

Torishima, Amami and Okinawa, Japan

26 March – 2 April, 2006

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Almost adult Short-tailed Albatross near Torishima

General

Short-tailed Albatross has always been high on my wish-list. I have taken the ferry from Hokkaido to Tokyo in February and June respectively, but luck has not been with me. When I visited Hachijojima in June 2005, I happened to meet the key researcher for this species, Hasegawa-san. He then told me that there would be a cruise to Torishima in March 2006 (thanks Hasegawa-san!!) and my mind was already then set for a return trip to Japan!

After some struggle trying to get in contact with the non-English-speaking cruise company, I suddenly got some much appreciated help from Simba Chan in Tokyo (thanks Simba!!). Jesper Hornskov could of course not resist the temptation and decided to join forces.

On the cruise to Torishima we saw a total of some 500 Short-tailed Albatrosses and well over 200 Black-footeds. It was the most over-whelming sight to see large rafts of this rare albatross sitting on the water and displaying pairs in the colony where the young birds were about to fledge. Perhaps the most memorable sights though were when adult Short-taileds slowly were cruising the steep cliff-sides of Torishima. These sights really burned marks on my retina!



On the cruise we also saw other interesting pelagic birds like a Providence Petrel, a Bannerman's Shearwater, 100+ Swinhoe's Storm-Petrels and a few Japanese Murrelets.

In order to make the trip to Japan more worthwhile (as if the Albatrosses were not enough?!), we decided to continue to Amami and Okinawa in the Ryukyu Islands. On Amami we managed to record all the key species, although Amami Thrush only provided flight views apart from hearing it. The most memorable birds were the ten Amami Woodcocks that we saw during one night. A Spoon-billed Sandpiper was a nice surprise find.

On Okinawa we saw all three target birds: Okinawa Rail, Okinawa Woodpecker and the pryeri form of Japanese Scops-Owl, as well as three Black-faced Spoonbills.

Itinerary

26/3

I left Beijing with an early morning flight bound for Tokyo Narita with a midday arrival. The ever-efficient trains swiftly carried me to Yokohama, where I teamed up with Jesper in due time for the cruise departure. At 19.00 the ship set off for the journey to Torishima, which is almost due south of Tokyo.

27/3

Well before sunrise we were on deck and started a long day of scanning the open waters. We did not need to wait long until the pelagic birds were around us, mostly in the form of Streaked Shearwaters, but also rarities like a Providence Petrel and a Bannerman's Shearwater. At 10.55 the first Short-tailed Albatross appeared at a distance, but there was more to come. From then on we saw around half a dozen individuals, sometimes passing close to the ship. This was an almost unbelievable dream that came true! Around midday we first sighted the isolated three-peaked volcano island of Torishima and at 13.30 we started the first of three circles around the island. After two hours it was time to return north again and there were at least two very happy birders on the ship. We continued birding from the deck until dusk, but there was much less activity compared to the southbound journey.

In the evening it was time for dinner and Jesper and I happily entered the restaurant in regular birding clothes only to discover that a tie and jacket was required! Neither is on my birding packing list, but the situation was smoothly resolved with the staff lending us some spare kits. Now dressed up, we were welcomed into the cocktail lounge for the warming-up for the five course dinner. Not only were we the only foreigners, but we also probably looked even odder with the semi-birding/semi-dressed-up clothing.



The left is a photo of about 25 % of the world population of Short-tailed Albatross. The two colonies are the two light green areas on the left photo (coordinates 0.7, 0.3). To the right is a Black-footed Albatross swooping past the Short-tailed colony. The Black-footed pairs were more spread out compared to the dense colonies of Short-tailed.

28/3

By dawn we were already well past Miyakejima and heading for the outer Tokyo Bay. In the twilight we saw a continuous spread out stream of Swinhoe's Storm-Petrels heading northeast. This migration continued between 5.20 and 6.00 until suddenly disrupted. A few Japanese Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets and Black-footed Albatrosses were seen amongst the larger number of Streaked Shearwaters. Bang on time at 10.00 we were back in Yokohama harbor, where we soon caught a bus to the nearest train station for onward transportation to Haneda airport. Our next destination was Amami in the Ryukyu chain of islands. After a short stop-over in Kagoshima we arrived at Amami in the late afternoon. Our pre-booked rental car was quickly fetched and soon we were driving towards Naze and the Supo-Rindo road.

