

## Trip report: Japan – Kyushu and Okinawa (09/12/2019 – 18/12/2019)

By Sin Yong Chee Keita @ Okamoto Keita

The spectacle of ten thousand cranes jostling in the paddyfields of Izumi is one of the highlights of winter birding in Japan. The sight of the critically endangered Okinawa Woodpecker and helplessly flightless Okinawa Rail in the southernmost prefecture of the country, Okinawa, is another that cannot be missed. I hence dragged along a non-birding friend and undertook these birding pilgrimages through a self-guided trip.

### Main Locations Birded

Kyushu – Izumi and Kogawa Dam, Lake Miike, Yatsushiro Mudflats

Okinawa



*Hooded and White-naped Cranes at Izumi*

## **Itinerary**

	<b>Kyushu</b>
9 December	Arrive at Hakata (Fukuoka Prefecture), touristy stuff Night at Hakata
10 December	Hakata to Izumi (Kagoshima Prefecture) via Shinkansen, birding at Izumi area Night at Izumi
11 December	Morning at Izumi area, afternoon at Kogawa Dam Night at Kirishima
12 December	Full day at Lake Miike Night at Kirishima
13 December	Morning at Lake Miike, afternoon at Kagoshima Prefectural Forest Night at Izumi
14 December	Morning at Kogawa Dam, afternoon at Yatsushiro Mudflats Yatsushiro to Hakata via Shinkansen, flight from Hakata to Okinawa  <b>Okinawa</b> Night at Naha
15 December	Morning at Naha, afternoon at Yanbaru Night at Yanbaru
16 December	Full day at Yanbaru Night at Yanbaru
17 December	Morning at Yanbaru, afternoon at Naha Night at Naha
18 December	Touristy stuff, flight back to Nagoya

## Accommodation

I booked all my accommodations via Rakuten Travels, except when stated otherwise. Prices indicated are tax inclusive.

### Kyushu

#### 9 December

*Sun Business Hotel (サンビジネスホテル) in Hakata (Fukuoka Prefecture)*

4500 yen per night. Few minutes walk from Hakata station. The hotel building seemed old but the room was very clean and simple. Good value for price. Breakfast option available for 300 yen which I did not try. By virtue of being located next to a major station, food was not a problem at all.

#### 10 December

*Kamon Inn Kotobuki (家紋イン寿) at Izumi town (Kagoshima Prefecture)*

6000 yen per night. An entire typical Japanese house for rent. Free parking. Plenty of food options nearby and a hypermarket (Supercenter Nishimuta Izumi) just few minutes drive away. Easy access to the birding sites at the Izumi Crane Observation Centre area and Kogawa Dam.

#### 11, 12 December

*Active Resorts Kirishima (アクティブリゾート霧島) at Kirishima (Kagoshima Prefecture)*

7000 yen per night, with additional 320 yen for the Onsen fee for 2 nights. Finding a cheap(er) accommodation near Lake Miike was not easy and I hence settled for this place. Free parking. About 20 minute drive from Lake Miike.

There were cabins and campsites at Lake Miike but the former was not operating likely due to the winter season. Sleeping in the car at the Lake Miike carpark was a possible option, but I chose not to risk getting unwell.

The room we booked had no shower, though it did not matter to us since we were planning to visit the onsen anyway. The onsen was normal, nothing fancy – a decently sized tub and another smaller roten-buro (outdoor onsen). Buffet dinner was available for a price of around 4800 yen per person. We did not opt for it and searched around for food on our first night which turned out to be a disaster as all the options that showed up on Google Maps were closed despite being listed as open...at 6pm! Eventually, we found 鳥茶屋炭火焼 (31.846745, 130.875680) that was open and filled our stomachs there. On the second night we splurged on delicious convenience store food.

#### 13 December

*Hotel Toko(ホテル桃晃) at Izumi town (Kagoshima Prefecture)*

7800 yen per night. Again located within the convenient and small town of Izumi. Free parking. Onsen (with no roten-buro) and breakfast included.

## **Okinawa**

### **14 December**

*OYO Victoria Hotel at Naha*

5986 yen per night. There is a convenience store right beside the hotel. About 15 minutes from the famous Kokusai-dori by foot.

### **15, 16 December**

*Pension Yonahadake (ペンション与那覇岳) at Kunigami*

5857 yen per night. Booked via agoda.com. Shared toilets (total of four), showers (total of two – one with bathtub, one without) and kitchens, but there was no one else during our 2 nights there. The room we booked was a very spacious Japanese style room. Located in the forests of Yanbaru – I highly recommend visiting birders to choose this accommodation for reasons that would be apparent later.

