

Trip Report — Japan in Spring 2025

May 10-27, 2025 with Phil Gregory & Sam Wilson & Jun Matsui



We found a few beautiful Long-tailed Rosefinches foraging along a hedge line on Japan's northern most island, Hokkaido. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

This was our fourth iteration of the tour. It ran smoothly and we did well in overall pretty nice weather, bar some intermittent rain on Okinawa and Amami and one very wet cold day in Nemuro. We began around Tokyo, going out to a site for the rare Marsh Grassbird, with Ochre-rumped (Japanese Reed) Bunting as a bonus, and a trip to Funabashi, which got us some very nice shorebirds including the scarce *osculans* race of Eurasian Oystercatcher, Grey-tailed Tattler, Dunlin and Sanderling, plus some late Greater Scaup.

En route to the mountains at Shiga-Kogen near Nagano was a Japanese Sparrowhawk nest at a park at Gion. We initially did not know where the

nest was, but we got great views of both the male and the female, being harassed by Azure-winged magpies.



Nesting Japanese Cormorants were a constant feature along the wild coastline of Shiretoko National Park. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Shiga-Kogen was a good area with the trees just beginning to leaf out and a fair bit of snow lying around. We had to work hard for some of the birds, but Russet Sparrow, Brown-headed Thrush, Japanese Robin, Japanese Yellow Bunting, Grey Bunting, Eastern Crowned, Sakhalin and Japanese Leaf Warblers were among the highlights here, and Northern Hawk-Cuckoo was calling but irritatingly stayed unseen. We visited the highest road in Japan at 7200', through some spectacular montane forest, and stopped near Karuizawa for Green Pheasant and unexpected Chestnut-eared Bunting en route to Tokyo.

Next came a fantastic overnight boat trip to Miyakejima in the Izu Islands, where it was for once quite calm and sunny, unusual here. Izu Thrush and

Ijima's Leaf Warbler showed well, and Styan's (Pleske's) Grasshopper Warbler was great, whilst the rare Japanese Wood Pigeon was seen nicely. The endangered Owston's Tit gave good views, and a nice bonus was thousands of Streaked Shearwaters from the boat on the way back, plus a surprise of Japanese Murrelets, and Black-footed Albatross for those diehards who stayed on deck.



The Amami Woodpecker, as we referred to it, is still taxonomically considered a subspecies of White-backed Woodpecker. But it's quite isolated and certainly looks different than the widespread 'White-backed' form! Photo by participant Barry Tillman.

The Ryukyu Islands (Nansei Shoto) were next, starting on Amami where we saw the very distinctive White-backed (Amami or Owston's) Woodpecker, heard and saw Ruddy Kingfisher calling, saw Ryukyu Robin and both heard

and saw Whistling (Ryukyu) Green Pigeon with its atmospheric and beautiful flute-like song on the first afternoon. That night we had our first attempt at seeing Ryukyu Scops Owl, which showed very well with 3 sightings, including one sat on a wire right over the road, and 2 superb Amami Woodcock, one of which kept wing-flicking and was thought to be a well-grown juvenile. Two Lidth's Jays were even roosting on wires by the road, but lighting was poor and we had much better looks next day. Sam used his thermal imager and found us a super Ryukyu Giant Rat up a small tree, but no sign of the endemic rabbit tonight.

Next night we did see Amami Black Rabbit despite the wet conditions, now doing much better thanks to the successful mongoose busters eradication program. The only snake we saw here was a colourful banded akamata in the road, other herps included the endemic swordtail newt.

The striking endemic Lidth's Jay was being rather furtive, no doubt breeding, but we got some good views, and tried various areas for Amami Thrush without success, though Ryukyu Minivet showed nicely.



Evening view of the Port of Rausu, one of the last villages before the wild Shiretoko Peninsula. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Okinawa produced some windy damp conditions which made things hard, but we got good views of Okinawa Rail, excellent encounters with Okinawa Woodpecker at a nest, eventually good looks for most at Okinawa Robin and the elusive Black (Japanese) Paradise Flycatcher, and Oriental Pratincole at Kin rice paddies, plus memorable Black-naped and Roseate Terns at a harbor on the way to Naha.

