

Winter birds in the Land of the Rising Sun

Japan is a huge archipelago stretching along the northern Pacific Ocean. Our tour concentrates on Kyushu, Hokkaido, Katano on the Sea of Japan and Karuizawa in the Japanese Alps. This winter tour to Japan should produce many memorable highlights in a country steeped in its own tradition and culture. Interesting species present in winter include Short-tailed Albatross, White-naped and Hooded Cranes, Baikal Teal, Blakiston's Fish Owl and impressive concentrations of Steller's and White-tailed Eagles.

This is the most comprehensive Japanese winter tour available today taking in a wide-range of habitats and sites. Birdwatching Breaks has been running tours to Japan since 1996, totalling 24 to date. Mark Finn has an extensive knowledge and experience of Japan's unique birdlife and where to find it. Over the years, Birdwatching Breaks has built up trust with local Japanese birdwatchers, making the company one of the market leaders to this wonderful country.

■ The following itinerary is sometimes subject to change due to ferry schedules from Nagoya.

Days 1-2: We fly to Tokyo, arriving on the morning of Day 2. On arrival, we travel to Tokyo station and take the bullet train to Karuizawa for a two-night stay. Karuizawa is a picturesque town situated in the foothills of the Japanese Alps. We make an initial exploration of woodland and forest habitats for Brown Dipper, Japanese Wagtail, Oriental Turtle Dove, Grey-capped Greenfinch, Hawfinch, Brambling and Rustic Bunting.

Day 3: This morning we walk the forest trails of Karuizawa searching for the rare Copper Pheasant. Feeders attract Japanese Green Woodpecker, Long-tailed and Pallas's Rosefinches, Japanese and Varied Tits, Japanese Grosbeak and Meadow Bunting. Near the river, we may locate Japanese Accentor, Eurasian Wren and, in trees laden with mistletoe, Japanese Waxwing. Patches of mature woodland often have White-backed Woodpecker and Daurian Redstart. During the afternoon, we explore rural roads and a reservoir near Karuizawa in search of Green Pheasant and the localised Long-billed Plover. On the reservoir we should locate a wide range of wildfowl including Smew and Falcated Duck.

Dates

Tour A: Friday February 5th –
Saturday February 20th 2021
Tour B: Friday February 4th –
Saturday February 19th 2022
Leader: Mark Finn and Kiwako
Minami
Group Size: 8
Birds: 155-175

Day 4: Today we travel back to Haneda airport for an internal flight to Miyazaki in Kyushu. On arrival, we transfer to Hyuga. Night at Hyuga.

Day 5: Our main interest today is the near-endemic Japanese Murrelet, which is best viewed by taking a short boat trip offshore. After seeing the murrelet, we travel to Mi-ike, a forested area of evergreens and deciduous trees surrounding a volcanic lake. En route we make a short diversion to a coastal wetland which has on recent visits produced sightings of Oriental Stork, Baer's Pochard and Long-billed Dowitcher. At Mi-ike a walk along the paths should give views of Red-flanked Bluetail and Grey and Yellow-throated Buntings. A campground is productive for Japanese

Green and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Olive-backed Pipit, Varied Tit, Ryukyu Minivet and Japanese Grosbeak. Transfer to Izumi along a quiet country road which often has Pale Thrush and a chance of Copper Pheasant. On arrival, we have a two-night stay in Izumi.

Day 6: This morning we visit Arasaki crane reserve, with wintering Hooded and White-naped Cranes and, possibly, Sandhill, Common, Demoiselle and Siberian Cranes. Extensive estuarine habitats at Arasaki attract Japanese Cormorant, Intermediate Egret, Black-eared Kite and wildfowl. Agricultural fields are a winter home to Greater Painted-snipe, Japanese Skylark, Oriental Rook, Daurian Jackdaw and Rustic, Black-faced and Meadow Buntings. Gardens and hedgerows of Arasaki attract Hawfinch and Japanese Grosbeak. Further south an area of dormant ricefields can be productive for wintering Eastern Reed and Chestnut-eared Buntings and in milder winters Eurasian Wryneck. A scan of the wires may reveal substantial numbers of Brambling and Russet Sparrow. In late afternoon, we visit a boulder-strewn river holding Long-billed Plover, Crested Kingfisher, Eastern Blue Rock Thrush, Barn Swallow, Asian House Martin and Japanese Wagtail.

Day 7: An early start today as we travel to Ariake-kai, a coastal bay north of Arasaki which has extensive areas of mudflats, river estuaries and agricultural fields. At high tide we study roosting and feeding Saunders's Gulls, Black-faced Spoonbills, shorebirds and wildfowl. Muddy dykes usually have Spotted Redshank and Marsh Sandpiper with Meadow Bunting and Chinese Penduline Tit in the reeds. A remnant patch of marsh near Saga is reliable for wintering Merlin, Eurasian Woodcock, Ruddy Crake and Oriental Magpie. Transfer to Saga for the night.