Supo-Rindo is the name for the rather small and sometimes very rough road that leads along the ridges across the entire island. Famous for holding all the Amami specialties it is a must for birders. The evening started good with a confiding Ryukyu Scops-Owl perched at eye-level along the road. Our main target, the Amami Woodcock, proved harder and in rather windy and cold conditions we spent the entire night driving back and forth along a 15 km long section of the road without getting a sniff of the woodcock, until just before dawn when one Woodcock was eventually flushed from the road-side. The same bird was flushed three times, but we only managed brief on-the-deck views once and could not clinch the identification. Very frustrating indeed and this called for a return visit next night.

29/3

In the early morning we went to Sumiyo Dam and heard a couple of Amami Thrushes singing at the crack of dawn. They however stopped singing when many other songbirds got going and we did not really have a chance to get into the forest. Smart Ryukyu Robins and ditto Minivets proved some compensation, but by mid-morning we returned to Supo-Rindo and birded there until lunch-time and some rest. The best bird being an Owston's Flycatcher. We also went to a tourist information center near the airport as we had heard that Woodcock-guiding could be on offer. This later on turned out to be by another nature center, so it proved rather useless. Instead we spent the rest of the afternoon at Amami Nature Reserve, where we rather quickly bagged the endemic Lidth's Jay and the striking owstoni form of White-backed Woodpecker.



Map of Amami Nature Reserve, where we had several observations of Lidth's Jay.

In the evening we returned to the Woodcock-quest along Supo-Rindo and rather quickly refound our Woodcock from the morning. Our initial smiles were fading within seconds as we realized it was only a Euro-Woodcock! Now we were back at working the very same roads for the second night in a row. This night was calm, although cold, and the owls were really throwing a party. However, it was less of a party-feeling in the car, as the lack of sleep was starting to take its toll and we failed in turning up another Woodcock. This was planned to be our last night on Amami and when slowly driving the roads, a contingency plan was forming in my mind.

30/3

No Amami Woodcock during the entire night and we decided to go back to Sumiyo Dam for another shot at Amami Thrush. In the dark we could hear one Thrush singing in a circular display flight and at dawn we heard another 2-3 birds singing. Only Jesper managed a flight view though. However, plan B for Amami Woodcock had to be executed. I drove to a payphone and tried to reach a birdwatching lady on the island, whom we knew would have information on Woodcocks. I knew she did not speak English and needless to say, I did not speak a word of Japanese. Anyway I gave it a go and called her with the only result that she probably thought I was a maniac and quickly hung up. Back-up solution: find someone that can translate, so I eventually found a small shop. The shop-owner call over his mother who spoke some words of English and with a bird-book, a big smile and

some perseverance I managed to get her to call the birdwatching lady. She had however left home or more likely decided not to answer any more phone calls this morning. This felt like the last thread to Amami Woodcock was cut. Our flight was about to leave at midday and we had to take a decision to postpone it or not. While trying to invent a plan C, the English-speaking mother came up with the idea to call a friend who might know where to find Amami Yama-shigi (the name for the well-known Woodcock). As it turned out this friend was Canadian and a) could recommend some other areas to try and b) knew a biology researcher who would surely know more. Within minutes I was talking to the researcher who very kindly promised to take us out the coming night, although he said that if we were unlucky we might only see 3-4 Amami Woodcocks during several hours searching!! Now we just needed to postpone the air tickets, so I quickly drove back to Sumiyo Dam where I had left Jesper and the tickets. After that it did not take us long to drive back into Naze and change the flights and prolong the car hire. After having secured all these details, there was only one thing to do: real sleep for the first time in 2.5 days. The sleep only lasted for a few hours as we were supposed to meet the researcher Maezono-san at 19.00.

