

Japan

Winter Spectacular

Monday 01 November – Wednesday 17 November 2010

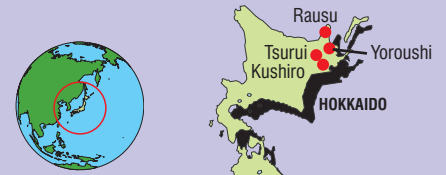
Leader: Mark Brazil

2010 Cost **£5,899** single room supplement **£360**

Japan comprises a chain of islands that span 1,600 miles and encompass many different vegetation zones. Stretching from the sub-arctic of Hokkaido to the sub-tropics of Nansei Shoto, these beautiful islands with their jagged and broken coastlines possess some of the most striking scenery in eastern Asia. This tour will offer a unique insight into the natural history and culture of this fascinating country. We will see Hokkaido at the beginning of winter, a magical land of snow and ice (the dry atmosphere is a pleasant surprise for those used to the damp of Britain's cold weather), with all the thrills of arctic birding but without the disadvantages of very short days, and with a gathering of birds to whet any appetite. Imagine the flocks of graceful Red-crowned Cranes dancing. Think of sea-eagles soaring close overhead and not only the White-tailed Eagle, but also the commoner, larger and far more spectacular Steller's Sea-Eagle, perhaps the world's most impressive bird of prey. The thrill of watching a Blakiston's Fish-Owl dropping into icy water to catch its dinner is a sight never to be forgotten. At the opposite end of the country in Kyushu we will watch and listen to the gathering of the attractive White-naped and Hooded Cranes, and enjoy birding our way through flocks of thrushes and buntings. This is winter birding at its finest. An added attraction will be a visit to see the Snow Monkeys (Japanese Macaques) as they bathe in the warm waters of thermal pools against an icy mountain backdrop.

We have been fortunate in obtaining the services of Mark Brazil, author of the *Birds of Japan* and *Birds of South-east Asia*, who will be the guide throughout this tour. He has now lived and worked in Japan for over 25 years and is Japan's premier birdwatcher.

To visit Japan is to have a complete cultural experience. Birding aside, the country is a fascinating one, and for those with a spirit of adventure and a willingness to adapt to new ways of doing things, it is the holiday of a lifetime. Even day to day aspects, such as sleeping (on a futon), bathing (in an ofuro and even an outdoor hotspring in Hokkaido) and eating (Japanese-style) all take on a new significance and become fun events. But don't worry, the Japanese-style living will be interspersed with western-style accommodation and food, and throughout the journey Mark will be there to point out and explain not only the birds and wildlife, but also cultural points of interest. Photographically this will be a great tour with many interesting and close subjects – see our last tour report or our website for photos taken on this holiday. This will be a most exciting trip, and it will be Ornitholidays' fourth tour of the country.



Red-crowned Crane

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Days 1 to 4

The tour begins at London, where we catch our scheduled flight to Tokyo where we arrive the next day. We then transfer to our hotel in Karuizawa where we stay for the next three nights. Karuizawa is situated in the mountains of central Honshu. This is a beautiful area of forests,

river valleys and snow-capped peaks. At this time of year there are many winter visitors to look for, as well as the exciting resident species. Copper Pheasant will be high on our list of birds to find but there will also be the endemic Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers, Japanese Wagtail, Japanese Accentor and Japanese Grosbeak. We can search finch and bunting flocks for Rustic,

Meadow and Yellow-throated Buntings, Brambling, Oriental Greenfinch and perhaps a Pallas's Rosefinch. Other species include Dusky Thrush, Red-flanked Bluetail, Daurian Redstart, Grey-bellied Bullfinch, Azure-winged Magpie, Japanese Grosbeak and Oriental Crow. We can also look at Lake Myogi and Chosei-ike for Baikal Teal, Mandarin and Falcated Ducks, Crested Kingfisher, Goosander and Spot-billed Duck.



Steller's Sea-Eagle

the sun will be shining and then the photographic opportunities may be excellent. During the day we explore the surrounding hills, fields, reedbeds, woods and rivers for a whole range of birds, including Green Pheasant, Mandarin Duck, Long-billed Plover, Crested Kingfisher, Chinese Penduline-Tit, Daurian Jackdaw, Buff-bellied Pipit (japonicus), Bull-headed and Northern Shrikes, Dusky and Pale Thrushes, Japanese White-eye, Yellow-throated, Black-faced, Chestnut-eared and (elusive) Grey Buntings. Every winter there are one or more rarities in the area so we can expect something out of the ordinary, perhaps a Black-faced Spoonbill or a Baikal Teal.