Finally it was time for wonderful Hokkaido, where birding at a marsh near Kushiro gave us Oriental Cuckoo, Sakhalin Leaf and Eastern Crowned Leaf Warbler, Eurasian Treecreeper, Eurasian Nuthatch and the white-headed nominate race of Long-tailed Tit, Amur Stonechat, plus on both visits Long-tailed Rosefinch (Siberian). It was here that the power of AI proved astonishing, as Barry heard a strange call which Merlin identified as a

Eurasian Wryneck. I was very sceptical, and played the real call, only to have one fly in and another start calling! The call was actually in the background of Barry's recording with Eastern Crowned Warbler the dominant one, so it was astonishing that this got picked out, our very first AI identified good species, and no doubt a harbinger of the future.



Green Pheasant is a beautiful endemic best seen in Japan's lowland agricultural areas. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Red-crowned Crane showed well en route. Venison burgers at Teshikaga were a hit, and the local park gave the scarce Bank Swallow and some beautiful Trilliums. We visited the minshuku where Blakiston's Fish Owl comes to feed from a fish-stocked pond in the stream outside, and we were lucky, as this night an adult male came in before we'd even got out of the van at 1920, and it and a female made some 4 visits during our 90 minutes here; they caught fish several times as they were feeding youngsters. One of the great birds, just so huge.

Next morning, we were luckily able to make the Bear Boat Cruise in a 30' fiberglass dinghy, keeping close to the shore of the gorgeous Shiretoko Peninsula and going right out to the tip. The scenery alone was worth it and my Pelagic Misery Index only rated it as a 3 as it was cold and a tad bumpy with some spray, but nothing too bad. The rewards were lovely looks at my lifer Brown Bear foraging on the beach, with female and last year's cub seen briefly high up on the slope later, and some huge Steller's Sea Lions roaring as they gathered on a slippery rock. Birds included Harlequin Ducks, Black-headed and Black-tailed Gulls and Pelagic Cormorants. Shiretoko Pass is only open from 0800-1700 and was fog-bound this time, with quite a bit of ice and snow, but we did get to see Brown Dipper as we came out of it in the lowlands.



Despite some rain showers, Marsh Grassbirds were in full display at Ukishima Marsh outside Tokyo. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Notsuke on the way back to Nemuro gave a big flock of Red-breasted Merganser, a very late Falcated Duck, our first Siberian Sandplover, and

many flocks of Ruddy Turnstone flying over, heading northwards as well as feeding on the tidal flats. Passerines were few but a male Reed Bunting was nice, Eurasian (Japanese) Skylark showed well, and Red Fox was very tame and photogenic despite moulting heavily.

May 25 was a very wet cold day, seeing very little at Meiji Park and with the bird hide at Cape Nosappu inexplicably locked, though we did see Ancient Murrelet, Black-tailed Gull and Red-necked Grebe, plus a splendid Sea Otter.

May 26 Ochiishi for the 2-hour boat trip round two nearby islands, in very cold but dry conditions with a choppy sea, Pelagic Misery Index a moderate scale 5. It seemed overall quite quiet and the bumpy sea made viewing hard, but the alcids were rewarding, including multiple summer plumage Spectacled Guillemot, a few Rhinoceros Auklet seen nicely and 5 Ancient Murrelet; Red-faced Cormorant sat on a rock stack was also discernible, in breeding dress with double spiky crest, a very rare bird now with just a handful or pairs here. Displaying Latham's Snipe by Cape Ochiishi were a treat too.



Wryneck was a surprise find on Hokkaido. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

This year we were slightly too early for both Middendorff's and Sakhalin Grasshopper Warblers; it was a late spring, but a visit to Furen Asemato footpath in lovely riparian, reed and woodland habitat gave Sakhalin and Eastern Crowned warblers singing and Black-browed Reed Warbler giving glimpses, Long-tailed Rosefinch seen again, and Masked Bunting showing nicely.