Maezono-san turned out to be a fantastic source of wildlife information and we thoroughly enjoyed being guided by him. One of the first forest roads that we took yielded several flushed Woodcocks. As none was seen on the deck, it was frustrating to say the least. Eventually we found one sitting on the road... but it was again a Euro-Woody! By then the thoughts were spinning in my brain, had we taken the risk of delaying our flight to Okinawa, at the expense of Rail and Woodpecker, for nothing? It felt like an eternity until suddenly a big fat Woodcock was standing like a Kiwi on the road only a few meters from the car: Amami Yama-shigi!!

The rest of the night we were fortunate to see a total of ten Amami Woodcocks and had superlative views of several of them. We also saw a few of the endemic Amami Black Rabbit and a not-so-poisonous cousin to the real Habu snake. Well after mid-night we were satisfied with all the good sightings and returned to Naze.

31/3

We were back at the hotel by 02.00 and had a couple of hours sleep before it was time to leave for a last morning at Sumiyo Dam and a final shot at Amami Thrush. This time it was my turn to see a flying bird, but they refused to show when perched. Around 8.30 we decided to leave the area and head back to the airport for the flight to Okinawa. We had been recommended to check out a tidal area just north of the airport and as we had some time to spend, we gave it a go. This turned out to be a good move as I suddenly put my scope on a distant sandpiper that had a very strange bill-shape... Indeed it showed to be a Spoon-billed Sandpiper! We eventually had very good looks at this marvelous little creature.

At the airport we unfortunately found that the aircraft had technical problems and still was grounded on Okinawa. With a three hours delay, it meant that the planned late afternoon birding on Okinawa was gone. Nothing to do about it, and the flight arrived at Naha on Okinawa at 17.00 instead. After another smooth rental car pick-up we were soon cruising north on the express-road. It took us two hours to reach Terukubi Rindo in the northern mountain range and by then it was dark. We parked and I played the tape of Okinawa Rail and one immediately responded at a distance. With the steep road-sides, we soon realized that this would be an impossible place to see them. At a distance I then heard a strange mewling call that aroused my interest. We got closer and pulled in the bird, but alas only got a view when it flew off. It then called for a long period of time in an inaccessible area. Eventually we gave up, although we strongly suspected it could have been the pryeri taxon of Japanese Scops-Owl.

With only two nights on Okinawa, we decided to drive down to the small village Ada, which is situated by the coast. We soon heard several Okinawa Rails going off in a simultaneous burst. Not being close to any meant that we had no chance of tracking down any of them. Then suddenly we heard the very same mewling call again and this time we were luckier and it indeed proved to be the pryeri Japanese Scops-Owl. Yip!

While walking around on small trails and roads in the village, we irregularly heard Okinawa Rails calling. This proved to be yet another long and frustrating night. The rails called on average only once every second hour and to find out their roosting place with such little help was a real pain. The closest we got was to locate one tree from where we thought one had been calling, but in spite of checking the tree carefully we could not locate it. Then suddenly we heard some low clucking calls and a rail dropped from the tree to the ground and sped away quicker than Lucky Luke could pull a gun. Not much to write home about! The night ended in a similar way as the first nights on Amami; exhausted, but still not the target bird seen.



Okinawa Rail was described only 25 years ago, but is now a locally well-known bird in its tiny range!

1/4

At dawn we were still working the trails and small roads around the village. We were more fortunate with the other target bird on Okinawa, the Woodpecker. We heard three drumming birds and during the morning we were treated with extraordinary good views of a pair.

