South Korea

Winter Specialities



Scaly-sided Merganser by Clayton Burne

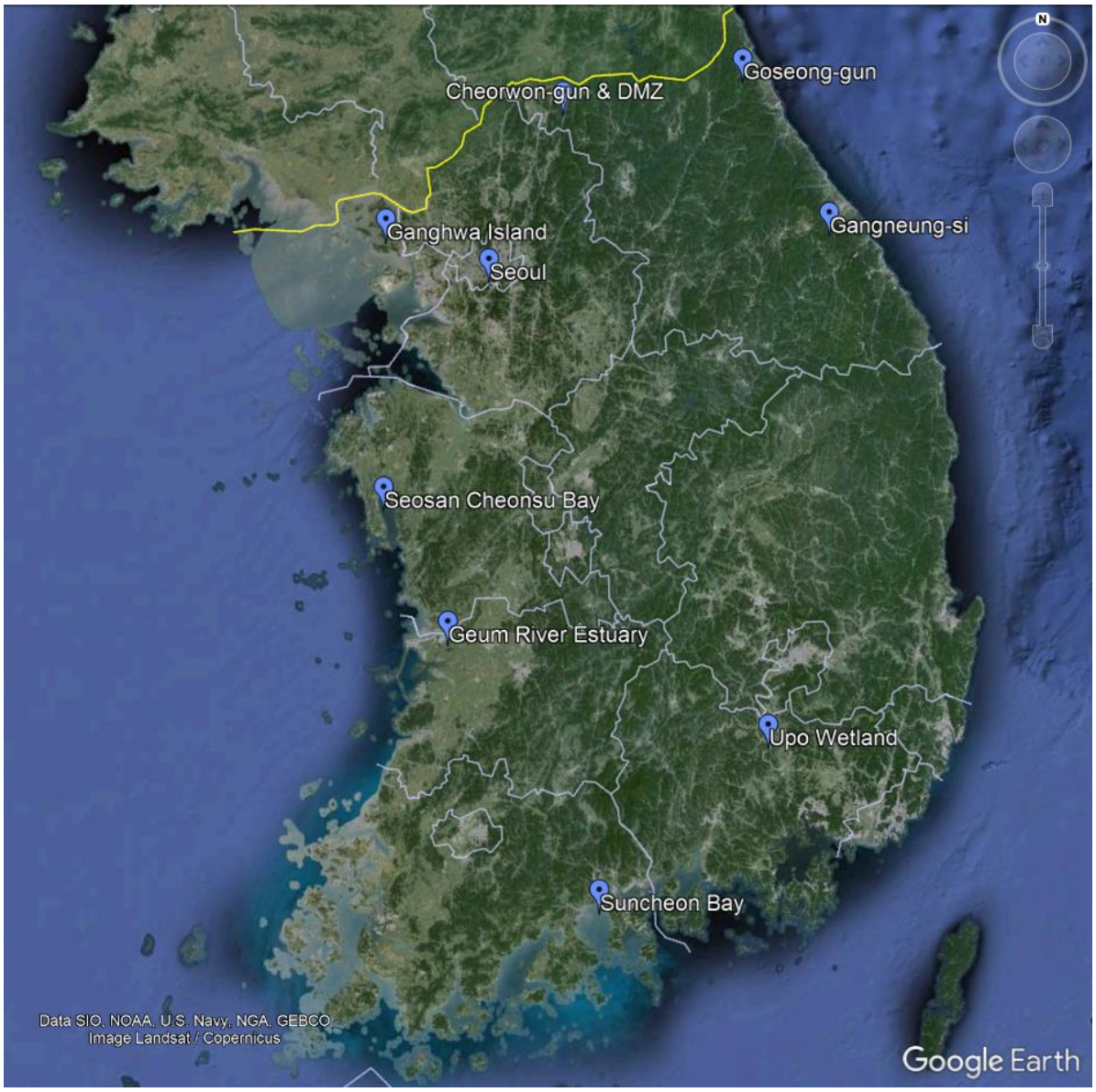
South Korea is a key wintering ground for several migratory species, many of whom are found in very large numbers. These great birding spectacles are set against a backdrop of snowy mountains, pine forests, sweeping coastal wetlands and estuaries. We can look forward to enjoying impressive gatherings of wildfowl with vast flocks of geese and cranes, colonies of various gulls and rafts of alcids just offshore.

Often overlooked for their more illustrious neighbours of Japan and China, South Korea offers equally exceptional birding in a far more condescend area, with top class infrastructure and enviable safety. The country's lack of bird persecution contributes to the abundance of birds, providing for repeat, quality sightings of sought-after species instead of fleeting glimpses.