### **17 December**

*OYO Victoria Hotel at Naha*

3800 yen per night. Same accommodation as on 14 December, but cheaper because it was a weekday night. Parking fee was 500 yen per night.

## **General Logistics**

### **Language**

I am fluent in Japanese and did not struggle, and my friend who is unfamiliar with the language managed to gesture his way through when I was not around to help with translation. I am doubtful that the locals around the birding sites have strong English skills, despite some of them being touristy areas, but am confident that communication should not be too much of an issue for non-Japanese speakers. The Google Translate mobile application, which has an offline download option, should come in handy (though direct translations can sometimes lead to weird sentences).

### **Food**

Apart from our dinners at the towns of Naha, Hakata and Izumi, where many food options were available, most of our meals were purchased at the convenience stores.

The convenience stores in Japan sell delicious bentos (take-out food), rice triangles (called Onigiri), cup noodles (all convenience stores have hot water), sandwiches and breads of different varieties (the maple syrup pancake is the best thing ever on shelf – this **fact** (!!!!)) has been verified by three more friends of mine), as well as other small bites like fried chicken. The bentos are kept cold but the counter staffs will usually ask “kochira atatamemasuka?” (do you want this microwaved?). In cases where communication breaks down, just point at the bento and say “hotto” (hot) and the staffs will likely understand. Some convenience stores have dining corners as well.

At the Yanbaru region in Okinawa, the only area with a proper variety of food was the Yuiyuikunigami Rest Area (道の駅 ゆいゆい国頭, 26.732059, 128.169406). There were restaurants there and a separate food court beside the restaurant compound. I highly recommend visiting the food court, it had fantastic and cheap Okinawan food.

In Naha, we visited the famous Kokusai-dori street. The main street was mostly filled with tourist traps but the quieter alleys in Heiwa-dori had many shops filled with locals instead of tourists. We visited [Hanagasa Shokudo](#) 花笠食堂 and it was great.

### Safety

We left our belongings in the car everywhere and did not have any issues at all. In fact, there was barely anyone at the birding sites we visited apart from the Izumi Crane Observatory Centre area.

Asian Black Bears, which very rarely attack people, are extinct from Kyushu and thus was not a cause for concern. At Okinawa, we did see the handsome Habu *Protobothrops flavoviridis* (pit viper) from the car once at night. Bashing blindly in Okinawa might not be very advisable, and there really was not a need to do so for Okinawan birding.

### Weather

Good weather throughout the trip, except on my last day in Naha where it rained (but thankfully I was just being a typical tourist instead of birding). At Kyushu, both Izumi and the Lake Miike area were quite chilly in the mornings and at night (a low of about 5°C) but warm in the day (around 18°C). The Yanbaru area was also surprisingly cold once the sun retired (reported online with a low of about 16°C in Naha, but the winds in Yanbaru were cold and especially so when driving with windows down) but annoyingly warm in the day (a high of about 27°C). Winter wear is needed for Kyushu (but note I was raised 1 degree north of the equator). For Okinawa, short-sleeves should be fine but a windbreaker is highly recommended.

### Planning the trip

I referred to and am thankful to the authors of the following trip reports and sites.

Kyushu: [Nielsen \(2016\)](#), [Burch \(2013\)](#) and [Hottola \(2015\)](#)

Okinawa: [Knass \(2017\)](#), [Skevington \(2016\)](#) and [Marko \(2012\)](#). Marko (2012) – A Birder's Guide to Okinawa – was the most comprehensive and useful document that covered all the key birding locations in Okinawa.

Both Kyushu and Okinawa: [Grundsten et al. \(2016\)](#),

The [Kantori Facebook Group](#), also a great resource for finding information. eBird records for Kyushu were scarce – barely any Japanese birders use the platform – while that for Okinawa was slightly better. However, they were both still sufficient in getting rough ideas of the key sites to visit.

Also special thanks to Yann Muzika and Lau Jia Sheng for providing me tips.

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, 392p.

永井真人. (2016). 鳥くんの比べて識別! 野鳥図鑑 670 第 2 版, 文一総合出版.

## **Transport**

Transport systems in Japan operate to the minute, especially so for trains. Expecting convenient transport by simply walking into stations without prior planning is not really the best idea for long distance travels (but subways in major cities generally operate at high frequencies).

### Hakata to Izumi

Shinkansen (“bullet train”) from Hakata station to Izumi station, 7320 yen per pax booked online on JR Kyushu. Duration was 1 hour 12 minute.

