ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Japan

Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding

27th January to 14th February 2022 (19 days)

Southern Islands Extension

14th February to 21st February 2022 (8 days)



Honshu crane congregation by David Shackelford

The island chain making up the country of Japan is undoubtedly a must-visit destination for the keen birder, and this exploration takes in the very best of what Japan has to offer. Stretching for over 3,000

kilometres (1,860 miles), 'The Land of the Rising Sun' is host to a variety of habitats. On the beautiful, northerly island of Hokkaido, with its fields of snow, frozen lakes and rugged seacoasts, we hope to marvel at the impressive Blakiston's Fish Owl, magnificent Steller's Sea Eagles and elegant Red-crowned (Japanese) Cranes. In addition, the coasts here are home to numerous species of sea-ducks, Loons and Auks, and we will also keep an eye out for wintering passerines, including the beautiful Asian Rosy Finch.

The forests inland from Tokyo harbour the spectacular, endemic Copper and Japanese Green Pheasants, Japanese Accentor, Japanese Grosbeak and Japanese Green Woodpecker, while the hot springs at Nagano are famous for their 'Snow Monkeys'. The extensive rivers and lakes on the Sea of Japan side of Honshu teem with waterfowl that include the immaculate Smew, rare Oriental Stork, Falcated Duck, Baikal Teal, Tundra and Taiga Bean Goose and the rare Long-billed Plover. The island of Kyushu plays host to one of the greatest avian spectacles on earth, with thousands of Hooded and White-naped Cranes spending the winter here along with other specialties like Brown-cheeked Rail, Chinese Penduline Tit, Saunders's Gull and the superb Mandarin Duck. On the eastern side of the island, we will attempt to locate the near-endemic Grey Bunting and the endangered Japanese Murrelet among many other exciting and memorable species. We invite you to join us on our unforgettable exploration of this Asian winter wonderland!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY:

Day 1	**Birding Tokyo**
Day 2	**Tokyo and fly to Kushiro (Hokkaido)**
Day 3	**Kushiro to Yoroushi**
Day 4	**Rausu and surrounds**
Day 5	**Yoroushi to Nemuro and pelagic outing**
Day 6	**Lake Furen, Nemuro, Cape Nosappu and Kiritappu**
Day 7	**Nemuro to Kushiro, fly to Tokyo and transfer to Karuizawa**
Day 8	**Karuizawa area**
Day 9	**Karuizawa to Nagano**
Day 10	**Nagano to Kaga**
Day 11	**Kaga and Komatsu areas**
Day 12	**Kaga to Toyooka**
Day 13	**Toyooka to Osaka, fly to Fukuoka and drive to Izumi via Yatsushiro**
Days 14 & 15	**Izumi, Arasaki and surrounds**
Day 16	**Izumi to Lake Mi-ike**
Day 17	**Day trip to Hyuga, boat trip and Myazaki**
Day 18	**Mi-ike to Myazaki and flight to Tokyo**
Day 19	**Final departures from Tokyo or continue on the Southern Islands Extension**

SOUTHERN ISLANDS EXTENSION:

Day 1	**Arrival in Tokyo and fly to Amami-Oshima (Amami)**
Day 2	**Amami-Oshima**
Day 3	**Amami-Oshima, fly to Naha and drive to Yanbaru (Okinawa)**
Day 4	**Yanbaru area**
Day 5	**Yanbaru to Naha via Kin Wetlands**
Day 6	**Naha, fly to Tokyo and transfer to Miyake Island via overnight ferry**
Day 7	**Miyake Island. Depart PM for Tokyo, pelagic birding en route**
Day 8	**Final departure**

TOUR ROUTE MAP



Dancing Cranes & Winter Birding



Red-crowned Crane by David Hoddinott

Day 1: Birding Tokyo. After breakfast, we shall catch a train to Tokyo Disneyland, not to see the sites but to visit Kasairinkaikoen, a large park with woodland, ponds, reedbeds and seashore. The park has a good path system and normally has a plethora of birds at this time of year. Some of the first birds we are likely to see include White-cheeked Starling, Oriental Turtle Dove, Black-faced Bunting, Large-billed Crow, Brown-eared Bulbul and Japanese Bush Warbler.

