

JAPAN IN WINTER A CRANE & SEA-EAGLE SPECTACLE!

JANUARY 21 – FEBRUARY 4, 2011*

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**Please note that tour dates differ slightly from the 2010 tour catalog*

Lying off the Pacific coast of Asia and extending over three thousand kilometres, Japan ranges from the southern subtropical Nansei Shoto islands to the cool temperate regions of northern Hokkaido. This isolation has resulted in the evolution of several endemic and near endemic species of birds in addition to a fascinating array of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, not to mention some truly beautiful landscapes. The isolation of the islands of Japan has enabled several endemic and near endemic species to evolve and during this tour we see a number of these. We will search for some very special birds such as Japanese Yellow Bunting, Copper Pheasant, Red-crowned Crane, Stellar's Sea- Eagle, Blakiston's Fish-Owl and Japanese Murrelet. Japan in winter is an amazing experience. The pristine snow-covered landscapes of Hokkaido and the thousands and thousands of cranes of up to five species in Kyushu ensure a truly memorable tour.

From Tokyo we will drive west for our stay in Karuizawa, on the edge of the stunningly beautiful Japan Alps. This area is exceptionally rich in birdlife and we will be kept very busy as we search for the many special birds here, particularly Copper Pheasant and Japanese Waxwing. Our next destination is on the Japan Sea side of Honshu where we will look for the increasingly rare Baikal Teal amongst a host of other spectacular wildfowl.

From here we fly to Kyushu where we will marvel at the amazing spectacle of thousands of cranes of various species congregating in a small area of rice fields. At Mi-ike we may find Japanese Green Pigeon, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Japanese Grosbeak, and the scarce Gray Bunting, along with Ryukyu Minivet, to mention but a few.

Next we will fly north past the snow-capped cone of Mount Fuji to the northern island of Hokkaido. The wide expanses of the northern island wilderness of Hokkaido contrasts with the steep-valleyed mountain scenery of the first part of our tour. The beauty of this almost Siberian landscape is complemented by some very exciting birds, notably Spectacled Guillemot, Blakiston's Fish-Owl and Hazel Grouse.

Although located at a latitude of only 43 degrees, Hokkaido's climate is influenced by that of nearby Siberia and the winters are cold and white. We will explore the coastal headlands and grasslands, where we might find Pelagic and Red-faced cormorants along with Tufted Puffins and Rhinoceros Auklets. Hokkaido is renowned as the breeding area for two of Japan's most impressive residents, Red-crowned Crane and Blakiston's Fish-Owl. The sight of cranes displaying in the snow is simply thrilling as are the many wonderful Steller's Sea-Eagles we will encounter. Even from the shore we can appreciate the richness of the seabirds in Japan's coastal waters, with the chance of a whole swag of pelagics including the Ancient Murrelet.

Other interesting birds that are possible on our tour of Japan include Japanese Quail; Gray-faced Buzzard; White-tailed Eagle; Whooper Swan; Falcated Duck; Smew; Eurasian Woodcock; Saunder's Gull; White-backed Woodpecker; Daurian Jackdaw (irruptive); Brown Dipper; Japanese Waxwing (irruptive); Japanese Accentor; Asian House Martin; Pale, Brown-headed and Dusky Thrush; Brambling; Asian Rosy Finch; Hawfinch; Japanese Grosbeak; Gray Bunting; and Yellow-throated Bunting to mention a few.

This tour may be taken in conjunction with Cambodia from February 5-18, 2011.

January 21-22, Days 1-2: Arrival in Tokyo. Please plan to arrive in Tokyo on January 22nd. Upon arrival in Japan, participants will be met and transferred to our hotel in Tokyo. The group will assemble on the evening of the 22nd at 6:00 p.m. in the hotel lobby for a get acquainted dinner.

