

Trip report: Amami Island, Japan (16/05/2018 - 18/05/2018)

By Sin Yong Chee Keita @ Okamoto Keita

The Ryukyu Islands are quite interesting from a cultural and historical perspective, but since this is a birding trip report, I shall not delve into those topics and instead write about my very short trip to Amami Island.

Main Locations Birded

Amami Island



Lidth's Jay

Itinerary

16 May	Arrive in Amami Quick stop at Ose Beach Evening/night birding at Amami Nature Forest
17 May	Morning birding Kinsakubaru Virgin Forest Afternoon birding at Mount Yuwan Observatory Park Evening/night birding at Amami Forestpolis Park
18 May	Morning birding at Amami Nature Forest Depart Amami

Planning the trip

Information from the Kantori Facebook Group (English being the default language used in the group) were quite helpful in planning the trip, especially some short notes from Yann Muzika. I am also thankful to the authors of the following trip reports: [Anders Bacher Nielsen](#), [Jeffrey Skevington](#), [Nick Brickle](#).

Field Guide used: 高野伸二. (2015). フィールドガイド日本の野鳥 増補改訂新版,(財) 日本野鳥の会.

General Logistics

I was already based in Nagoya, Aichi prefecture, prior to heading to Amami, so the general logistics of my trip was settled by booking a package via the [WhiteBearFamily](#) that included the flights, accommodation and car rental. My accommodation was Hotel New Amami, located in the town of Nazeirifunecho, somewhat in between Amami Nature Forest and Kinsakubaru Virgin Forest.

There were plenty of food choices at places in town but they were completely absent around the birding sites apart from a small stall and some vending machines at Amami Forestpolis Park. I hence purchased Onigiris (rice triangles) and sandwiches from the convenient stores in town for the field.

I did not make any special effort to look for the Amami Rabbit because I did not have enough time and did not encounter any during my drives to the birding sites either.

Birding

Ose Beach

A very quick birding here (parking at GPS: 28.451676, 129.717266) produced some **Red-necked Stints**, **Grey-tailed Tattler**, **Eurasian Whimbrel**, **Little Tern** and **Lesser Sand Plover**. **Ruddy Kingfishers** were calling from the wooded area right beside the beach as well.

Amami Nature Forest

Parking at GPS: 28.451882, 129.592882. There was a trail, a playground and nature centre in the forest with very obvious trailheads around the carpark. **Ryukyu Robins** were calling all over the place here, although getting good views took me some effort. A pair of **White-backed (Owston's) Woodpeckers** was nesting beside the nature centre which attracted a number of photographers. One of them apparently saw a Habu pit viper *Protobothrops flavoviridis* just minutes before my arrival but I was sadly unable to find one. **Whistling Green Pigeons** and **Lidth's Jay** were present too (multiple seen along the drive to the site as well). Most importantly I found an **Amami Thrush** along the road near the carpark (around GPS: 28.452746, 129.593485) on my first evening, which turned out to be my only views of this bird throughout my trip. Night birding here was pretty good – at least eight **Ryukyu Scops Owls** heard and one very easily tracked down with walk-away views. A group of locals who were driving around warned me about walking the trails – the Habus are apparently quite common, although I saw none – but owling from the main road was very easy as well.



Ryukyu Robin



Ryukyu Scops Owl

Kinsakubaru Virgin Forest

As indicated in other trip reports, the roads around this area were not fully paved. I entered the forest by driving from the northern, paved section (starting around GPS: 28.366848, 129.448027), turned right at the first T-junction (GPS: 28.349363, 129.449800) and parked at the trailhead at GPS: 28.341817, 129.446550. I drove in pretty early – reaching the trailhead by 0515 – and heard many **Ryukyu Scops Owls** on the way in (and oddly heard not just one, but two, calling later in the morning close to 0900 while driving out).