### Southern Kyushu Area

Rented a small vehicle from Toyota Rent a Car, which is generally a more expensive option compared to other rental car companies, but the discrepancy compared to other companies was not as significant for the members (which I am). I opted to rent from Toyota as I planned to pick up the car at Izumi and return it at Yatsushiro, an option which other rental companies around the Izumi station could not offer (at least according to their websites). The vehicle, which I rented for effectively 5 days (10 December morning to 14 December evening), was 36440 yen. There was a free shuttle service from the Yatsushiro branch to the Shinyatsushiro station available upon request.

I used Google Maps to navigate my way although the car was equipped with a navigation system and it worked fine. There were no toll roads between the Izumi, Lake Miike and Kagoshima Prefectural Forest area. There were tolls on the expressways towards Yatsushiro and as I did not have any ETC card (expressway card), I went to the “Standard Lane” (一般レーン), usually indicated in green, instead of the “ETC Lane”. The leftmost lane in Japan is typically the standard lane. When entering toll roads, slow down and take the ticket that automatically comes out of the machine, then merge back into the expressway. When exiting, pick the standard lane again, hand the ticket to the staffs at the counters, and pay the toll fee (prices can be checked online or at the banners of the exit tolls if you are able to read the location names. Otherwise, the staff would tell you the cost).

### Yatsushiro to Hakata

Shinkansen from Shinyatsushiro station to Hakata station, 5190 yen per pax booked online on JR Kyushu. Duration was 51 minute.

### Hakata to Okinawa

Flew by Peach Air from Hakata to Naha – 5910 yen per pax (after including all sorts of blablabla fees) and an additional 1700 yen for one checked baggage. Flight duration about 2 hours.

### Within Okinawa

From the Naha airport, we took a taxi to OYO Victoria Hotel on the first night instead of taking the bus or monorail as it was late (2230). The taxi fare was 1260 yen.

We then rented a vehicle from Oryx Rent-a-car, picking up from the Miebash branch and returning at the Naha Airport branch (same price as returning to the original branch). The cost was 14553 yen for effectively 4 days (15 December morning to 18 December afternoon). There was a free shuttle service from the Naha Airport branch to the Naha Airport that operated every 15 minutes.

Google Maps worked fine for navigation and toll roads operated the same way as in Kyushu (and everywhere else in Japan).

## Birding

### Kyushu

Apart from the cranes and other assorted species found at the Izumi area, my targets for Kyushu included the Crested Kingfisher, Yellow-eared Bunting, Ural Owl, Japanese Scops Owl, and most importantly the Copper Pheasant. I hence devoted 2.5 days to the forests with the hope to bump into the big, long and endemic not-a-chicken, but I failed to do so.

### Izumi Crane Observation Centre area



My main targets at Izumi included the Cranes, Rook, Daurian Jackdaw, Chestnut-eared Bunting, Pipits, Chinese Penduline-tit and any other random birds that I could find in the fields.

I visited the Izumi area for one afternoon and one morning. Birding here was essentially just driving around the entire region, scanning cranes after cranes after more cranes for rarities and identifying whatever else that flushed from the roadside. There was barely any traffic, so other than giving way to the occasional vehicles, driving around and parking at random spots was not a problem at all. The areas marked in red (recreated from memory – borders might be slightly wrong) were cordoned off by very obvious fences. Unintentionally driving into restricted area should not happen unless smashing through obstacles is your thing.

**Hooded, White-naped, Common and Sandhill Cranes** are species that are more or less regular (with the latter two being more uncommon) while **Demoiselle and Siberian Cranes** are rarer targets to look out for. There was a single Demoiselle Crane during my visit (apparently the first in 15 years according to the Crane Observation Centre, though there are eBird records from 2008) which was my raison d'être and I repeated the accelerate – stop – scan process for hours.



*Hooded Crane*

There were fences built along the road around the roosting area (32.105930, 130.291939) with several viewing points set-up. The cranes took off from this area as the sun rose and were spread out throughout the entire region in the day.

**Hooded** and **White-naped Cranes** were aplenty (official counts of 13902 and 1533 respectively during my visit). They were fed at the Izumi Crane Observatory Centre and were everywhere else throughout the paddyfields as well. **Common Cranes** (with an official count of 4) required some effort to find. After searching for about 5 to 6 hours on my first afternoon, I finally found the **Demoiselle Crane** at 32.108059, 130.266026 among a flock of **Hooded Cranes**. Together with this flock was also one **Hooded x Common Crane** (official count of 6) as well as a single **Sandhill Crane** (official count of 7).



*Demoiselle Crane*

At the waterlogged area around 32.102844, 130.299472, many **Northern Lapwings** and **Dunlins** foraged busily. A single **Common Snipe** quietly walking around was a nice bonus as well. **Buff-bellied Pipits** were abundant throughout, there was one **Richard's Pipit**, but I somehow failed to find Red-throated Pipits that are not supposed to be too difficult. When scanning and inevitably flushing birds from the shrubs along the roads, **Meadow Buntings** were common, while **Chestnut-eared Buntings** less so. **Eurasian Tree Sparrows** and **Russet Sparrows** were present as well, with the latter in smaller numbers.