We'll spend some time scanning the wetland and associated brush for Northern Shoveler, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, Eastern Buzzard and Western Osprey. A number of scarcer birds will be searched for including Brown-cheeked Rail, Red-flanked Bluetail, lovely Azure-winged Magpies, Eurasian Bullfinch and both Pale and Brown-headed Thrushes. After an excellent introduction to Japanese birding, we shall head back to our lodgings for the evening.

Day 2: Tokyo and fly to Kushiro (Hokkaido). This morning we will embark on some introductory birding in the greater Tokyo area. Birding around the many canals, drainage ditches and parks that are dotted around the city can be extremely productive indeed and makes for the perfect introduction to Japanese birding. Two of the country's very scarce and elusive target species are sometimes easiest to find in Tokyo and these are the Brown-headed and White's Thrushes and we will target these species this morning. We are also likely to encounter a number of common and widespread waterfowl species, as well as Brown-eared Bulbul, Dusky Thrush and Japanese White-eye.

In the afternoon we will transfer through to Tokyo's Haneda Airport to connect with our domestic flight to Kushiro Airport, on the outskirts of Kushiro city, on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. After arriving on this beautiful island, we will drive to our hotel in downtown Kushiro, where we will overnight. We are likely to arrive at our comfortable overnight hotel in the early evening.



Japanese Wagtail by Dennis Braddy

Day 3: Kushiro to Yoroushi. This morning, we will embark on the short



Blakiston's Fish Owl by Glen Valentine

drive to a nearby river where we are likely to encounter close to a hundred Red-crowned (Japanese) Cranes mingling about at the icy, river-edge, the condensation puffing out from their beaks while they bugle away before heading off to their feeding grounds nearby. After absorbing this awe-inspiring spectacle we will head off to the nearby crane feeding area where we are again likely to see several dozen of these handsome and stately cranes feeding, dancing, calling, neck-stooping and wing-mantling in the snow covered fields. This is certainly birding in Japan in winter at its best! These elegant and iconic birds are paired-off and patchily distributed throughout the island's difficult-to-access wetlands during the summer months, but in winter they congregate in fairly large flocks at a few sites at the edge of the marshlands just north of Kushiro. As we marvel at this spectacle, it will become extremely clear why we ventured to this remote and frigid corner of Japan!

After enjoying the cranes, we will make our way north towards the east coast and the town of Rausu, situated on the Shiretoko Peninsula. We should have time this afternoon to make a short detour along the Notsuke Hanto Peninsula where we will make several stops along the road where we have good visibility out to sea. Scanning out across the open, icy waters we are likely to encounter our first Black and White-winged (Stejneger's) Scoters, the immaculate Harlequin and Long-tailed Ducks, Spectacled Guillemot, Ancient Murrelet, Red-necked Grebe and Slaty-backed, Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls. In the late afternoon we will depart Notsuke Hanto and drive the final stretch of road to the small, peaceful village of Yoroushi where we are based at a delightful, cosy hotel for the next two nights.

This area of eastern Hokkaido is home to a few pairs of the very impressive Blakiston's Fish Owl. It may require us staying up all night but we certainly have an excellent chance of seeing this spectacular bird during our stay in the area. Staring into the giant eyes of this nocturnal beauty, the largest owl on Earth must rank as one of the world's great birding experiences!



White-tailed Eagle by Glen Valentine

Day 4: Rausu and surrounds. We have the entire day to explore the surroundings of Rausu and the nearby Notsuke Hanto Peninsula. At some point in the day, we will board an ice breaker boat for a short



Steller's Sea Eagle by Adam Riley

ride into the harbour to enjoy the incredible spectacle of good numbers of regal Steller's and White-tailed Sea Eagles sitting out on the pack-ice, as well as several species of gull that includes Glaucous, Slaty-backed, Mew, Vega and Glaucous-winged Gulls.