NIGHT: Hotel Tokyu Excel Narita, Tokyo

January 23, Day 3: Depart for Karuizawa. Long famous for its beautiful, temperate woodlands, the area around Karuizawa supports a rich selection of species in a relatively small area. As we explore the tracks and trails through the deciduous and mixed woodland and along the fast-flowing streams, we may encounter such species as Mandarin Duck; Japanese Green Pheasant; Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy woodpeckers; Brown Dipper; Brambling; Gray, Black-backed and Japanese wagtails; Dusky Thrush; Northern Red-flanked Bluetail; Japanese Bush-Warbler; Gray-bellied Bullfinch; Hawfinch; gorgeous Japanese Waxwing; Azure-winged Jay; Japanese Grosbeak; and, if we are lucky, the scarce endemic Copper Pheasant.

In the evening, after a long day in the field, we can bathe in the mineral waters of the hot springs. Among the Japanese, this is a very popular activity. Near our hotel is a very pleasant hot spa, especially built for visitors to take the waters. The waters are heated by natural volcanic activity, and this is a great way to relieve the aches and pains of our days in the field.

NIGHT: Pension Cocotte, Karuizawa

January 24, Day 4: Karuizawa. Today we will enjoy another day in the field, possibly birding at a nearby lake to look for a variety of wintering ducks including the wonderful Smew as well as Chinese Spot-billed Duck, Mallard, Eurasian Wigeon, Eurasian Teal, Gadwall, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and Common Merganser. Rarities such as Falcated Duck or Baikal Teal are also much hoped-for possibilities, while more common species such as Little Grebe, Gray Heron, Black-eared Kite and Eurasian Coot are usually present. This is also an excellent area to look for the rather scarce and unobtrusive Long-billed Plover, which favours wide rocky streams, as does that perennial favourite Crested Kingfisher.

NIGHT: Pension Cocotte, Karuizawa

January 25, Day 5: Morning Search for Snow Monkeys; Drive to Kaga. We'll depart early this morning to head toward the Japan Alps to see the fabled snow monkeys. The Japanese macaques in this area have learned to make use of the natural hot springs to keep warm in the winter. They can be seen at close range bathing in the springs or playing nearby, and we'll have excellent photographic opportunities. Later we drive to Kaga on the Japan Sea coast where we'll spend the next two nights.

NIGHT: Hashimoto Ryokan, Kaga

January 26, Day 6: Birding at Katano Kamo-ike Reserve. The Katano Kamo-ike (Katano Duck Lake) Reserve is an important wintering ground for a host of wildfowl, of special note being the increasingly rare Baikal Teal, as well as Smew and Falcated Teal. The whole area offers excellent birding with a variety of woodland, wetland and coastal species.

NIGHT: Hashimoto Ryokan, Kaga

January 27-28, Days 7-8: Komatsu-Arasaki. This morning we will fly to Izumi on the island of Kyushu, the southernmost of the main Japanese islands. By the afternoon we will be marvelling at the spectacle of literally tens of thousands of cranes of up to five species. The most common species here are the White-naped and Hooded cranes, but small numbers of Common and Sandhill cranes can usually be found amongst them. And there is even a slim possibility of rarities such as Demoiselle Crane! Searching nearby fields, estuaries and reed beds we may also find Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunder's Gull, Long-billed Plover, Crested Kingfisher or Penduline Tit.

Overnight: Hotel Wings, Izumi

January 29, Day 9: Izumi-Mi-ike. Morning birding around Arasaki before heading off around lunchtime to Mi-ike. Mi-ike is a delightful location and forms a part of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park, a fascinating region of intense volcanic activity. There is a wide range of habitats in the Mi-ike, a circular lake about a kilometre in diameter surrounded by lush broadleaf forest, lakes, fast-flowing streams and mountains. Many of Japan's commoner woodland birds occur here plus a bunch of specialties. Birds of special interest for us here include Copper and Green pheasants, White-bellied Green-Pigeon, Crested Kingfisher, Japanese Green and Japanese Pygmy woodpeckers, Japanese Wagtail, Varied Tit and Eurasian Jay.