*Long-eared Owl*

Hottola (2015) reported **Chinese Penduline Tits** at the reeds along the river around 32.117554, 130.266047 and I managed to find them at this area too. The reeds here also produced multiple **Meadow** and **Black-faced Buntings**. While walking along the riverbank, I flushed a pair of **Long-eared Owls** from the trees at 32.116440,130.266161 that resultantly got attacked by a flock of **Carrion Crows**. While I am unsure if this is a regular roosting spot, given the lack of well-shaded trees around the fields, it certainly is a tree worth scanning from afar before approaching. The small pond along this riverbank at 32.119349, 130.266265 had some **Dunlins** and ducks, though nothing particularly noteworthy.

**Rooks** were all over the place and I consistently saw big flocks of them near the Izumi Crane Observatory Centre at various times of the day (especially at the trees around 32.105748, 130.280123). I observed many bathing at the shallow parts of Iwashita River around 32.100564, 130.278277 too. Careful scanning produced several **Daurian Jackdaws**. The pied individuals were very easy to find, while the darker ones required more effort – though very obvious in flight as the Jackdaws were much smaller.



The general habitat of the area seemed good for Kestrels and Merlins, but I failed to find any. **Eastern Ospreys** flew around occasionally and there was also a single **Eurasian Sparrowhawk** that flew above the woods, seen from around 32.105968,130.262086. A **Bull-headed Shrike** was observed from this spot as well. **Black Kites** were everywhere.

Summary of GPS spots:

32.105930, 130.291939 – good views of roosting Cranes before sunrise (and after sunset?)

32.108059, 130.266026 – Demoiselle Crane

32.102844, 130.299472 – Dunlins, Northern Lapwings, Common Snipes foraging

32.117554, 130.266047 – Chinese Penduline Tit, Long-eared Owl

32.105748, 130.280123 – many Rooks

32.100564, 130.278277 – bathing Rooks and Daurian Jackdaws

32.105968,130.262086 – Eurasian Sparrowhawk flyby

### Kogawa Dam

Kogawa Dam was just 15 minutes from Izumi town. I visited this site on one afternoon and one morning.

There is a single quiet tarmac road that goes around the dam and scanning the waters from the occasional clearings produced **Crested Kingfishers** from 32.061294, 130.411761 and once more from 32.051317, 130.416590. The road had a lot of **Varied, Japanese** and **Long-tailed Tits**, **Pale Thrushes**, **Warbling White-eyes**, as well as some **Daurian Redstarts** and **Red-flanked Bluetails**. A lone **Yellow-throated Bunting** at 32.059532, 130.419343 that gave a very brief and depressing view.

The exposed bank at the southernmost edge of the lake (32.046595, 130.418239) was a very productive spot with **Long-billed Plovers** and **Green Sandpipers**, as well as **Grey, White** and **Japanese Wagtails** zipping around.

A local I met told me that he sees/has seen Copper Pheasant(s?) around 32.048098, 130.418828, "usually after rain". I went to this area on my next visit before sunrise. There was one **Ural Owl** calling here. I walked around the roads as well as a trail starting from 32.045763, 130.418177, but the only Copper Pheasants I saw were in my field guides. The trail was not particularly productive and the only new bird there that was not found along the main road was the (introduced and established) **Red-billed Leiothrix**. There were many **Chinese Bamboo Partridges** (also introduced and established) calling too.

Summary of GPS spots:

32.061294, 130.411761 and 32.051317, 130.416590 – Crested Kingfisher

32.046595, 130.418239 – Long-billed Plover, Green Sandpiper, Wagtails

32.048098, 130.418828 – Copper Pheasant, supposedly

32.045763, 130.418177 – trail through forest

32.059532, 130.419343 – Yellow-throated Bunting

## Lake Miike

The carpark at Lake Miike (31.886868, 130.966077, free parking) is supposed to only be open from 0800 to 1630 and there is a “gate” (two poles with a lockable chain) at 31.888715,130.963781. Fortunately, this gate was not locked during my visit and I was able to drive freely to the campsite before 0600 and out around 2100. However, even if it were to be locked, there should not be much inconvenience as vehicles can be parked around the gate which is actually only 300 metres from the campsite carpark.

The trail that goes around the lake was inaccessible during my visit, however, I did see vehicles at the other end of the lake (where there is a parking lot indicated in the map, on the east end). I do not know if the trails were accessible from the other side.