This basically concluded our very enjoyable and successful fourth iteration of the Field Guides spring trip to Japan, with the revised itinerary working out well. My thanks to the group for good company, good humor, enthusiasm and good spotting, and to Ruth at Field Guides and Sue, Rowan and Jun at Sicklebills Safaris who handled the logistics. Particular thanks to my local co-leader Jun Matsui, who handled driving, packing bags and interpreting meals and food packages very nicely as well as helping with the bird guiding. JAL were a terrific airline, with fast and efficient check-in using me as the helpless tourist so we could do a group check, no baggage hassles, punctual

flights and marvelous politeness so sadly missing elsewhere these days. Sam Wilson joined us as a Field Guides guest leader and was a very helpful spotter, scope-carrier and E-Bird checklist compiler, my thanks to him for his contributions. Why not join us for 2026? I am already looking forward to it in one of my favorite countries.



Spectacled Guillemot is unique alcid of the northwest Pacific. Photo by guide Sam Wilson.

Mammals

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*)- Shiretoko

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) - Notsuke

Japanese Raccoon Dog (*Nyctereutes viverrinus*) or tanuki- 2 seen Lake Inba area

Siberian Weasel (*Mustela sibirica*) Feral on Miyakejima

Small Indian Mongoose (*Urva auropunctata*) Feral at Kin paddies

Sika Deer (*Cervus nippon*) Common on Hokkaido

Steller's Sea-lion- Shiretoko

Bottle-nosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)- Oshima triangle near Tokyo

Sea Otter (*Enhydra lutris*)- one off Cape Nosappu

Snakes- Japanese Ratsnake (*Elaphe climacophora*) at Shiga-Kogen and Akamata (*Lycodon semicarinatus*) at Amami Nature Forest, neither being venomous

Butterflies- Japanese Luehdorfia (*Luehdorfia japonica*) at Gion Park, Mourning Cloak (*Nymphalis antiopa*) at Shiga-Kogen on snow patches, Orange Oakleaf (*Kallima inachus*) at Aha Dam, Asian Green-veined White (*Pieris melete*) on Hokkaido, Chinese Windmill (*Byasa alcinous*) on Amami

Favorite birds- Blakiston's Fish Owl of course, then a dark horse entry with Japanese Bush Warbler, white-headed Long-tailed Tit, Red-crowned Crane, Amami Woodcock, Sam with two alcids in Spectacled Guillemot and Japanese Murrelet and Phil with two lifer mammals in the bear and sea-lion.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/378368>

Phil Gregory

Field Guides Birding Tours—Japan in Spring, 2025 (with Phil Gregory, Sam Wilson, and Jun Matsui)



12 – 26 May 2025 (15 days) Link-only



Japan

Chiba | Gunma | Hokkaido | Ibaraki | Kagoshima | Nagano | Okinawa | Tochigi | Tokyo


Subregions

Sam Wilson, Anonymous eBirder, Barry Tillman, Jun MATSUI | Sicklebill Safaris,
Phil Gregory | Sicklebill Safaris | www.birder.travel



For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional...

DATA FOR: **Group (all people)** ▾













**155**
Species Observed




























**68**
Checklists



































**84**
Species with Photos
































Species Observed





























Show all details
































2	Falcated Duck <i>Mareca falcata</i>	▶  1
60	Eurasian Wigeon <i>Mareca penelope</i>	▶  1
12	Eastern Spot-billed Duck <i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>	▶  1  6
2	Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	▶  1  1
10	Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	▶  1
2	Green-winged Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	▶  1
7	Tufted Duck <i>Aythya fuligula</i>	▶  2
10	Greater Scaup <i>Aythya marila</i>	▶  2  2
88	Harlequin Duck <i>Histrionicus histrionicus</i>	▶  3



