NIGHT: Ebino Kogen-so, Mi-ike

January 30, Day 10: Kagoshima-Kushiro. After another morning's birding at Mi-ike, we will drive to Kagoshima, from where we'll take a flight to Kushiro in Hokkaido, via Tokyo. We will transfer from Kushiro to nearby Tancho-no-sato, which translates as Red-crowned Crane Village. Here we can see at close quarters the renowned wintering flocks of Red-crowned Cranes. Standing over five feet in height, these stately cranes, the most magnificent yet one of the rarest of all the world's cranes, can be seen performing their amazing dancing and bugling displays. A number of other interesting species come into the same area and we should have good photographic opportunities not only for the cranes, but also for White-tailed Eagle and Whooper Swan among others.

NIGHT: Drive In Tsuru, Tancho-no-sato

January 31, Day 11: Kushiro-Rausu. This morning we will drive north, stopping to explore the scenically spectacular coastline as we travel, then on to the Shiretoko Peninsula in Hokkaido's north-east. At Odaito we'll stop to see the congregations of Whooper Swans and other wildfowl. On our way to Rausu we may see various shearwaters, alcids and wildfowl as we hug the coastline.

Hokkaido is also renowned as the breeding area for two of Japan's most impressive residents, Red-crowned Crane and Blakiston's Fish-Owl. Finding Blakiston's Fish-Owl is altogether a different proposition. There may be as few as 20 breeding pairs in the whole of Hokkaido and we shall be very fortunate indeed if we manage to see this rare denizen of the northern forests. After searching for the fish-owl, we will also make a try for the very impressive Ural Owl.

NIGHT: Pension Rausu Kuru, Rausu

February 1, Day 12: Boat Trip on the Shiretoko Peninsula, Rausu. Today we will take a boat trip out to the pack ice along the length of the southern edge of the Shiretoko Peninsula. Here we will enjoy spectacular views of numerous Steller's Sea Eagles. We will also look out for Japanese and Pelagic cormorants, Common and Spectacled guillemots, Ancient and Rhinoceros murrelets and Harlequin Duck. We could encounter almost anything today including large numbers of wintering gulls such as Black-tailed and Slaty-backed as well as small numbers of Glaucous gulls, a good variety of waterfowl and shorebirds, and we may have more opportunities to enjoy such gems as Long-tailed Rosefinch.

NIGHT: Pension Rausu Kuru, Rausu

February 2-3, Days 13-14: Lake Furen. We will leave for Kushiro early this morning and then drive to Lake Furen. From our base at Minshuku Furen adjoining Lake Furen, we will explore the gorgeous nearby woodlands, which hold

such birds as Black Woodpecker and Japanese Robin. In the neighbouring marshes we will seek out the lovely local race of Eurasian Bullfinch, which feeds around the homes of fishermen.

NIGHT: Minshuku Furen, Nemuro

February 4, Day 15: Kushiro – Tokyo. This morning we drive back to Kushiro to board our flight back to Haneda, Tokyo. We will then transfer to Narita Airport for our evening flights home.

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 6 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: Susan Myers