I hence walked around the green and pink trails. The entrance to the green trail was very obvious, located along the only road from the gate to the carpark, while that to the pink trail was at 31.885329, 130.965080. The green trail was very obvious while the pink trail was slightly more dishevelled, though clearly marked by pink flagging tapes.

I walked the trails for 1.5 days (did not walk towards the Shrine ((topmost section of the map))) and once down to Lake Koike. The trail down to Lake Koike was rather thrashed and I did not have any interesting sightings at the smaller lake itself either.

31.886868, 130.966077 – campsite carpark

31.888715,130.963781 – alternative carpark (300m from campsite)

31.885329, 130.965080 – trailhead



Throughout the forest, **Varied, Japanese, Willow** and **Long-tailed Tits** were common, often in mixed flocks together with **Warbling White-eyes** and **Eurasian Nuthatches**. I also found a single **Goldcrest** in a mixed flock, as well as a flock of **Japanese Grosbeaks**. **Ryukyu Minivets** were very common by call but they typically just flew over the canopy. Some joined the mixed flocks, though, which allowed good views. The hilarious songs of **White-bellied Green Pigeons** echoed through the forest but I was only able to get flushed views. **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers** were very common, and although there were lesser **Japanese Green** and **White-backed Woodpeckers**, I still encountered both species during every routine.



*Ural Owl*

The campsite, supposedly a good site for the Yellow-throated Bunting (that I failed to find) had multiple **Grey Wagtails, Olive-backed Pipits** and **Japanese Bush Warblers** along the shrubs. Lake Koike itself had plenty of floating ducks but none of them were noteworthy.

There was a very responsive **Ural Owl** at the campsite that turned out to be one half of a pair, and an attempt to search for a Japanese Scops Owl was a failure.

### Kagoshima Prefectural Forest

After spending 1.5 days in the forests of Lake Miike, I decided to visit the Ebino Plateau based on [this eBird checklist](#) in attempt to emulate the observers and flush a Copper Pheasant. Some sections of the forests along Route 408 (that leads to the plateau) seemed ideal for the pheasant, but of course I saw none. After a 50 minute drive all the way up to the plateau, there was a sign that prevented access beyond 31.945389, 130.843841 due to volcanic activity, so not only was I unable to bird, I was also unable to enjoy the scenery as a consolation. I therefore drove to the Kagoshima Prefectural Forest on a whim based on [this other eBird checklist](#) – if a male Copper Pheasant can perform on a tarmac road for 8 people, why not for me?

The drive to Kagoshima Prefectural Forest took about an hour. I first explored a “hiking trail” from 31.839920,130.636260. The trail was quite steep and bird activity was almost zero. The view from the observatory deck at the top was obscured by trees and although standing on railings allowed me to look beyond the canopy towards Sakurajima, the scenery was not worth risking standing on top of the structure which primary purpose was to prevent my fall.

I then headed to another trail that started from 31.841978,130.617679. This section of the forest was labelled Yacho no Mori – Forest of the Birds – but was ironically the most terrible trail that I visited throughout my whole trip.

The rest of my afternoon was spent driving aimlessly around the forests of the prefectural forest. The habitat seemed good and I drove around for hours till sunset, but there was no Copper Pheasant. I am now fully convinced that this bird, like climate change, is merely a Chinese conspiracy.

## Uki and Yatsushiro Mudflats

Before visiting Yatsushiro Mudflats, I dropped by Uki (about 20 minutes North of Yatsushiro) with the sole purpose of finding myself a Baikal Teal. I first drove to 32.634226, 130.658672 – the northern section of the Asa river mouth – and knocked my skull to check if there was any brain in there because the views were terribly backlit (at noon) and I really should have seen it coming during the drive. There was a flock of **Black-headed Gulls** and **Kentish Plovers** there. The ducks (>1000) were resting along the southern section of the river mouth, and I hence drove over to 32.630626, 130.658265 and was rewarded with excellent views of about 200 **Baikal Teals**. Other species included the typical ducks, some **Falcated Ducks**, as well as one **Great Crested Grebe**.

I then headed to Yatsushiro Mudflats, a site best visited during low tide. I knew this fact from reading trip reports and re-learned it the hard way. The high tide on the day I visited was at 1036 (361 cm) while the low tide was at 1612 (10 cm). I visited the mudflats (32.456054, 130.565103) around 1420, thinking that the tide would already be low enough, but I was horribly wrong. As I was on a tight schedule to return the vehicle and catch the train back to Hakata, my time there was limited, and like an idiot leaving a movie theatre just as the advertisements are over, I left Yatsushiro just as the



**Black-headed Gull (left), Heuglin's Gull (right)**

birds started to show up. I was still able to find the key species of this site – **Saunders's Gull** – but my hopes of pulling out a Heuglin's or Pallas's Gull out of the air was crushed. Red-breasted Merganser, that I needed, should have been around based on eBird reports, but I found none. **Common Greenshanks, Black-headed, and Black-tailed Gulls** were present.