Highlights are sure to include stunning encounters with the rare Scaly-sided Merganser, large flocks of Red-crowned, White-naped and Hooded Cranes, a chance for Steller's Sea Eagle, numerous Baikal Teal, Swan Goose, Oriental Stork, Solitary Snipe, Azure-winged Magpie, Chinese Grey Shrike, Chinese Penduline Tit and Relict Gull.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Seoul**
Day 2	**Hangang (Han) Estuary & Imjin River**
Day 3	**Cheorwon-gun, the DMZ & cranes**
Day 4	**National Arboretum & Han River**
Day 5	**Seoul to Goseong-gun**
Day 6	**Goseong-gun to Gangneung-si**
Day 7	**Upo Wetland**
Day 8	**Suncheon Bay**
Day 9	**Geum River Estuary**
Day 10	**Seosan Cheonsu Bay**
Day 11	**Ganghwa Island**
Day 12	**Final departure**



Birding sites in detail

Hangang (Han) Estuary & Imjin River. We'll spend a day visiting the environs of the wide Han River Estuary and its confluence with the south flowing Imjin River. Highlights to be found as we meander the mudflats and scrub may include Smew, Brown-cheeked Rail, both White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes, White-tailed Eagle, the rare, but seemingly annual Steller's Sea Eagle, Grey-capped Pygmy and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Bull-headed Shrike, Azure-winged Magpie, Dusky and Naumann's Thrushes, Daurian Redstart, Japanese Wagtail, and both Yellow-throated and Rustic Buntings.



Red-crowned Cranes by David Hoddinott

The Paju Sannam wetland area of the Imjin River is an excellent site for Swan Goose, vast numbers of Tundra Been and Greater White-front Geese, Mallards, and Eastern Spot-billed Ducks, as well as several raptor possibilities such as Eastern Buzzard, Eurasian Goshawk and Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

Cheorwon-gun, the DMZ (demilitarized zone) & cranes. This historic site of ancient fortifications is located close to the DMZ, allowing for excellent views over the river below. However, our pirmary reason for being here is to witness the flypast of several species of cranes. Roosting across the border in North Korea, the cranes start moving south in the morning to feed on the exapansive Cheorwon-gun Plain, flying close by to where we'll be standing. Very small numbers of Sandhill, Common and Hooded Cranes are often found in the area, and there is even an outside chance for Siberian Cranes.



Swan Goose by Sarah Thomas

Large numbers of Cinereous Vultures can be expected overhead, along with skeins of wildfowl containing Taiga and Tundra Bean, Greater White-fronted and even a slight chance of Lesser White-fronted Goose.

The river below holds large numbers of duck, primarily Mallards and Goosanders, whils the rougher water may turn up our first Scaly-sided Merganser. Several White-tailed Eagles are likely to be patrolling the icy waters, occassionally flushing flocks of waterfowl.

The roadside scrub often holds the tricky Naumann's Thrush, Durian Redstart, Chinese Grey Shrike, Bull-headed Shrike, rare Long-tailed Rosefinch or even a few Hawfinches, whilst the extensive stubble fields have small flock of Rustic and Yellow-throated Buntings, common Oriental Greenfinch and Brambling.



Solitary Snipe by Dušan Brinkhuizen

National Arboretum & Han River. The picturesque gardens offer a great introduction to open woodland birding. Varied Tits have been habituated by one of the wardens, often coming very close if nuts are on offer. Our primary reason for being here is to target the tricky Solitary Snipe, a small stream running through the gardens being one of the best sites in the world to see it. A supporting cast of Brown-cheeked Bulbul, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Daurian Redstart, Hawfinch, Yellow-throated Bunting, Vinous-throated Parrotbill will keep us entertained.

With luck, we could stumble onto a rarity such as Pallas's Rosefinch or even Siberian Accentor, whilst Black Woodpecker or Yellow-bellied Tit would be an excellent return.

The nearby Han River is a reasonably reliable stakeout for Scaly-sided Merganser and, in recent years at least, Steller's Sea Eagle has reliably wintered here. We can also expect to see vast numbers of Whooper Swan and both Taiga and Tundra Bean Geese.



Relict Gull by Sarah Thomas

Goseong-gun. Located on the northeastern coast, we use Goseong-gun as a base to explore several headlands, bays, headlands, and beaches for new species.

From the headlands we'll gaze out to see where rafts of Ancient Murrelet and Rhinoceros Auklet, several Black-throated Diver and the odd Pacific Diver, Black and Stejneger's Scoters, small numbers of Black-necked, Great Crested, Horned and Red-necked Grebes and large number of Pelagic Cormorants are typical.

On the beaches and rocky outcrops, we'll work our way through Black-tailed, Slaty-



Hooded and White-naped Cranes by David Hoddinott

backed, Vega, Common and Glaucous Gulls, and with a little luck might be rewarded with a Glaucous-winged or American Herring Gull.