Before it was too late we shifted site and strategy and drove up to Terukuibi Rindo in order to try to find a rail along the road-sides. Apart from a zillion of signs and cartoons with rails, we did not get a sniff of the real stuff. At midday we drove down to the west coast and the Yambaru Wildlife Center with the hope of local guides perhaps knowing a roosting tree for the rail. No success in that strategy, apart from them telling us that Ada would be our best bet. After an exceptional lunch (cooked food rather than soggy fast food sandwiches), we drove back to Ada and tried to check in at the local minshuku. The owner was out fishing, so we just slept in the car for a couple of hours, well aware of another sleepless night ahead of us. By late afternoon the minshuku owner was back and we got ourselves a room. Suddenly our luck took a new direction and a lady who had just a few days earlier moved to Ada, came to help with translation. Even better, her husband was a birdwatcher so within minutes we found ourselves talking to him and a local rail researcher! They recommended us to keep an eye at the mangrove-fringed tidal river before dusk, and sure enough, suddenly a brilliant Okinawa Rail was standing in the water and enjoying a real bath. How easy can it be with the right info? This meant an extra beer and a good night sleep.



First it was frustrating...

...eventually we saw it...

...wonderful!

2/4

For me, this was the last morning and I only had less than half an hour of daylight before I had to leave for Naha. We decided to stake out another recommended spot and again the local people proved correct: another Okinawa rail walked back and forth on the road in front of the parked car. Happy with this, I dropped Jesper off at the minshuku and started the return journey to Naha, which took me only 1hr45min in the light Sunday morning traffic. This left me with some time to stop by at Manko in Naha on Okinawa., a large tidal area in central Naha. Three Back-faced Spoonbills were a fitting end to a truly successful birding week!

The flight from Okinawa to Haneda (Tokyo) was uneventful and I even had time to stop by at Ueno Park for some magnificent cherry blossom. Loads of people were having picnic in the park and many of them partying really hard.

Then on to Narita for the evening flight to Beijing.



Party time in Ueno Park in Tokyo...

Weather

On the Torsihima cruise we were treated to good and stable weather. There was almost no swell, making scoping no problem at all. Last years trip had apparently been much bumpier, so we considered ourselves lucky. Temperatures were rather comfortable, although the wind sometimes made it a bit chilly.

On Amami we encountered a cold spell and strong winds the first night/day with temperatures down to 7 C, i.e. rather unpleasant. The weather improved during our stay and then became sunny and dry. Okinawa was initially nice and warm, even during the nights, although the second night was rainy and windy.

Logistics

From Beijing I flew Japan Airlines, which may not be the cheapest, but has the advantage that domestic flights are cheaper compared to buying these separately. The flight between Amami and Okinawa was not possible to issue in China, so we had to arrange it through a friend in Tokyo (thanks Norm!). In greater Tokyo, the transportation works like a clock and the train networks are extensive and very efficient. On arrival at Narita airport it is recommended to go to the information desk just outside the baggage claim area. They speak a bit of English and can help with tickets, maps, etc.

On both Amami and Okinawa we hired cars from Hertz (actually operated by Toyota in Japan). Everything was handled via Internet and worked out extremely well. Note that international driver's license is required.



Two happy birders, with the Albatross colony just behind my (center) head.

Site descriptions

Torishima

Torishima is one of only two tiny islands where the rare Short-tailed Albatross is breeding (the other being an island north of Taiwan). It is certainly a very inaccessible island some 500 km south of Tokyo. Some birders have connected with the Albatross while taking the ferry to Ogasawara (Bonin Islands), as Torishima is almost along the route. In 2005 I heard about a cruise that was scheduled to aim at Torishima specifically and eventually we managed to arrange for tickets. This trip runs irregularly from Yokohama, just outside Tokyo. It was run in 2005, now once in 2006 and the next time will maybe be in 2008 again. The cruise is actually not a birder's pelagic, but rather an expensive tourist cruise. The cheapest type of accommodation (incl food) started at 82.000 JPY. The ship departed from Yokohama at 19.00 on the Sunday and went due south and reached Torishima at 13.30 the next day, at a speed of 16 knots. It circled the island three times, allowing us good scope views of the albatross colonies, before returning to Yokohama at 10.00 on the Tuesday. The ship was excellent to watch seabirds from with a telescope, even allowing digiscoping! An advice is to put some padding under the tripod feet in order to minimize vibrations.

The cruise company has a web-site in Japanese: www.mopas.co.jp. They can also be contacted through S_Matsumoto@mopas.co.jp, however Matsumoto-san does not speak English.