Days 10 & 11

We leave Izumi and transfer back to Kagoshima for our flight northwards to Kushiro (via Tokyo). We are now on the island of Hokkaido and we transfer to Tsurui for a stay of two nights. We should see our first Steller's Sea-Eagles here and Ural Owl is another speciality of the area. We shall visit the famous Crane Observatory at Tancho no Sato. This area provides another of the great Japanese winter spectacles, as Red-crowned Cranes come to feed and we may even see them in their dancing and bugling displays. Food, in the form of fish, is provided in the afternoon and we may see White-tailed Eagle, as well as scavenging Red Foxes and Large-billed Crows, vie for this fish with the cranes.

Days 12 & 13

We now travel to Yoroushi, where we stay for two nights. We can enjoy the ambience of this area and walk in the forest and be in place to look for Blakiston's Fish-Owl at dusk. These large owls are fish eaters and we can watch an area where they come to take fish each night. The next day we can bird along south-east Hokkaido and stop at Lake Furen. Here we should find a large concentration of Steller's Sea-Eagles, as they have moved here over the last few years as fish stocks further north have been depleted. The local fisherman drill holes into the ice to fish and the eagles often scavenge on the offal from their catch. We may well see interactions between the large Steller's and the smaller White-tailed Eagles. There will also be Whooper Swans here, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon and Eurasian Teal. If we have not already had good views of Blakiston's Fish-Owl we may well try again this evening.

Days 14 & 15

After a morning birding around Yoroushi we transfer north to the harbours and promontories of Rausu. There will be Steller's Sea-Eagles here and we should also keep an eye open for flocks of Asian Rosy-Finches. There will also be many gulls and we should find Vega, Glaucous, Glaucous-winged and Slaty-backed. On one day we have the chance to take a boat trip from Habomai to look for some of the special seabirds of the area. There is a good chance of finding Spectacled, Brunnich's and Pigeon Guillemots, Ancient Murrelet, Japanese, Red-faced and Pelagic Cormorants, Pacific Diver and various grebes and scoters.

Day 16

We have some final time to watch birds around Rausu before transferring to the airport at Memambetsu and catching our afternoon flight back to Tokyo where we have our farewell dinner and stay overnight.

Day 17

After breakfast we transfer to the airport for our London bound flight where we arrive later that day.

Days 5 & 6

We can have a final morning birding around Karuizawa, perhaps finding a Long-tailed Rosefinch or Oriental Turtle-Dove. We then transfer to Kambayashi for a two night stay. Here we have the chance for some more mountain birding with a difference. This is where we can watch the Snow Monkeys coming to bathe in the natural thermal springs, with a cold backdrop of snow covered hills. These animals do this to keep warm and this behaviour can lead to some great photos of these red-faced monkeys with snow on their heads! We can also walk in the hills here and look for Brown Dipper, Alpine Accentor, Hawfinch, Golden Eagle and Mountain Hawk-Eagle as well as the elusive Japanese Serow.

Days 7 to 9

This morning we transfer back to Tokyo for our flight to Kagoshima on the island of Kyushu. We then drive to Izumi where we stay for three nights. We have two whole days to explore and our main focus of attention will be Arasaki. This is the single best winter birding site in Japan, and host to Asia's largest gathering of cranes. Here we will spend time enjoying the spectacle of the crane flock. Amongst the flock of Hooded and White-naped Cranes, gathering to feed within 100 metres of the observatory, we will hope to find both Common and Sandhill Cranes and perhaps something even rarer – perhaps a vagrant Demoiselle or a Siberian. We hope that



Snow Monkeys

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Depart London
Day 2	Arrive Tokyo and transfer to Karuizawa
Days 3-4	Karuizawa
Days 5-6	Kambayashi
Days 7-9	Izumi
Days 10-11	Tsurui
Days 12-13	Yoroushi
Days 14-15	Rausu
Day 16	Tokyo
Day 17	Depart Tokyo, arrive London

Party Size

Maximum of 10 clients.

Accommodation

The accommodation will be a mixture of western and Japanese styles with either beds or futons. Most rooms have private facilities. However, please note that at Kambayashi there are no single rooms. Also at Rausu some rooms may share bathrooms.

Transport

By private coach and minibus.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

	Good
	140
	Cold
	Low
	Special
	Moderate
	Good/Excellent
	Easy
	Scheduled



Japanese White-eye