Summary of GPS spots:

32.634226, 130.658672 – Asa river viewpoint 1 (nearer to gulls and waders). Afternoon backlit.

32.630626, 130.658265 – Asa river viewpoint 2 (nearer to ducks). Baikal Teal.

32.456054, 130.565103 – Saunder's Gull. Visit during low tide.

## Okinawa

### Naha Area

There were several spots of interest to me in Naha. Waders and waterbirds are the main species at all the sites and my key targets here were the Black-faced Spoonbill, Black-winged Stilt and Pied Avocet. Absolute distances between the birding sites were short, but the drives took longer than expected due to traffic.

At [Triangle Pond](#), 26.172415, 127.656257 (parked vehicle around 26.172415, 127.656257), three species of white coloured birds, **Black-faced Spoonbills**, **Pied Avocets**, and **Black-winged Stilts**, were present upon my arrival. Other birds here included the typical waterbirds such as **Common Moorhen**, **Garganey** and **Common Kingfisher**. I visited during high tide.



*Black-faced Spoonbill*

I went to the following sites during my last afternoon in Naha. All are best visited during low tide. As I was not equipped with a scope, wader watching was not very productive, but the number of birds were generally low during my visits anyway. Chinese Egrets can occur anywhere, but I found none.

[Mudflats off Shiosai Park](#), 26.172415, 127.656257. Very backlit when I visited around 1500. Apart from a faraway dark-morphed **Pacific Reef Egret**, species here included **Grey-tailed Tattler**, **Whimbrel**, **Ruddy Turnstone**, **Lesser Sand Plover** and **Pacific Golden Plover**.

[Toyosaki Bird Observation Park](#), 26.160730, 127.660399. Nothing special. **Grey Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Whimbrel**.

[Manko Wetland Centre](#), 26.193954, 127.681818. Had a short boardwalk through the mangroves and a viewpoint for the mudflats. Same few waders and excellent views of foraging **Pied Avocets** at the end of the boardwalk (26.193363, 127.683700). A Long-billed Dowitcher was apparently present but I was unable to find it.



*Pied Avocet*

### Nago and Ogimi area

I visited the Nago and Ogimi sites en route to Yanbaru from Naha.

The [rice paddies around Nago](#) around 26.614149, 128.016018 was quite disappointing and the only interesting bird here was the **Scaly-breasted Munia**.

Bird life was slightly (only slightly) better at the [Ogimi fields](#) around 26.7068966, 128.1490803 with a **Wood Sandpiper** and juvenile **Grey-faced Buzzard** (common throughout Yanbaru).

### Kin Rice Fields

The kin rice fields, which I visited on the way back to Naha from Yanbaru, was very birdy and I would recommend spending a good duration here.

eBird checklists are split to the [northern side](#) 26.454757,127.939479 and [southern side](#) 26.447409,127.933790.

Egrets flocked around the tractors at work, while **Zitting Cisticolas**, **Scaly-breasted Munias** and **Japanese Bush Warblers** foraged around the bushes and shrubs by the side. **Blue Rock Thrushes**, **Grey** and **Japanese Wagtails** often ran around the roads, unaware that cars could crush them to death. **Eastern Yellow Wagtails** were slightly more well behaved, running around the drier fields instead.

The wetter rice fields had **Little Ringed** and **Pacific Golden Plovers**, **Common Snipes**, **Wood Sandpipers**, **Northern Lapwings** and **Long-toed Stints**. A single **Common Kestrel** flew around, while the small water channels along the roads had **Black-winged Stilts** and **Green Sandpipers**.

### Yanbaru Area

The Yanbaru area is where the main targets and endemics of Okinawa can be found. My key targets here included the Ryukyu Robin, Okinawa Woodpecker, Okinawa Rail and Japanese Scops Owl ssp *preyeri*. I did not see nor hear any Japanese Wood Pigeons nor Ryukyu Green Pigeons. I spent a total of one afternoon, a full day, and another short morning at the Yanbaru area.

I expected to struggle more with the Okinawa Woodpecker but encountered a total of 5. The Okinawa Rail, which I thought would be easy, was on the other hand difficult. I drove around the mountain roads during all possible dawns and dusks but saw none; they were almost silent and quite unresponsive. Searching around the known roosts in Ada (details to follow) somehow yielded zero birds as well.