The Rausu Harbour can also be extremely productive during January and February when several species of Auk shelter in these calm waters and past trips have produced Least and Crested Auklets, Common and Thick-billed Murres, Spectacled Guillemot and Ancient Murrelet. A scan out to sea should be productive, both around Rausu and off Notsuke Hanto, with this area being especially fruitful for waterfowl and loons/divers. Here we may find Red-throated, Black-throated and Pacific Loons (Divers), Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Common Goldeneye, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, White-winged and Black Scoters, Red-necked and Horned Grebes, Spectacled Guillemot, Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet.

Small, icy streams just inland from the coast may yield the captivating Brown Dipper and the scarce but impressive Crested Kingfisher, while the snow-covered meadows and forested hillsides are likely to produce herds of Sika Deer and the occasional Red Fox. The patches of open ground and grass tufts along the Notsuke Hanto Peninsula occasionally support several species of seedeater such as Common Redpoll, Eurasian Siskin, Grey-capped Greenfinch, and more sporadically Snow Bunting and Asian Rosy Finch. Tonight we will have a second opportunity to look for the regal Blakiston's Fish Owl should we have missed it the night before.

Day 5: Yoroushi to Nemuro and pelagic outing. Driving from our hotel in Rausu, we will follow the coast south towards the frozen Lake Furen. On our way, we should see Large-billed and Carrion Crows and the elegant Whooper Swan, while we'll also keep an eye and ear out for the massive Northern Raven, here at its northern-most range in Japan. We are also likely to encounter more White-tailed Steller's Sea Eagles. These magnificent raptors can be seen dotted around on the frozen lake and are also often seen flapping heavily as they move from one feeding area to another.



Spectacled Guillemot by Glen Valentine



Harlequin Duck by Rich Lindie

This afternoon we will depart on a short pelagic trip offshore from Nemuro, where we could expect some of the best sea-watching of the tour. Large numbers of sea-ducks, including Long-tailed and Harlequin Ducks, Common Goldeneye and White-winged and Black Scoters will compete for our attention with Red-throated Loon, Red-necked Grebe and Greater Scaup. We also stand a chance of finding the scarce and localised Red-faced Cormorant among the more common Pelagic Cormorant. Other specialities that we will look out for include Spectacled and Pigeon Guillemots, Thick-billed (Brunnich's) and Common Murres (Guillemots), Rhinoceros and Least Auklets and Ancient Murrelet. If we are very fortunate we may even find a Crested Auklet or Long-billed Murrelet, both of which are annual but only occur in very small numbers.

After what should be a fantastic few hours of sea-birding, we will make our way over to our accommodation in Nemuro. If we have time we can visit a nearby bird observatory where the feeders and surrounding trees often attract Eurasian Nuthatch, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Marsh, Japanese and Long-tailed Tits, Hawfinch, Eurasian Bullfinch, Red Crossbill, Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Common Redpoll and Grey-capped Greenfinch. We can expect to arrive at our comfortable hotel in Nemuro in the late afternoon.

Day 6: Lake Furen, Nemuro, Cape Nosappu and Kiritappu. We have a full day to explore the headlands, forests and bays around Nemuro where we are certain to find a number of exciting species. Our main target species at Kiritappu will be the scarce and erratic Asian Rosy Finch that is usually present somewhere in the area during the winter months. Secluded bays in the area often harbour wintering Brant Goose, as well as the occasional Smew and Falcated Duck. The area is surrounded by beautiful, verdant coniferous forest but accessing these forests during the winter months can be challenging and sometimes impossible if there is too much snow and ice around. If conditions are favourable we will venture into the forest along a side-track where, if we are very fortunate, we may encounter the impressive Black Woodpecker and Hazel Grouse, a difficult species at the best of times, and especially challenging to see in winter. We also hope to hear about an active and reliable Ural



Copper Pheasant (female) by Glen Valentine



Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker by Rich Lindie

Owl roosting site while we are in the area and we will also check several roost sites where we have previously seen this rare and beautiful owl.

Mammals are tough to find here, although we stand a chance of seeing Sika Deer, Harbour and Spotted (Largha) Seals and even the rarely-seen Sea Otter.