Day 8: Today we head north to Shikanoshima Island which is reached via a causeway. Shikanoshima is a regular haunt of Red-throated, Black-throated and Pacific Divers whilst sheltered bays offer a safe refuge to Great Crested and Black-



Red-crowned Crane Photo: Neil Norvock

necked Grebes, Greater Scaup and other wildfowl. Shikanoshima is a reliable area for wintering Japanese Bush Warbler, Pale Thrush and, on offshore stacks, Japanese Cormorant and on occasions Brown Booby. Transfer to Fukuoka for a flight to Komatsu for a two-night stay.

Days 9-10: Our main interest is the wetlands and rice fields of Katano bordering the Sea of Japan. Although small in size, Katano attracts geese and ducks in winter including the globally-threatened Baikal Teal. Other species occurring on a regular basis include Middendorf's Bean, Greater White-fronted and occasionally Lesser White-fronted Geese, Eastern Marsh Harrier and Grey-headed Lapwing, whilst rarities comprise Tundra Bean and Swan Geese and Siberian Crane. Depending on winter conditions we also have a chance of locating Solitary Snipe in woodland pools. Along the Sea of Japan, we search for

Red-necked Grebe, Ancient Murrelet and other seabirds. Woodlands around Katano hold the commoner Japanese birds and, on occasions, Chinese Grosbeak and Japanese Waxwing. On Day 10 we take the express train to Nagoya where we board a comfortable ferry bound for Tomakomai in Hokkaido. We have two nights aboard in first-class en-suite cabins.

Day 11: A whole day seawatching in the North Pacific Ocean. We can expect White-billed and Pacific Divers, Laysan Albatross, Streaked and Short-tailed Shearwaters, Rhinoceros and Ancient Murrelets, Pomarine and South Polar Skuas, Black-tailed Gull and Red-necked and Grey Phalaropes. Rarities may include Short-tailed Albatross and Tristram's Storm Petrel. We also have a chance of observing Northern Fur Seal and Pacific White-sided Dolphin.

Day 12: Before docking at Tomakomai, we may see Least Auklet and Common and Brünnich's Guillemots. In the harbour itself we may encounter Fork-tailed Storm Petrels which winter in the area. Transfer to Chitose airport for an internal flight to Kushiro. On arrival we travel to Nemuro, our base for three nights. Furen-ko should provide us with Black and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, Marsh Tit and other woodland species. In Nemuro we may locate parties of Bohemian Waxwings.

Day 13: Our main interest today is the sheltered bays and estuaries en route to Cape Nosappu overlooking the Kurile Islands. The Nemuro Straits concentrates divers, seaduck, gulls and alcids. We should find Pelagic Cormorant, Harlequin Duck, Snow's and Spectacled Guillemots, Least Auklet and, possibly, Long-billed Murrelet. The frozen capes have White-tailed and Steller's Sea Eagles and the harbours Glaucous and Glaucous-winged Gulls. In the afternoon, we visit Cape Kiritappu, an exposed peninsula jutting into the Sea of Okhotsk where a house with feeders has Asian Rosy Finch. Off the cape, we may see Red-necked Grebe, Red-faced Cormorant, Black and Stejneger's Scoters and Long-tailed Duck.

At the end of the day, we visit a farm for Blakiston's Fish Owl.

Day 14: Today we head north towards Notsuke Hando, a remote peninsula. On our journey north, we check harbours for Whooper Swan and Smew. Depending on the severity of the winter, we may find Short-eared Owl and Snow Bunting. At Notsuke Hando hundreds of Steller's Sea Eagles congregate on the ice or in bare trees – a truly spectacular sight. Also present are White-tailed Eagle, Slaty-backed and Kamchatka Gulls, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser. Ice-free rivers are home to Brown Dipper. If we have not managed to see Blakiston's Fish Owl we make a short diversion to Rausu.

Day 15: We leave Nemuro and visit Tancho no Sato, a feeding area for Red-crowned Cranes. In winter this delightful bird often dances in the snow accompanying itself with bugling calls. After this finale, we head towards Kushiro Airport for an internal flight to Tokyo and our final night in Japan.

Day 16: Transfer to Narita for our flight to Europe. Arrival is later the same day.

Prices

Ground Price: £5,995
 Tour B: £5,995 (provisional)
 Single room: £600
 Deposit: £600
 *Air Fare: £1,550

This holiday is fully inclusive of ferries, accommodation, meals, transport, guidance and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature, air passenger duty taxes, excess baggage and fuel surcharges.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*