December is (expectedly) not a very birdy period for the Yanbaru region. A full day and one night is certainly required to clear the key targets and although I managed to find everything (lest the Pigeons) in effectively one day, had I not been lucky with the one Okinawa Rail, I would have left the island with a very painful dip.

The resident **Ryukyu Robin** and migratory **Pale Thrushes** were abundant throughout. Other migrants were scarce, with only one each of **Daurian Redstart**, **Red-flanked Bluetail** and **Eurasian Siskin** throughout. **Grey-faced Buzzards** were common in open areas and I saw several while driving, often on lampposts.



**Ryukyu Robin**

The main sites I visited were:

- Ada Village

Visited the village on my first evening and heard several **Okinawa Rails** calling but could not see any. Searched around Yasuda Shrine (26.745081, 128.315911) as well as random clearing nearby in hope for roosting rails (apparently reliable) but found none too. Visited again on my second morning was fortunate as there was a single **Okinawa Rail** at the entrance (26.746437, 128.315279) that gave excellent views.



*Okinawa Rail*

- Trail to Yonaha Mountain (trailhead: 26.731950, 128.209050)

Visited twice, once in the afternoon and once in the morning, till about 1.7 km in. Highlights here were **Okinawa Woodpeckers**, with a solitary bird at 26.729410,128.212892 and a pair at 26.727176,128.213444. I encountered the pair at the same spot on both visits. There was also a **Ryukyu Flycatcher** where the pair was.

- Drive from Pension Yonhadake to Yonaha Mountain Trail (and slightly beyond)

Bumped into **Okinawa Woodpeckers** at 26.728209, 128.196507 and another at 26.735692,128.218069 while driving, both first detected by sound. Their knocking sounds different from the **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers** and they call very softly. They flap with a distinct sound too.

- [Taiho Dam](#) Bird Observatory (hide at 26.646635, 128.147018)

The nearest car park to the hide is at 26.646962, 128.145601. Google maps directed me to access the observatory from the southern direction via 26.644419, 128.146084 but I was unable to as the road was overgrown. Instead, I entered from the northern side at 26.649181, 128.145441.

A marshy pond with many migratory waterbirds including the common ducks and a single **Smew**. I went to this place mainly to look for a trio of Cotton Pygmy Goose that were reported several days earlier, but they were not present. Habitat seemed good for Cinnamon Bittern too. **Light-vented Bulbuls** were all over the area, several **Meadow Buntings**, and a single **Eurasian Siskin**.

- [Small dirt road](#) at 26.780833,128.3217274

Supposedly good for Okinawa Rail, but found none.

- [Oku forest roads](#) (Parked around 26.824786, 128.305749)

Visited mainly to look for Japanese Wood Pigeons but there were none. Apparently good for Okinawa Woodpeckers too. One **Okinawa Rail**, but heard only.



*Okinawa Woodpecker*

- [Fushigawa Dam](#) Parking Lot (26.742628, 128.280860)

A pair of super tame **Northern Boobooks** that a local was photographing. One bird consistently returned to the tree at 26.742514, 128.280823. Probably a reliable spot.

- Clearing at 26.738882, 128.259383

A nice big clearing (visible from satellite view) that seemed productive for owling. One **Japanese Scops Owl** responded which I failed to find, but I instead saw an **Amami Woodcock**.

- Pension Yonahadake (26.729726, 128.190423)

After a disappointing owling session, I decided to do some owling right before I went to bed. This turned out to be a key decision because I managed to nail the **Japanese Scops Owl** here. Decided to do some owling from the accommodation the next night and saw it as well as a friendly **Ryukyu Scops Owl** too.



*Japanese Scops Owl ssp preyeri*

Summary of GPS spots:

26.729410,128.212892;

26.727176,128.213444;

26.728209, 128.196507;

26.735692,128.218069 – Okinawa Woodpecker

26.746437, 128.315279 – Okinawa Rail (but heard more at other random sites in forest)

26.729726, 128.190423 (Pension Yonahadake) – Ryukyu Scops Owl, Okinawa Scops Owl

26.738882, 128.259383 – Japanese Scops Owl, Amami Woodcock

26.742514, 128.280823 – Northern Boobook



## Systematic List of Birds

125 species seen, 1 heard only

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). 2019. IOC World Bird List (v9.2). doi : 10.14344/IOC.ML.9.2.