A trip to Cape Nosappu will hopefully produce the rare Red-faced Cormorant, of which there are usually a few birds hanging out with the abundant Pelagic Cormorants off the rocks at the point. A sea-watch here may also prove worthwhile and could produce any of the already-mentioned sea-ducks and Auks.

After a long but rewarding day in the field we can expect to return to our hotel in the early evening for our final night on Hokkaido.

Day 7: Nemuro to Kushiro, fly to Tokyo and transfer to Karuizawa. This morning, we begin our journey back to Kushiro from where we board our domestic flight back to Tokyo. Depending on the time of our flight, we may be able to stop in again at Cape Kiritappu should we still be missing any of the area's specialties.

After arrival in Tokyo, we will begin the drive to Karuizawa, situated in the scenically beautiful, forested highlands of central Honshu. We should arrive in the late afternoon and will have some time to settle into our comfortable Japanese style hotel, located just a few hundred meters from the prime birding area! Not only is our hotel located on the doorstep of this excellent forest, but we should also be able to enjoy some easy, relaxing birding around the hotel's bird feeders after what will have been a long day's travel.

Day 8: Karuizawa area. We have a full day to explore the forests and streams around Karuizawa. Our main target here will be the stunning but elusive Copper Pheasant, which is endemic to Japan's Honshu and Kyushu Islands. The area around Karuizawa supports a rather healthy population of the species, yet due to its furtive habits, we may have to work hard and be patient to see this special endemic! This area also supports a wealth of other interesting and sought-after species, partly due to the fact that the local residents have attempted to maintain an environment attractive to birds, as well as introducing building restrictions to maximise their available habitat. While walking in the area,



Long-billed Plover by Rich Lindie



Japanese Macaque (Snow Monkeys) by Glen Valentine

we should see fair numbers of Varied, Long-tailed, Japanese, Willow and Coal Tits, Brown-eared Bulbul, the eye-catching and distinctive *japonicus* subspecies of Eurasian Jay and Great Spotted and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers. We will also search for the uncommon Japanese Green Woodpecker, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Japanese Accentor and Japanese Grosbeak and will keep our eyes peeled for any of the rarer and more erratic winter visitors like Japanese and Bohemian Waxwings and White's Thrush. We also have a chance of finding the reticent Japanese Serow, a kind of forest-dwelling even-toed ungulate.

Day 9: Karuizawa to Nagano. We have another morning in the Karuizawa area to look for any of the area's target species that we may have missed, before heading further west towards Nagano this afternoon.

En route to Nagano, we will spend time birding a large lake in the Toden area where we are likely to find the attractive Smew, as well as large numbers of other more common and widespread waterfowl such as Great Crested and Little Grebes, Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Teal, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and Common Merganser. Baikal Teal is sometimes seen here too and we will scan the neighbouring river for Japanese Wagtail and the scarce Long-billed Plover. The surrounding scrub and reedbeds may yield Black-faced, Meadow and Rustic Buntings, Long-tailed Rosefinch and Dusky Thrush, as well as the gorgeous Japanese Green Pheasant.

Day 10: Nagano to Kaga. After breakfast, we head to a well-known site for the resident population of Japanese Macaque, also known endearingly as 'Snow Monkeys'. Watching troops of these monkeys playing in the snow, squabbling over food scraps or even bathing in their own 'hot-tub', will undoubtedly be one of the highlights of the tour! In the surrounding coniferous forests, we are likely to encounter several species of passerine such as Eurasian Treecreeper, Goldcrest, Long-tailed, Varied, Coal and Japanese Tits and Eurasian Jay. After enjoying the Snow Monkey spectacle, we leave the Nagano area and continue the drive west towards the Komatsu region on the western (Sea of Japan) coast of Honshu for a two-night stay.



Brown-cheeked Rail by Dennis Braddy

This afternoon we'll visit a large lake near the town of Kanazawa that always harbours an impressive array of waterfowl during the winter months and



Hooded and White-naped Cranes by David Hoddinott

we are likely to encounter Smew and Falcated Duck, and if we are lucky perhaps a couple of Baikal Teal amongst the masses of other more common and widespread species. The lake edge may reveal Bull-headed Shrike and Japanese Green Pheasant and in the late afternoon we will arrive at our accommodation in the Kaga area.