The cruise is certainly not cheap, but if you are interested in having truly magic moments with loads of Short-tailed Albatrosses, then sign up for 2008!

Amami

Amami is situated in the northern part of the Ryukyu chain of islands stretching from Kyushu to Taiwan. Apparently it has been separated from other islands for a long time as much of its fauna has developed into a high degree of endemism. Key birds include Amami Woodcock, Lidth's Jay, Amami Thrush, amami form of Ryukyu Robin, Owston's White-backed Woodpecker plus somewhat more widespread birds like Whistling Green-Pigeon, Owston's Flycatcher, Ryukyu Minivet and Ryukyu Scops-Owl. Birding localities are well described in various birding reports and literature. We birded along the first 15 km of Supo-Rindo out of Naze, at Amami Nature Reserve (roughly between Naze and the airport), in the forest near Sumiyo Dam (south of Naze) and at a tidal area immediately north of the airport. One night was also spent along the southern parts of Supo-Rindo and on many small roads around Mt Yowan in the southwest of the island. These last areas proved very good for Amami Woodcocks, which we failed to find at Supo-Rindo near Naze.

Okinawa

Okinawa is further south in the Ryukyu islands and sports two endemics: Okinawa Rail and Okinawa Woodpecker. The island also has the Okinawa form of Ryukyu Robin, Ryukyu Scops-Owl, Whistling Green-Pigeon, Owston's Flycatcher, Ryukyu Minivet plus the pryeri form of Japanese Scops-Owl. We birded the Yambaru Forest and around Ada village on the northern part of the island, which inconveniently is at the opposite end compared to the airport. On my return journey to the airport, I also quickly stopped at the tidal area Manko in Naha on Okinawa., which is in central Naha.

Birds

Short-tailed Albatross, *Phoebastria albatrus*

A total of about 500 seen on and around Torishima. The first birds appeared 2.5 hours before arrival to Torishima (ship cruising at 16 knots).



Short-tailed Albatrosses, clock-wise: almost adult, immature, immature and youngish

Black-footed Albatross, *Phoebastria nigripes*

A total of at least 200 seen on and around Torishima. Several birds were also seen all the way up to Tokyo Bay.



Black-footed Albatross

Providence Petrel, *Pterodroma solandri*

A surprise find was one that was discovered at a large distance, but thankfully decided to head straight for our ship and cruised in front of us for a couple of minutes. It was seen at 6.30 on 27 March. Identification based on basically completely dark brown plumage, faintly scaled upperparts, pale area around the billbase/forehead/throat, slightly paler belly, pale double primary base patch on underwing, dark upperparts incl primaries.

Streaked Shearwater, *Calonectris leucomelas*

A total of several hundreds were seen between the outer Tokyo Bay and Torishima.

Bannerman's Shearwater, *Puffinus [lherminieri] bannermanni*

One was seen in loose company with a Streaked Shearwater at 6.00 on 27 March. It was unexpected to find one so far north from the breeding grounds at Ogasawara Islands.

Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel, *Oceanodroma monorhis*

Well over a hundred were seen flying northeast between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay in the early morning between 5.20-6.00 on 28 March. Identification based on small size, all dark plumage except upper wing-covert bar and fast Leach's like flight.

Matsudaira's Storm-Petrel, *Oceanodroma matsudairae*?

One large all dark storm-petrel was seen at 10.40 on 27 March. Evidently it was either a Tristram's or a Matsudaira's. The overall brown plumage, weak upper wing-covert bar and initially, when the bird was in good light, a white primary base patch indicates a Matsudaira's. The nearest breeding grounds are on Ogasawara.

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo hanedae*

Frequently seen in and around Tokyo.

Japanese Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

Two presumably of this species were seen at a small rock between Hachiojima and Torishima. Ten were seen well at the tidal flat near Amami airport, where the subtle differences from Great could be seen.

