Grey Nightjar during our nocturnal forays.

Around the vast Lake Furen we will concentrate on finding the area's various wetland-edge specialists, top of the list being the stately and majestic Red-crowned (Japanese) Crane that breeds in the marshes in this area during the summer months. Latham's (Japanese) Snipe is another major drawcard to this area during Japan's spring and summer months as they can regularly be seen displaying over the marsh. Common Reed Buntings and Black-browed Reed Warblers are also present in fair numbers, while the magnificent White-tailed Eagle sometimes puts in an appearance. In the surrounding brush and rank, weedy vegetation we hope to locate a few singing Siberian Rubythroats, the males of which are almost impossibly brilliant and wonderful to admire perched up and singing their hearts out at the tops of bushes and other vantage points, especially in comparison to how they usually behave – or indeed misbehave - on their wintering grounds further south in Subcontinental and South-East Asia! Here we will also focus our attention on teasing out the three species of skulking *Locustella* warblers that this area is famous for during this time of the year. These are the tiny and heavily streaked Lanceolated Warbler, Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warbler (recently split from Gray's Grasshopper Warbler). Russet Sparrows also occupy this habitat along with the very pretty but rather shy Long-tailed Rosefinch, another big target species in this magical part of Japan.



Ural Owl by David Hoddinott

Various varieties of waterbird should also be present on the lake and we hope to find and obtain good scope views of Red-necked Grebe, as well as Greater Scaup and Common Merganser, and with a bit of luck maybe a Falcated Duck. We'll also scan out to sea on a few occasions where we are likely to encounter at least a few oceanic species

that mainly occur here in winter but that usually linger into spring and early summer in small numbers and these include White-winged (often split as Stejneger's) and Black Scoters, the spectacular Harlequin Duck, Rhinoceros Auklet, Spectacled Guillemot, Red-throated and Pacific Loons (Divers), Slaty-backed and Glaucous Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwake and Japanese (Temminck's) and Pelagic Cormorants.



Blakiston's Fish Owl by Dennis Braddy

Days 3 & 4: Rausu area. This morning after some final birding around Lake Furen we will embark on the drive up north towards the small town of Rausu, located on the rugged and remote Shiretoko Peninsula. In the late afternoon we will arrive at the small, peaceful village of Rausu where we are based at a delightful, cosy hotel for the next two nights. These nights will offer us a very exciting experience as we stake out the magnificent Blakiston's Fish Owl.

The Shiretoko Peninsula in extreme north-eastern Hokkaido is home to a few pairs of these very impressive owls and we hope that our patience will be rewarded with superb views of this absolute beauty! It may require us staying up late into the night but we certainly have an excellent chance of seeing this spectacular bird. Staring into the giant eyes of this nocturnal giant, the largest owl on Earth must rank as one of the world's great birding experiences!

During our daylight hours in the area there are countless options, depending on which species we would like to see. The Shiretoko Peninsula is cloaked in some magnificent temperate forests and also gives access to a high alpine pass. These forests harbour all of the forest species of Hokkaido so we can concentrate on anything that we have missed until this point, or want better views of. The views from the high pass out to the Kuril Islands are worth it alone! There is also no shortage of coastal vantage points where we can scan the Sea of Okhotsk for coastal and pelagic birds and mammals.



White-tailed Eagle by Glen Valentine

Day 5: Rausu to Kushiro and departure. This morning we depart the Shiretoko Peninsula and begin making our way back

south to Kushiro where we connect with our flight back to Tokyo and the conclusion of our Japan Spring Highlights birding adventure.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

The tour fee includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 11 for those on the main tour, and all meals from lunch on day 1 to lunch on day 5 for those on the extension;
- All lodgings and ground transportation during the tour;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including local guides and tour leaders).

The tour fee does not include:

- Visa fees;
- **ANY** flights;
- Any beverages including bottled water;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls; and
- Laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: Tipping is NOT customary in Japan. However, if you feel that your Rockjumper leaders have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Special Notes:

- Much of our time is spent in vehicles, as we do have to cover fair distances in order to get to the best birding areas. The more luggage you pack the less room there is in the vehicle, so it is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- You should expect a number of long days, potentially without mid-day breaks in order to maximise our chances of finding all of the countries' special species since the sun rises early and sets late in Japan at this time of year.
- Accommodations are of a good standard throughout the tour. We will do our utmost to make your stay as comfortable as possible, but at times we may experience maintenance problems that are beyond our control. In the remote areas, like in northern Okinawa, we opt for the best available accommodation; however, this is sometimes below the standard of what you may have come to expect but is always clean and comfortable. Please note that some accommodations during the tour may have shared washroom facilities.
- This tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be in good general health as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. The main tour will begin at our hotel near the Narita Airport, Tokyo (IATA: NRT) in the evening on day 1. As this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time, but preferably before **16:00** in order to meet up for a welcome dinner at roughly **18:00**. The tour will conclude at Naha Airport, Okinawa (IATA: OKA) mid-morning on day 11.

The Hokkaido Extension tour will depart from Tokyo's Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) on day 1 and conclude in the early afternoon on day 5 at Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND).

If arriving or departing from Tokyo's Narita Airport there is a shuttle bus that can be used to transfer between airports, the cost of this is around $30.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) handles most of Japan's domestic flights and premier international business flight routes. Narita International Airport, Tokyo (IATA: NRT) handles most of Japan's leisure international flights. Both are well serviced by most of the world's major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**