Day 11: Kaga and Komatsu areas. The area around Kaga, in particular the Katano Kamo-ike Wetland Reserve, hosts staggering numbers of waterfowl in winter. We will work patiently through the vast flocks and are likely to be rewarded with good, scope views of Baikal Teal, sometimes in their hundreds! Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese are also usually present, along with a few Falcated and Mandarin Ducks and Smew. The majority of the waterfowl will however consist of Eastern Spot-billed and Tufted Ducks, Northern Shoveler, Eurasian Wigeon and Mallard. Venturing out towards the fields close to the Komatsu Airport usually produces large numbers of Tundra Swan, mostly comprising the *bewickii* subspecies (Bewick's Swan) but occasionally supporting a few of the *columbianus* subspecies (Whistling Swan).



Saunders's Gull by Glen Valentine

Small to large flocks of White-fronted Geese are also usually present and vigilant searching may even turn up a vagrant Lesser White-fronted Goose. Eastern Marsh and Hen Harriers are sometimes seen quartering low over the grasslands. The stubble fields are also usually home to a flock or two of Grey-headed Lapwing and there is even a slim chance of flushing a Japanese Quail here in the agricultural lands.

We will also take some time to visit the coast itself, where we hope to find Pacific Reef Heron, Black-tailed and Vega Gulls, Japanese Cormorant, one or two species of Loon/Diver and Blue Rock Thrush.

Day 12: Kaga to Toyooka. After breakfast, we will have some final birding around the Kaga area to look swans, ducks and geese before starting our drive to Toyooka. The reason for visiting Toyooka, is to see one of Japan's most endangered species, the Oriental White Stork. This species used to be more widespread in Honshu but due to hunting, deforestation and new agricultural practices including the use of pesticides, it declined drastically. Due to this a project was started with captive – breeding birds as well as very importantly, working with the local farmers to keep their rice fields flooded in winter to provide the storks with feeding areas. The farmers are numerated for this work and this has been a huge success, as now there are well over 100 free-flying birds, which breed in the surrounding district. The aim of the project is to re-establish Oriental White Stork throughout Honshu.



Red-flanked Bluetail
by Dennis Braddy

Day 13: Toyooka to Osaka, fly to Fukuoka and drive to Izumi via Yatsushiro. This morning, we depart Toyooka and make our way to Osaka Airport from where we connect with our domestic flight to Fukuoka, a large city situated on the northern coast of the island of Kyushu. From here, we will drive south towards Izumi, stopping along the way at a large area of sandbanks and mudflats in an attempt to locate the scarce Saunder's Gull, which can usually be found here in small numbers. In fact, the area is an excellent site for a number of different species of gulls and we are also likely to see Black-headed, Black-tailed, Vega and Mew Gulls. Lesser Black-backed (this race sometimes split as Heuglin's), Slaty-backed and Pallas's Gulls are occasionally seen here, and we also stand a good chance of finding a number of other interesting species such as the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill, Kentish Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Western Osprey, Great Cormorant and Common Shelduck. In the late afternoon we continue the drive south, arriving at our hotel in Izumi in the early evening.



Taiga Bean Goose by Glen Valentine

Days 14 & 15: Arasaki and surrounds. We have two full days to explore the area around Arasaki. Our main focus here will be the fallow fields and rice paddies where thousands of Hooded and White-naped Cranes congregate and feed during the winter months. During good years, it is not unusual to count over 10,000 Hooded and 3,000 White-naped Cranes here, and they are usually joined by very small numbers of Sandhill and Common Cranes. Both Demoiselle and Siberian Cranes have been recorded here on several occasions over the past but are vagrants to the area and we'd be immensely fortunate to see either of these two species. However, the immense numbers

of Hooded and White-naped Cranes undoubtedly makes for one of the most spectacular avian gatherings on earth!