Susan Myers absolutely loves birding and traveling in Asia. As she says, “The combination of incredible and diverse wildlife, ancient and fascinating cultures, and the best food in the world is unique to this amazing continent.” For more than 15 years Susan has led tours throughout Asia, including at least a dozen tours to Vietnam, countless trips to the Malay Peninsula and Borneo, plus many other tours in India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Taiwan, Cambodia, and the Philippines, as well as Madagascar, Irian Jaya, the Pacific islands and, of course, Australia. Susan was born in Melbourne of convict ancestry dating back to the establishment of the city, when her shoe-stealing forebear was released from Port Arthur in Tasmania and came to Melbourne to start a new life. She has been a birder and passionate naturalist since early childhood, running around barefoot in the bush chasing birds, lizards, and aquatic insects. Her experiences in Asia started at an early age when a short trip to Singapore cast a spell on her, never to be broken. That first sighting of a sunbird in the tropical rainforest led to the purchase of the first edition of *The Birds of South East Asia*, which she memorized before the age of thirteen! After her university studies in biological sciences, she moved to Japan where she lived for four years, learning the language and studying the natural history and culture; she has traveled there regularly ever since. A few years in Japan and extended travel and birding all over the region further strengthened her deep love of the wildlife and culture of Asia. Susan has also worked as a scuba dive instructor on Australia’s Great Barrier Reef in Queensland, showing international visitors this marine marvel. She loves to explore new areas, and has recently undertaken scouting trips to Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, Taiwan, Sumatra, and Halmahera. She has published many papers and articles on ornithology and general ecology in a variety of respected magazines and scientific journals. Susan’s deep affection for and appreciation of Asia and its wildlife, her special language skills, and her understanding of the different cultures of this region ensure an extra dimension to your tour. Susan is the author of a new field guide to the birds of Borneo, published in mid 2009.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for Japan in Winter is **\$8,025** based on double occupancy from Tokyo. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 to lunch on Day 15, lodging as stated in the itinerary, all internal flights, ground and water transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leader. The fee does not include airfare from your home to Tokyo and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, telephone calls, laundry or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs, if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for Japan in Winter is **\$600**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be

necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

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| <u>If you cancel:</u> | <u>Your refund will be:</u> |
| 120 days or more before departure date | Your deposit minus \$250* |
| Fewer than 120 days before departure date | No refund available |

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE: A brochure and application form for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends Travel Insured International as our preferred insurance provider.** Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact Travel Insured International prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than Travel Insured International, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT NOTE: *Please read your itinerary carefully to see whether or not your tour/cruise requires MANDATORY Medical Insurance which covers you for emergency evacuation/repatriation during the trip.* This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by Travel Insured International. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through Travel Insured International, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

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CLIMATE: At the time of our visit, we will encounter a wide range of temperatures. As we head north, temperatures and humidity will decline and rain becomes more likely. It will be cold to very cold at times, especially along the coast. There will be much snow and ice in Hokkaido.

CLOTHING: Neat, casual clothing is recommended in this part of the world. For men, tie and jacket are not necessary; for women, slacks are perfectly acceptable for any occasion, as are skirts and dresses. Japan is a modern first world country where very similar rules to those of North America apply. In Japan it is customary to remove one's shoes when entering houses, traditional hotels (not Western hotels), temples and many other places. A pair of slip on style shoes can save you a lot of bother!

In the south, winters are cool but sunny, but as one ventures further north, temperatures drop and snow falls. The island of Hokkaido in the far north of Japan is bitterly cold in the winter, with snow guaranteed. Please bring warm clothing including a waterproof/windproof jacket, gloves, hat and over trousers for the Hokkaido boat trip.

Laundry service will be available at some (but not all) of the hotels at which we stay in Japan; however, many of these are coin-operated, do-it-yourself machines.

SPECIAL NOTE: Please try to avoid bright colours. Although the birds and other wildlife are relatively approachable, we will be trying to see a number of very elusive species. Muted colours will enhance our chances. Please do not wear brightly colored clothes, hats, gloves, bags, or other paraphernalia.

CURRENCY: Japanese Yen. Credit cards are accepted by some places in Japan but many fewer places than one might expect, so cash is important to bring if you want to shop. Participants are also advised to carry sufficient funds in low denomination American Express US dollar traveller's checks and/or US dollar cash - the latter can be very useful in an emergency. ATM's are increasingly available and we recommend Citibank as all airports have an ATM outlet for this bank.

DOCUMENTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure is required for United States citizens to enter Japan. U.S. citizens are not required to have a visa for stays of less than 90 days. Non-United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

EQUIPMENT: You should have a pair of binoculars in good condition (please check before departure!!). Your tour leader will be carrying a spotting scope; however, you are **welcome and encouraged to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish**. You should bring all the camera equipment and spare batteries that you will need as there will be many excellent photographic opportunities. Batteries are widely available. UV and polarizing filters are recommended. Plastic bags are very useful to protect equipment from rain and dust.