Sheltered rocky bays are often home to smaller numbers of Japanese Cormorant, flocks of Harlequin Duck and Black-legged Kittiwake.

Gangneung-si. We'll visit a nearby estuary, well known for its large rafts of male Smew, providing spectacular views of this attractive duck. Small numbers of Long-billed Plover and Japanese Wagtail are occasionally found here too.

A large lake offers more good views of Smew, as well as several other waterfowl such as Goosander, Common Goldeneye and Greater Scaup. The surrounding scrub and open woodland may hold Dusky and Naumann's Thrushes, Chinese Grosbeak, and small flocks of Hawfinch, whilst the slightly thicker undergrowth may hide the odd Siberian Accentor.



Baikal Teal by Sarah Thomas

Open fields may turn up Rustic Bunting and Oriental Skylark.

Upo Wetland. This largest wetland complex has large numbers of wintering wildfowl such as Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, both Tundra and Taiga Bean Geese, Eurasian Spoonbill, Tundra and Whooper Swans and the odd Mandarin Duck.



Female and Male Smews by Glen Valentine

Suncheon Bay. This areas is host to another crane spectacle, with hundreds of Hooded Cranes feeding in the stubble fields. Careful scanning will likely find a small scattering of Common Cranes, and if we are lucky, a few Sandhill Cranes amongt them. Overhead, we should find Eastern, Upland and Rough-legged Buzzards, as well as Hen Harriers courting the fields. We'll try to entice a few Chinese Penduline Tits from the thick reedbeds.

Nearby wetlands typically hold small numbers of Baikal Teal and Chinese Grey Shrike is possible.

Geum River Estuary. We head for the ginormous Baikal Teal statue to give ourselves a good perch from which to gaze over the river barrage below for real Baikal Teals! If our luck is in, we could see flocks numbering many thousands of this otherwise elusive species. There are likely to be large flocks of Common Pochards and Northern Pintails, and possibly a Falcated Duck or two.



Chinese Penduline Tit by Clayton Burne

Seosan Cheonsu Bay. One of the top birding sites in Korea, we will spend time targeting Oriental Stork or perhaps Relict Gull and Chinese Grey Shrike if we haven't seen them yet. We all also enjoy the numerous Hooded Cranes feeding in the area whilst poking about in the reed beds for Pallas's and Common Reed Buntings.
Scrubby patches may have Black-faced Bunting, and scarcities here may include Dusky Warbler.

Ganghwa Island. The tidal flats and rice fields are an excellent site for Red-crowned and White-naped Cranes, as well as Mandarin and Falcated Ducks, Red-breasted Merganser, White-tailed Eagle, Azure-winged Magpie, Long-tailed Rosefinch, Oriental Greenfinch, Meadow and Yellow-throated Buntings and the oaccsaional Rustic Bunting.

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Mostly an easy tour. Days are reasonably short. Drives are not particularly long; most birding is straight forward. Suitable for all birding / wildlife interest levels and most mobility capabilities.
Birding Ease		Easy. Several target species & rarities, but species diversity is reasonably low. Most birding is in open habitat.
Accommodation		Good to comfortable.
Walking / Trails		Fair amount of walking, mostly on roads & tracks. Possibly some snow/ice underfoot.
Vehicles / Roads		Very good quality roads in a comfortable vehicle.
Photography		Worthwhile to good. Some species can be distant (i.e.: estuaries).
Annoyances		Food can repetitive, especially for vegans. Temperatures are cold, typically ranging from 0°C to 10°C (32°F to 50°F) during the day. Snow can fall at any time, strong winds & fog may affect birding.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 12;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services;
- Tips for local guides, drivers and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions;
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, 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.

Twin rooms are not available, so all participants not sharing a double bed will require a single room.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is 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. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Days are short at this time of the year. You should expect to be in the field or travelling from one location to another on most days, without dedicated mid-day breaks at a lodge or hotel.
- 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.
- Temperatures can be cold to very cold, typically ranging from 0°C to 10°C (32°F to 50°F) during the day. Snow can fall at any time, strong winds & fog may affect birding.
- In some areas it can get very cold, especially if we encounter high winds.
- We move accommodation regularly, so the more luggage you pack the less mobile you are. It is thus important for your comfort and ease of travel that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20kg (44lb) for check in luggage and 8kg (+-18lb) for hand luggage.
- Korean dinners are usually meat or fish based along with rice or noodles, or a stew/soup dish. Vegetarian food is not widely eaten.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour will begin at our hotel in Seoul with a welcome dinner on day 1. The tour will conclude at Incheon International Airport after breakfast on day 12.

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.

Incheon International Airport, Seoul (IATA: ICN) is the main port of entry & departure for international flights for this tour.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.