Grey Heron, *Ardea cinerea jouyi*

17 at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami, two north of Naze on Amami and 20 at Manko in Naha on Okinawa.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba modesta*

Ten at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami and ten at Manko in Naha on Okinawa.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta garzetta*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami and one at Manko in Naha on Okinawa.

Pacific Reef-Heron, *Egretta sacra sacra*

Two at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Black-faced Spoonbill, *Platalea minor*

Three in winter plumage were seen at Manko in Naha on Okinawa..

Eurasian Wigeon, *Anas penelope*

Ten at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Yellow-nibbed Duck, *Anas zonorhyncha*

One at Sumiyo on Amami.

Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta*

Three at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami and one at Manko in Naha on Okinawa.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans lineatus*

One at Haneda airport in Tokyo.

Grey-faced Buzzard, *Butastur indicus*

Five migrating north at Sumiyo Dam on Amami on 29 March and a few roosting birds on the northern part of the island the same day. Between 17.15 and 18.00 29 birds were seen migrating north over Supo-Rindo near Naze on Amami. Single birds were seen at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami and at Ada village on Okinawa.

Eurasian Buzzard, *Buteo buteo toyoshimai*

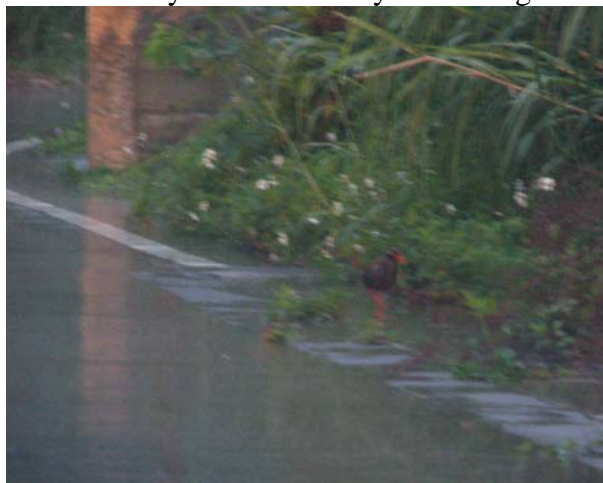
One pair on Torishima. Very pale, especially on the head and upper breast and tail, almost non-existent carpal patches and a dark belly.

Barred Buttonquail, *Turnix suscitator okinavensis*

One heard in an open scrubby area below Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa.

Okinawa Rail, *Gallirallus okinawae*

One heard in the early evening at Terukubi-Rindo. Approximately ten heard in and around Ada village on Okinawa. After a full night of only seeing one bird that dropped from a tree-roosting site almost above us and quickly ran away on the ground, it was a relief to see one bathing in the open in the salt-water for a couple of minutes in the early evening. The last morning one bird performed a fitting end to the trip by walking right out in the open on the road in front of the car. Ten years ago there was an estimated population of 900 pairs, but since then the population has been dramatically reduced. The birds calls extremely infrequent during the night, perhaps as seldom as once every second hour. Once a bird calls, it often triggers other birds in the vicinity. This could even be initiated with playback. Unless you happen to stand right near an accessible site when they call, it will prove extremely hard to locate exactly which tree they are calling from.



Okinawa Rail on a rainy morning through the windscreen

Ruddy-breasted Crake, *Porzana fusca phaeopyga*

One heard at Sumiyo Dan on Amami.

Grey Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Little Ringed Plover, *Charadrius dubius curonicus*

10-15 at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus dealbatus*

About 30 at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Lesser Sandplover, *Charadrius mongolus mongolus/stegmanni*

At least 20 at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Eurasian Woodcock, *Scolopax rusticola*

One seen at Supo-Rindo near Naze on Amami on two consecutive nights was a disappointment as we were unable to locate any Amami Woodcocks during these first two nights. During the third night at least three (plus two unidentified woodcocks) were seen on forest roads on the southern part of Amami. On Okinawa, one unidentified Woodcock was seen near Terukubi-Rindo. This clearly shows that not all Woodcocks on Amami are of the sought-after species and they are not always easy to identify...