White-backed Woodpecker by Dennis Braddy

Although Arasaki is understandably most famous for this spectacle, the diversity of habitats in the area also makes it one of the richest places for winter birding in Japan. The reedbeds fringing the rivers often harbour Chinese Penduline Tit, Common Reed Bunting and Brown-cheeked Rail, while Japanese Quail can sometimes be found amongst the rice fields. The rivers themselves hold Crested Kingfisher and the highly desirable Long-billed Plover, while in the more wooded areas; we should find the handsome Daurian Redstart, Japanese White-eye, Bull-headed Shrike, White-cheeked Starling, fair numbers of Dusky and Pale Thrushes and with luck, the rare Brown-headed Thrush. Huge flocks of Rook dominate the gaps in the fields between the cranes and careful scanning usually reveals a few Daurian Jackdaws amongst them. Areas of thickets and scrub are home to several species of bunting that include Black-faced, Meadow, Chestnut-eared and Rustic Buntings, while a number of waterfowl can be seen in the rivers and ponds throughout the area along with occasional flocks of Black-faced and Eurasian Spoonbills. Other grassland species we'll be on the lookout for while driving around the agricultural lands include Eastern Marsh and Hen Harriers, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Skylark (the subspecies occurring here sometimes split as Japanese Skylark) and Buff-bellied Pipit. If we are very lucky we may even encounter some of Arasaki's rare but generally annual visitors like Merlin, Northern Goshawk, Short-eared Owl and Red-billed Starling. Some of the other interesting and noteworthy species we may encounter during our time in the area include Japanese Bush Warbler, Green Sandpiper, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Eastern Buzzard, House Swift, Russet Sparrow, Asian House Martin and Grey Wagtail.



Varied Tit by Dennis Braddy

If time allows, we'll also venture out to a nearby wooded lake in the Sendai area where we will look for Mandarin Duck, the scarce and nomadic White-bellied Green Pigeon and the secretive Grey Bunting.

Day 16: Arasaki to Lake Mi-ike. After a final morning in the Arasaki area, we will drive east into the highlands of Kyushu towards Lake Mi-ike. En route we may visit the Sendai River where previous trips have found the very rare and irregular Scaly-sided Merganser. The river also often harbours Mandarin Duck, Crested Kingfisher and Brown Dipper, while the adjacent forest-edge sometimes turns up White-bellied Green Pigeon and Brown-headed Thrush.

We can expect to arrive at Lake Mi-ike in the mid to late afternoon with a few hours to do some initial explorations and birding in the tall woodland that surrounds the lake. Here we may find Varied, Japanese and Long-tailed Tits, Daurian

Redstart and the striking Yellow-throated Bunting before heading down to our wonderful accommodation near the lake.



Japanese Murrelet by Glen Valentine

Day 17: Day trip to Hyuga, boat trip and Myazaki. This morning, we embark on a day trip to Hyuga, a coastal town situated on the north-east coast. Our prime reason for this journey is to search for the localised, endemic Japanese Murrelet. At Hyuga Harbour we board a boat that will take us around the harbour and the bay in search of the Murrelet and our chances of seeing this Japanese specialty is excellent. Other species that we are likely to see during this outing include Black-tailed, Vega and Mew Gulls and Great and Japanese Cormorants. If we do not find the Murrelet on the boat trip, we will scan out to sea from a nearby headland where previous trips have produced scope views of this sought-after species from the shore. We will also keep a lookout for the scarce Japanese Wood Pigeon that is sometimes present in the forest that lines the trail to the viewpoint.

Depending on how much time we still have available, we might also call in at an estuary in the Myazaki area. Here we may encounter several species of wader on the mudflats that could include Lesser Sand Plover and we may also find Black-faced and Eurasian Spoonbills. In the late afternoon we will then make our way back to our accommodation near Lake Mi-ike for our final night's stay on Kyushu.

Day 18: Lake Mi-ike area and flight to Tokyo. This morning we will have time for some final birding around Lake Mi-ike to search for any species we may not have encountered there on our first afternoon in the area or may simply wish to enjoy seeing again and these include Ryukyu Minivet (here near the northern limit of its range), White-backed Woodpecker, Japanese Grosbeak, Yellow-throated and Grey Buntings, Eurasian Nuthatch, White's Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Olive-backed Pipit, Daurian Redstart, Forest Wagtail and the introduced - but highly attractive Red-billed Leiothrix.