A small day pack (either waterproofed or with a strong plastic bag inside) is essential for carrying excess clothing, camera equipment, toiletries, food, and water. However, in many of the areas we will be birding, we will have regular access to our transport, which will be attended by a driver. Water bottles are important if you like to carry a regular supply of water. Drinks may be purchased from automatic dispensing machines virtually anywhere.

Other useful items include:

1. Flashlight or headlamp (as we will be out at night on a few occasions), and furthermore, a small flashlight or headlamp may be essential to find your way around your room at night.
2. Handy-wipes and paper tissues are especially useful. All participants should carry sufficient for their personal needs for the entire tour.
3. Spare glasses or contact lenses.
4. One bath towel and face cloth.
5. Sunscreen (strongly recommended especially for the boat trip where the UV is reflected back from the sea surface and can cause burning remarkably quickly). Lip balm is also essential.

6. Umbrella—the collapsible type is easy to carry and useful both against rain and sun.

7. If you have difficulty using chopsticks (*o-hashii*), we would recommend bringing your own knife and fork in your checked luggage, as these are often not available in some restaurants.

LUGGAGE: When travelling within Japan, officially one piece of checked luggage weighing no more than 44 pounds is allowed free of charge. In addition you are allowed one piece of carry-on luggage and whatever you carry over your arm or in your hands (i.e. coat, book, purse, umbrella etc.).

MISC: Departure Tax – included in the cost of your air ticket

Electricity - Japan uses 100 volts, 50 cycles, AC. Japanese-style plug with two parallel flat blades

Language - Japanese is the national language. Some younger people speak a little English but it can be difficult at times to find someone who speaks English fluently. Your tour leader speaks, reads and writes fluent Japanese.

Time - Japan is 15 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time.

Country Dialling Code - 81

Snacks- it is advisable to bring granola-type bars, dried fruit or other snacks. Convenience stores are very common and widespread; they stock many snacks and other products that you will be familiar with (and some not so familiar).

HEALTH: Unless advised otherwise, all water including tap water is potable and you can safely enjoy the salads, fresh fruit and vegetables.

No vaccinations are required, however, cholera and yellow fever inoculations are required only if you arrive within five days of departing from an infected area. A number of forms of hepatitis may be present in Japan, but very rare. We recommend participants contact their doctor for advice prior to departure.

All participants should bring a good quantity of all their medical/pharmaceutical supplies, as these will be very difficult to obtain anywhere on the tour.

If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website at www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You might also want to visit such other online stores as www.amazon.com, and for

those out-of-print and hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com, or www.buteobooks.com, which specializes in ornithology books.

Brazil, M. A. 1991. *The Birds of Japan*. Christopher Helm, London. Provides a detailed summary of the status of all Japanese birds.

Brazil, M.A. 1987. *A Birdwatchers Guide to Japan*, Kodansha International, Japan. A detailed site guide with much information relating particularly habitat, likely birds, accommodation, and useful information for getting there. Out of print.

Wild Bird Society of Japan. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Japan*. * A very useful guide which illustrates all the species which we are likely to encounter on this tour. Out of print.

Shimba, T. 2007. *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Japan and East Asia*. Christopher Helm, London. The only up to date publication on the birds of Japan in English, a photographic guide.

For a more exhaustive bibliography, see selections in the Apa and Lonely Planet Guides.

If participants have difficulty obtaining any titles, they may wish to contact the Natural History Book Service which has one of the most comprehensive collections of books on natural history: 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K. Phone: 011-44-1803865913, Fax: 011-44-1803865280.

MAPS: Japan - 1:1,500,000 Nelles series

* Recommended to bring on tour.

TIPPING: As noted in our itineraries, tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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