I walked about 1.7km into the trail and back and encountered multiple **Narcissus (Ryukyu) Flycatchers** (that I did not in Amami Nature Forest on both my during this trip – the photographers I met there also mentioned that they were easier in Kinsakubaru). I heard many **Amami Thrushes** but frustratingly wasn't able to get any of them into view. **Japanese Wood Pigeons** were also calling, as were the other forest inhabitants. Apart from the *Ficedula*, the species I found here were pretty much consistent with Amami Nature Forest.

Mount Yuwan Observatory Park

A brief stop at Mount Yuwan Observatory Park in mid-day (parking at GPS: 28.287488, 129.315562) did not produce anything new but panoramic view from the observatory tower was pretty fantastic.

I also had luck with some great views of the **Ryukyu Minivet** (not a Ryukyu islands endemic by the way, they are also found in Kyushu) around here that mostly only gave me flyby views at the other sites.



Ryukyu Minivet

Amami Forestpolis Park

I arrived at this site at about 1720 on my second evening (carpark GPS: 28.315957, 129.336040) and my main target was the Amami Woodcock that was apparently numerous here. My hopes were honestly low since I encountered none during my two night and morning drives.

Bird activity was still pretty good in the evening. A family of **Lidth's Jays** were nesting under the roof of the resting hut at GPS: 28.316800, 129.335307 and the wooded area at GPS: 28.316774, 129.333928 yielded great views of **Whistling Green Pigeon, Ruddy Kingfisher** and more **White-backed (Owston's) Woodpeckers**.

I waited around the carpark once the sun started to set, staring into the forest like a bumbling fool. Then, at dusk, a fat blob darted out of the woods – narrowly missing me – and flew straight towards the fields behind the car park. I then headed to the field at GPS: 28.316795, 129.335019 and was absolutely dumbfounded, because before me were no less than 10 fat **Amami Woodcock** blobs just blobbily blobbing around like weird blobs. (Sorry, English is difficult.)

Anyway, the birds did not seem to really care about my presence as long as I was stationary, so I just sat down in the middle of the field and waited for them to walk towards me rather than to follow them around. There were at least two more of them in the inaccessible soccer field at GPS: 28.316070, 129.334901 and definitely a lot more in the entire area, so this site is probably a great place to nail this species. While walking around the general area I also encountered a **Northern Boobook** and heard many more **Ryukyu Scops Owls**. On one occasion I also heard what could only have been a Japanese Scops Owl, but it was a one-off encounter and I was unable to get any sound recordings or a response by tape.



Amami Woodblob

Systematic List of Birds

33 species seen, 1 heard only

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill F, D Donsker & P Rasmussen (Eds). 2020. IOC World Bird List (v10.1). doi : 10.14344/IOC.ML.10.1.

1 = Seen, HO = Heard Only

No.	English Name	Latin Name	Amami
1	Japanese Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba janthina</i>	HO
2	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	
3	Whistling Green Pigeon	<i>Treron formosae</i>	
4	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	
5	Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Mongolus exilis</i>	
6	Eurasian Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	
7	Red-Necked Stint	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	
8	Amami Woodcock	<i>Scolopax mira</i>	
9	Grey-Tailed Tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>	
10	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>	
11	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	
12	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	
13	Japanese Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter gularis</i>	
14	Ryukyu Scops Owl	<i>Otus elegans</i>	
15	Northern Boobook	<i>Ninox japonica</i>	
16	Ruddy Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon coromanda</i>	
17	Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus kizuki</i>	
18	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	
19	Ryukyu Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus tegimae</i>	
20	Japanese Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone atrocaudata</i>	
21	Lidth's Jay	<i>Garrulus lidthi</i>	
22	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	
23	Varied Tit	<i>Sittiparus varius</i>	
24	Japanese Tit	<i>Parus minor</i>	

25	Brown-Eared Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>	
26	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
27	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	
28	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
29	Warbling White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>	
30	Amami Thrush	<i>Zoothera major</i>	
31	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	
32	Ryukyu Robin	<i>Larvivora komadori</i>	
33	Narcissus Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula narcissina</i>	
34	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	