Hooded Cranes by Glen Valentine

In the mid-morning we will then begin the drive to Myazaki from where we will catch our flight back to Tokyo. Upon arrival in Tokyo, we will make our way to our hotel and check-in before enjoying our final, celebratory dinner together.

Day 19: Final departures from Tokyo or continue on the Southern Islands Extension. Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end so that the

next unforgettable birding adventure can begin, and this morning our grand tour of Japan will conclude after breakfast. For those continuing on the Southern Islands Extension we will make our way over to Haneda Airport from where we connect with our internal flight to Amami-Oshima to begin our exciting extension of Japan's Ryukyu Islands.

Southern Islands Extension



Okinawa Rail by Glen Valentine

On our extension to the Ryukyu Islands, we will visit the small island of Amami, home to the striking Lidth's Jay, Amami Thrush and the scarce Amami Woodcock. Thereafter, we venture to the island of Okinawa, where a host of exciting endemics can be found – endangered Okinawa Woodpecker, recently discovered Okinawa Rail, stunning Ryukyu Robin and Ryukyu Minivet are just some of the island's tantalizing species that we hope to see during our explorations here!

Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo and fly to Amami-Oshima (Amami). Today we will fly to the subtropical island of Amami. Upon arrival, we will begin the fairly short drive across the island towards the small city of Naze, our comfortable base for the next two nights on the island.

En route to Naze we should have time to stop in at an area of offshore rocks where our main target species will be the Japanese (Temminck's) Cormorant. We may also find Brown Boobies flying low over the breakers, as well as Pacific Golden Plovers and Ruddy Turnstones roosting on the rocks. Another short stop fairly close to Naze could produce our first suite of exciting Amami specialties such as the vibrantly coloured Lidth's Jay, 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 as many of these specialities as possible during our



The *komadori* subspecies of Ryukyu Robin by David Hoddinott

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, furtive Ryukyu Scops Owl and if we are extremely lucky maybe even a Long-eared Owl or the little known and seldom-recorded Japanese Scops Owl.

Day 2: Amami-Oshima. This morning, we will head back early to Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve in search of Amami Woodcock and Amami Thrush should we not have seen them yesterday. One of our main target species this morning will be the beautiful Lidth's Jay. These birds are 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, 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. In the early afternoon we will make our way to the coast where we'll scan an area of tidal mudflats and rocky coastline where we are likely to encounter Japanese and Great Cormorants, Kentish, Lesser Sand and Pacific Golden Plovers, Grey-tailed Tattler, Dunlin and Red-necked Stint, while the distinctive, rufous-bellied *philippensis* subspecies of Blue Rock Thrush is often seen around the edge of the beach.

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



Amami Woodcock by David Hoddinott

Day 3: Amami-Oshima, fly to Naha and drive to Yanbaru (Okinawa). We will have the early morning to search the Kinsakubaru Forest one last time for any species we may still need or require better views of, before heading to the airport for a short flight to the city of Naha, on the southern end of Okinawa Island. We are likely to arrive in the mid afternoon after which we will begin the drive up to the northern end of the island where we can expect to arrive in the late afternoon or early evening. Depending on the time of



Lidth's Jay by Glen Valentine

our flight from Amami, we may be able to make a short stop in at a series of rice paddies and irrigation channels en route. These could turn up Grey-faced Buzzard, White-breasted Waterhen, Pin-tailed and Common Snipes, Long-toed and Temminck's Stints and the scarce and elusive Cinnamon Bittern if we are lucky.

Day 4: Yanbaru area. Our main target species early this morning will be the stunning Okinawa Rail, a bird described to science only as recently as 1981! We are likely to hear them calling in the area but we will have to be fortunate to obtain a view 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 within arm's reach from the edge of the road. 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 in the world with an estimated population of fewer than 600 individuals! Other exciting species we hope to encounter during our woodpecker quest include Whistling Green Pigeon, Japanese Wood Pigeon, Ryukyu Minivet and the stunning Ryukyu Robin, represented here by the *namiyei* subspecies that may soon be split as Okinawa Robin. 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. We will also try for Ryukyu Scops Owl at night, should we have missed it on Amami, as well as Northern Boobook and this will provide us with additional chances for Okinawa Rail if we have not yet located it.