4	Black Scoter	<i>Melanitta americana</i>	▶  1
46	Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>	▶  2
10	Green Pheasant	<i>Phasianus versicolor</i>	▶  3  4
2	Chinese Bamboo-Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i> *	▶  2
1	Japanese Quail	<i>Coturnix japonica</i>	▶  1
11	Rock Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i> *	▶  3
8	Black Wood-Pigeon	<i>Columba janthina</i>	▶  2  3
30	Oriental Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	▶  1  16
9	Whistling Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron formosae</i>	▶  5
4	Northern Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx hyperythrus</i>	▶  3
7	Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>	▶  6
2	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	▶  2
6	Oriental Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus optatus</i>	▶  3  6
22	Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>	▶  5  3
14	Okinawa Rail	<i>Gallirallus okinawae</i>	▶  5
2	Eurasian Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	▶  1
7	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	▶  2  2
8	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	▶  1
49	Eurasian Oystercatcher	<i>Haematopus ostralegus</i>	▶  1  2
3	Black-bellied Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	▶  2

































14	Siberian Sand-Plover	<i>Anarhynchus mongolus</i>	▶  1
30	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	▶  1
40	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>	▶  2  1
7	Amami Woodcock	<i>Scolopax mira</i>	▶  2  2
6	Latham's Snipe	<i>Gallinago hardwickii</i>	▶  2  3
5	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	▶  1
22	Gray-tailed Tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	▶  1  4
1	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	▶  1  1
236	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	▶  3
300	Red-necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	▶  1
5	Sanderling	<i>Calidris alba</i>	▶  1  1
10	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	▶  2  2
1	Oriental Pratincole	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>	▶  3  1
10	Rhinoceros Auklet	<i>Cerorhinca monocerata</i>	▶  1  2
28	Spectacled Guillemot	<i>Cepphus carbo</i>	▶  6  1
7	Ancient Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus antiquus</i>	▶  2  2
15	Japanese Murrelet	<i>Synthliboramphus wumizusume</i>	▶  5  3
1	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	▶  1
38	Black-tailed Gull	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>	▶  3  11
660	Slaty-backed Gull	<i>Larus schistisagus</i>	▶  1  7

3	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	▶  1
47	Black-naped Tern	<i>Sterna sumatrana</i>	▶  4  2
5	Roseate Tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>	▶  1  1
1	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	▶  1
10	Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>	▶  3
6	Red-throated Loon	<i>Gavia stellata</i>	▶  1
4	Pacific Loon	<i>Gavia pacifica</i>	▶  2
4	Black-footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>	▶  5  1
4405	Streaked Shearwater	<i>Calonectris leucomelas</i>	▶  10  8
950	Short-tailed Shearwater	<i>Ardenna tenuirostris</i>	▶  2  5
4	Red-faced Cormorant	<i>Urile urile</i>	▶  1  1
85	Pelagic Cormorant	<i>Urile pelagicus</i>	▶  2  2
569	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	▶  1  5
231	Japanese Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax capillatus</i>	▶  3  3
1	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	▶  1
1	Pacific Reef-Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	▶  1  1
10	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	▶  1  3
4	Eastern Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>	▶  1
5	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	▶  2
2	Medium Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>	▶  2

27	Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	▶  10
4	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	▶  4
3	Japanese Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza gularis</i>	▶  3  2
16	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	▶  5
2	Eastern Buzzard	<i>Buteo japonicus</i>	▶  2
17	Ryukyu Scops-Owl	<i>Otus elegans</i>	▶  4  4
4	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	▶  4
7	Ruddy Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon coromanda</i>	▶  5
2	Eurasian Wryneck	<i>Jynx torquilla</i>	▶  2  1
20	Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus kizuki</i>	▶  1  16
7	Okinawa Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos noguchii</i>	▶  6  3
6	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	▶  9  5
8	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>	▶  6
12	Ryukyu Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus tegimae</i>	▶  2  6
3	Black Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone atrocaudata</i>	▶  1
7	Bull-headed Shrike	<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>	▶  5
11	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	▶  3
10	Lidth's Jay	<i>Garrulus lidthi</i>	▶  5
4	Azure-winged Magpie	<i>Cyanopica cyanus</i>	▶  2  1
45	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	▶  6

