

Trip report: Miyake Island, Japan (29/05/2018 - 30/05/2018)

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The volcanic islands floating south of “mainland” Japan are libraries of evolutionary history. Miyake Island is one of such islands located about 100km from Tokyo and the endemic (sub)species there are birder magnets. Birding the island is pretty simple and all it takes is two short days generally – some manage it within one. That being said, navigating the country might be difficult for non-Japanese speakers and although there already are several independent trip reports online, I figured that providing my own brief version might be helpful too.

Main Locations Birded

Miyake Island



Owston's Tit

Planning the trip

[The official website of the Akakokko-kan](#) (Akakokko is the Japanese name for the Izu Thrush and the website is managed by the Miyake Nature Centre) provides a super detailed itinerary to clear the main targets on the island. I basically followed the superb birding advice on the website which allowed me to find all my targets (I also had no idea what CloudBirders was back then) and would frankly have skipped writing this report if not for the fact that the information were all in Japanese.

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

Transport to Miyake Island

There are two ways to get to the island, via flight or ferry. I took the latter like many other birders. The ferry, called the Tachibana Maru – a regular ferry that connects Tokyo and Miyake Island – departed from the Takeshiba Ferry Terminal in Tokyo (GPS: 35.652246, 139.762142) at 2230 and reached Miyake Island around 0500 the next morning. The return ferry departed at 1335 and reached Takeshiba at 1945. The timings for these regular ferries are still the same as of writing (May 2020).

There are several cabin classes available for the first overnight ride (see photos on the official site [here](#)). Tickets prices vary according to season and classes, and so do the timetables. Such other detailed logistical information can be found [here](#) (English site available).

Some birders choose to find all the targets within the morning and head back for the afternoon ferry, but I took my time and spent a night on the island. The return ferry trip is where birders look out for pelagic species – I stood on the deck almost throughout the entire duration but was only able to find myself **Streaked Shearwaters** and one **Black-footed Albatross**.

Accommodation

I stayed at [Pension Oshidori \(note: Japanese site\)](#) (booked by calling them, the telephone number is on the website but they don't speak English). Prices vary according to season and is listed [on their website here \(note: Japanese site\)](#). The owner picked me up from the ferry terminal promptly on the first morning, and back on the second afternoon. I rented a vehicle from the accommodation as well (prices on the same link as the previous) to navigate the island.

Food

I typically get my food from convenience stores when birding in Japan but there were no “big convenience store chains” on the island. I hence brought some field food (bread, rice balls and drinks) from a shop in the town where the accommodation was located before heading out to bird. The towns/villages are not exactly located close to each other so it would be a good idea to buy enough food beforehand to save time. Dinner was provided at the accommodation.

Birding

I managed to find all the main targets on the first day and hence spent the rest of my trip just enjoying random places within the island and staring at other slightly more touristy sites. These were the two key sites I visited where I found the main targets.



Miyake Nature Centre Akakokko Station

The carpark was at GPS: 34.051504, 139.527558 and the beautiful songs of the **Japanese Robins** serenaded me as soon as I exited the vehicle. **Owston's Tits** were right at the carpark, a pair of **Japanese Wood Pigeons** flew over me within minutes and the robins were very easily found upon walking towards the centre.

The nature centre had a hide and a small water puddle where **Japanese Bush Warblers** and **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers** were attracted to. A **Eurasian Wren** was nesting in the roof of the building as well. Behind the station was a lake called Tairo Ike which had a path around it (<2 km in length). **Iijima's Leaf Warblers** and **Brown-eared Bubuls** were all over the forest and I encountered a total of four **Izu Thrushes**. Basically, all the forest targets were here.

The viewpoint of the lake was at GPS: 34.055709, 139.526101 but apart from **Black-crowned Night Herons** and **Grey Herons** the waterbody was otherwise empty.



Izu Thrush



Japanese Robin

Cape Izu

This was a pretty nice place and I visited twice – first day's afternoon and next day's early morning. I parked at GPS: 34.112359, 139.490178 and just bummed around the general area. On both occasions I saw many **Pacific Swifts** and **Japanese Wood Pigeons** flying around, and most importantly the **Styan's Grasshopper Warblers**. The grasshopper warblers were present at a high density, but it took a little while before one finally popped up from the grass field to sing from a visible perch. There were also **Lesser Cuckoos** here (and actually all over the island – I heard many while driving).

Systematic List of Birds

28 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

English Name	Latin Name	Miyake
Pacific Swift	<i>Apus pacificus</i>	
Lesser Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>	
Japanese Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba janthina</i>	
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	
Black-Tailed Gull	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>	
Black-Footed Albatross	<i>Phoebastria nigripes</i>	
Streaked Shearwater	<i>Calonectris leucomelas</i>	
Black-Crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	
Grey-Faced Buzzard	<i>Butastur indicus</i>	
Northern Boobook	<i>Ninox japonica</i>	HO
Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus kizuki</i>	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	
Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	
Owston's Tit	<i>Sittiparus owstoni</i>	
Brown-Eared Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	
Japanese Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis diphone</i>	
Ijima's Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus ijimae</i>	
Styan's Grasshopper Warbler	<i>Helopsaltes pleskei</i>	
Warbling White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>	
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	
Izu Thrush	<i>Turdus celaenops</i>	
Japanese Robin	<i>Larvivora akahige</i>	
Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	
Grey-Capped Greenfinch	<i>Chloris sinica</i>	