Ryukyu Scops Owl by David Hoddinott

Day 5: Yanbaru to Naha via Kin Wetlands. We will spend the morning further exploring the Yanbaru area for any species we may still require, after which we will make our way to the Kin wetlands in the afternoon. Possible species here include Cinnamon Bittern, Common and Pin-tailed Snipes, Temminck's and Long-toed Stints, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Scaly-breasted Munia, Buff-bellied and Red-throated Pipits, and the rare and elusive Brown-headed Thrush to name just a handful, though there is always the possibility of something unusual such as Greater Painted Snipe or Oriental Pratincole. Thereafter, we will make our way south to Naha, where we spend our final night on Okinawa.



Black-faced Spoonbills by Glen Valentine

Day 6: Naha, fly to Tokyo and transfer to Miyake Island via overnight ferry. This morning, we will explore a few of the wetlands in the Naha area. Several exciting and noteworthy species are available in this area with our main target being the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill. Many other migrants spend the winter here and we may also find Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Little Ringed and Pacific Golden Plovers and Bar-tailed Godwit. We may even encounter a Ruddy-breasted Crake skulking at the edge of the reedbeds in the early morning. After a final morning's birding, we will head to the airport for our return flight to Tokyo, before transferring to the Tokyo Harbour. Depending on time, we may visit a nearby wetland for birding. Later this evening, we will catch an overnight ferry to Miyakejima.

Day 7: Miyake Island. Depart PM for Tokyo, pelagic birding en route. After a pre-dawn arrival on Miyake Island, we will head to an inland lake surrounded by dense forest. Here we will search for several special endemic birds including Black Wood-pigeon, the very distinct Owston's Tit, regarded as a full species by most authorities, the shy Japanese Robin and best of all, the Izu Island Thrush. Other more widespread species include Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Pale and Dusky Thrushes, Japanese Tit, Blue Rock Thrush, Japanese White-eye, Eurasian Siskin and Eurasian Tree Sparrow. Our anticipated return journey, will be very exciting. Traveling through an area called the "Oshima Triangle" by local birders, we have very good chances for several mouth-watering pelagic species as soon as we leave the harbour including: Streaked and Sooty Shearwaters, Tristram's Storm Petrel, Northern Fulmar, Ancient and Japanese Murrelets, Laysan, Black-footed and the highly sought-after Short-tailed Albatross. The latter species is now recovering steadily on its protected breeding grounds on the Senkaku Islands, Japan's most



Ryukyu Minivet by Glen Valentine

Southerly Islands and is frequently seen in the "Oshima Triangle" at this time of year. We will arrive in Tokyo in the evening after a very exciting pelagic and transfer to our hotel.

Day 8: Final departures. After an action-packed extension, the tour will conclude after breakfast.

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 19 for those on the main tour, and all meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 8 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 long 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.
- In some areas, it can get **very** cold, especially on Hokkaido. Days are fairly short at this time of the year and some of the birds also occur in low densities. You should, therefore, expect some full day's birding without mid-day breaks in order to maximise our chances of finding all of the countries' special species.
- Accommodations vary somewhat in Japan, from excellent in the main centres such as Tokyo to fairly basic on Hokkaido. 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 we generally opt for the best available accommodation; however, this is sometimes below the standard of what you may have come to expect. Please note that some accommodations during the tour have shared and/or basic 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 depart from the Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) on day 1. The tour will begin with local birding at 08:00, so please do arrive the day before the tour begins to ensure your participation. The tour will conclude after breakfast on day 19 at our Tokyo hotel.

The Southern Islands Extension tour will depart from Tokyo's Haneda Airport, Tokyo (IATA: HND) on day 1 and conclude after breakfast on day 8 at our Tokyo hotel.

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 approximately $40.

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.**