45	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	▶  6  24
58	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	▶  2  7
2	Varied Tit	<i>Sittiparus varius</i>	▶  1
3	Owston's Tit	<i>Sittiparus owstoni</i>	▶  7  1
10	Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>	▶  3
30	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>	▶  4  5
22	Asian Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>	▶  3  12
12	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	▶  4
26	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	▶  2  7
9	Black-browed Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus bistrigiceps</i>	▶  2
8	Oriental Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>	▶  7  2
5	Marsh Grassbird	<i>Helopsaltes pryeri</i>	▶  4  1
4	Pleske's Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Helopsaltes pleskei</i>	▶  6  1
2	Bank Swallow	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	▶  1
19	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo javanica</i>	▶  5
15	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	▶  6
16	Asian House-Martin	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	▶  2
1	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	▶  1
63	Brown-eared Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>	▶  2  20
10	Light-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>	▶  1  2

49	Eastern Crowned Warbler <i>Phylloscopus coronatus</i>	▶  5  10
16	Ijima's Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus ijimae</i>	▶  3
12	Sakhalin Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus borealoides</i>	▶  2  3
10	Japanese Leaf Warbler <i>Phylloscopus xanthodryas</i>	▶  3
9	Asian Stubtail <i>Urosphena squameiceps</i>	▶  1  3
94	Japanese Bush Warbler <i>Horornis diphone</i>	▶  6  28
4	Long-tailed Tit <i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	▶  1  3
22	Warbling White-eye <i>Zosterops japonicus</i>	▶  4  11
1	Red-billed Leiothrix <i>Leiothrix lutea</i> *	▶  1
4	Goldcrest <i>Regulus regulus</i>	▶  3
8	Eurasian Nuthatch <i>Sitta europaea</i>	▶  1  6
4	Eurasian Treecreeper <i>Certhia familiaris</i>	▶  1  4
17	Eurasian Wren <i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	▶  3  6
1	Brown Dipper <i>Cinclus pallasii</i>	▶  2  1
3	Chestnut-cheeked Starling <i>Agropsar philippensis</i>	▶  2  1
12	White-cheeked Starling <i>Spodiopsar cineraceus</i>	▶  2  3
15	Brown-headed Thrush <i>Turdus chrysolaus</i>	▶  4
7	Izu Thrush <i>Turdus celaenops</i>	▶  3  3
12	Asian Brown Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	▶  3  7
1	Blue-and-white Flycatcher <i>Cyanoptila cyanomelana</i>	▶  1  1


2	Japanese Robin	<i>Larvivora akahige</i>	▶  3  2
9	Izu Robin	<i>Larvivora tanensis</i>	▶  2  2
7	Ryukyu Robin	<i>Larvivora komadori</i>	▶  3
4	Okinawa Robin	<i>Larvivora namiyei</i>	▶  2
7	Siberian Blue Robin	<i>Larvivora cyane</i>	▶  2  3
3	Red-flanked Bluetail	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	▶  1  3
17	Narcissus Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula narcissina</i>	▶  5  5
2	Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus auroreus</i>	▶  1
12	Blue Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	▶  1  8
15	Amur Stonechat	<i>Saxicola stejnegeri</i>	▶  1  6
4	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i> *	▶  1
4	Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer cinnamomeus</i>	▶  3
12	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	▶  8
6	Gray Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	▶  1  5
22	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	▶  2  9
1	Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	▶  1
2	Hawfinch	<i>Coccothraustes coccothraustes</i>	▶  1
11	Long-tailed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus sibiricus</i>	▶  2  3
23	Oriental Greenfinch	<i>Chloris sinica</i>	▶  2  9
6	Chestnut-eared Bunting	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>	▶  1  1

- 14


Meadow Bunting

Emberiza cioides

▶



2




7
- 2

Ochre-rumped Bunting

Emberiza yessoensis

▶




1
- 3

Reed Bunting

Emberiza schoeniclus

▶




2
- 2


Yellow Bunting

Emberiza sulphurata

▶



3




1
- 37


Masked Bunting

Emberiza personata

▶



1




10
- 9

Gray Bunting

Emberiza variabilis

▶



3

ADDITIONAL TAXA

- 2

snipe sp.

Gallinago sp.

▶



1
- 1

white egret sp.

Egretta/Ardea sp.

▶



1