1 = Seen, HO = Heard Only

No.	English Name	Latin Name	Kyushu	Okinawa
1	Chinese Bamboo Partridge	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus</i>	HO	
2	Mandarin Duck	<i>Aix galericulata</i>	1	
3	Baikal Teal	<i>Sibirionetta formosa</i>	1	
4	Garganey	<i>Spatula querquedula</i>		1
5	Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>	1	1
6	Gadwall	<i>Mareca strepera</i>	1	1
7	Falcated Duck	<i>Mareca falcata</i>	1	
8	Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>	1	1
9	Eastern Spot-billed Duck	<i>Anas zonorhyncha</i>	1	1
10	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	1	1
11	Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	1	
12	Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	1	1
13	Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	1	1
14	Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1	1
15	Greater Scaup	<i>Aythya marila</i>	1	
16	Smew	<i>Mergellus albellus</i>		1
17	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	1	1
18	Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	1	1
19	White-bellied Green Pigeon	<i>Treron sieboldii</i>	1	
20	Okinawa Rail	<i>Gallirallus okinawae</i>		1
21	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>		1
22	Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	1	1
23	Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>	1	
24	White-naped Crane	<i>Antigone vipio</i>	1	

25	Demoiselle Crane	<i>Grus virgo</i>	1	
26	Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>	1	
27	Hooded Crane	<i>Grus monacha</i>	1	
28	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1	
29	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	1	
30	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		1
31	Pied Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>		1
32	Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	1	1
33	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>		1
34	Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	1	1
35	Long-billed Plover	<i>Charadrius placidus</i>	1	
36	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>		1
37	Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	1	
38	Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>		1
39	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		1
40	Bar-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>		1
41	Ruddy Turnstone	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>		1
42	Long-toed Stint	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>		1
43	Dunlin	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	1	1
44	Amami Woodcock	<i>Scolopax mira</i>		1
45	Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1	1
46	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1	1
47	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1	1
48	Grey-tailed Tattler	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>		1
49	Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>		1
50	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1	1
51	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1	1
52	Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	1	1
53	Saunders's Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus saundersi</i>	1	
54	Black-tailed Gull	<i>Larus crassirostris</i>	1	

55	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1	
56	Black-faced Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>		1
57	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>		1
58	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1	1
59	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1	1
60	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>		1
61	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1	1
62	Pacific Reef Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>		1
63	Western Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	1	1
64	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	1	
65	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	1	
66	Grey-faced Buzzard	<i>Butastur indicus</i>		1
68	Japanese Scops Owl	<i>Otus semitorques</i>		1
69	Ryukyu Scops Owl	<i>Otus elegans</i>		1
70	Ural Owl	<i>Strix uralensis</i>	1	
71	Northern Boobook	<i>Ninox japonica</i>		1
72	Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1	
73	Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	1	1
74	Crested Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle lugubris</i>	1	
75	Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus kizuki</i>	1	1
76	Okinawa Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos noguchii</i>		1
77	White-backed Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>	1	
78	Japanese Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus awokera</i>	1	
79	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>		1
80	Ryukyu Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus tegimae</i>	1	1
81	Bull-headed Shrike	<i>Lanius bucephalus</i>	1	
82	Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	1	
83	Daurian Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus dauuricus</i>	1	
84	Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	1	
85	Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	1	1

86	Large-billed Crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	1	1
87	Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	1	
88	Varied Tit	<i>Sittiparus varius</i>	1	1
89	Japanese Tit	<i>Parus minor</i>	1	1
90	Chinese Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz consobrinus</i>	1	
91	Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	1	
92	Light-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>		1
93	Brown-eared Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes amaurotis</i>	1	1
94	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>		1
95	Japanese Bush Warbler	<i>Horornis diphone</i>	1	1
96	Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	1	
97	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>		1
98	Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>	1	
99	Warbling White-eye	<i>Zosterops japonicus</i>	1	1
100	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>	1	
101	Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	1	
102	Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	1	
103	Pale Thrush	<i>Turdus pallidus</i>	1	1
104	Dusky Thrush	<i>Turdus eunomus</i>	1	1
105	Ryukyu Robin	<i>Larvivora komadori</i>		1
106	Red-flanked Bluetail	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	1	1
107	Narcissus Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula narcissina</i>		1
108	Daurian Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus aureus</i>	1	1
109	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>		1
110	Russet Sparrow	<i>Passer cinnamomeus</i>	1	
111	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	1	1
112	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>		1
113	Eastern Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>		1
114	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1	1
115	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	1	1

116	Japanese Wagtail	<i>Motacilla grandis</i>	1	
117	Richard's Pipit	<i>Anthus richardi</i>	1	
118	Olive-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	1	
119	Buff-bellied Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>	1	1
120	Japanese Grosbeak	<i>Eophona personata</i>	1	
121	Grey-capped Greenfinch	<i>Chloris sinica</i>	1	
122	Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>		1
123	Meadow Bunting	<i>Emberiza cioides</i>	1	1
124	Chestnut-eared Bunting	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>	1	
125	Yellow-throated Bunting	<i>Emberiza elegans</i>	1	
126	Black-faced Bunting	<i>Emberiza spodocephala</i>	1	