Eurasian Woodcock, note the differences around the eye, tertial pattern and underpart barring compared to Amami Woodcock.

Amami Woodcock, *Scolopax mira*

An impressive total of ten were seen when driving the forest roads of the southern part of Amami. Many of these were seen incredibly well at only a few meters distance, providing superlative views of this threatened species. Only about 1000 individuals are thought to remain and the population is in serious decline due to introduced cats, dogs and mongooses.



Three different Amami Woodcocks!

Far Eastern Curlew, *Numenius madagascariensis*

Two at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*

Two at Ada village on Okinawa.

Red-necked Stint, *Calidris ruficollis*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, *Calidris acuminata*

One at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina* ssp

12 at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.

Spoon-billed Sandpiper, *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*

One in winter plumage, but with some peach-colored feathers on the throat, was a nice surprise find at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.



Spoon-billed Sandpiper showing its unique bill

Red Phalarope, *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Three together between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay.

Pomarine Skua, *Stercorarius pomarinus*

One adult pale phase with growing tail streamers at 6.40 on 27 March.

Arctic Skua, *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Three, and also nine unidentified skuas, during the morning of 27 March.

Black-tailed Gull, *Larus crassirostris*

A few in Yokohama harbour and at sea between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay.

Common Gull, *Larus canus kamtschatschensis*

Two in Yokohama harbour.

Vega Gull, *Larus vegae*

A few in Tokyo, Yokohama harbour and in Tokyo Bay.

Slaty-backed Gull, *Larus schistisagus*

Small numbers in Yokohama harbour and between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay.

Black-headed Gull, *Larus ridibundus*

50 in Yokohama harbour.

Japanese Murrelet, *Synthliboramphus wumizusume*

3+2+1 between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay.

Rhinoceros Auklet, *Cerorhinca monocerata*

2+1 between Miyakejima and Tokyo Bay.

Japanese Wood-Pigeon, *Columba janthina janthina*

One, and another seen by Jesper, at Amami Nature Reserve.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis orientalis* & *stimpsoni*

Frequently seen in Tokyo (*orientalis*) and on Amami and Okinawa (*stimpsoni*).

Whistling Green-Pigeon, *Treron formosae permagnus*

About five at Sumiyo Dam on Amami, about five at Supo-Rindo on Amami and two at Amami Nature Reserve. Mostly heard, but also a couple of close encounters. The song is extraordinary and almost Gibbon-like.

Japanese Scops-Owl, *Otus semitorques pryeri*

One heard and glimpsed at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa and another heard and seen very well at Ada village on Okinawa. Jesper also saw one in a park in Ada village.

Ryukyu Scops-Owl, *Otus elegans elegans*

Between 20-40 along Supo-Rindo near Naze on Amami, about ten in the southern part of Amami, two at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa and at least five at Ada village on Okinawa. The normal call was the typical two-note whistle, but somet called regularly with a one-note call, and a few individuals called with a three-note and one with a four-note call. When I tried with playback of the Lanyu (Taiwan) form, I got very good response.



Ryukyu Scops-Owl on Amami.

Northern Boobook, *Ninox japonica japonica*

At least four heard along Supo-Rindo on Okinawa and three heard at Ada village on Okinawa.

Common Kingfisher, *Alcedo atthis bengalensis*

Two at Ada village on Okinawa.

Ruddy Kingfisher, *Halcyon coromanda bangsi*

One heard at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos kizuki amamii* & *kizuki*

Seven at Supo-Rindo on Amami, three at Amamai Nature Reserve, two at Sumiyo Dam on Amami (*amamii*) and four at Ada village on Okinawa (*kizuki*).

Owston's White-backed Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos [leucotis] owstoni*

One male (and female seen by Jesper) at Amami Nature Reserve and one heard at Sumiyo Dam on Amami. This taxon may merit full species status, but the variation among several related taxa in east Asia needs to be sorted out.



Owstoni form of White-backed Woodpecker. Certainly very different morphology than most other taxa in the group, but does it qualify for species level or is it merely a saturated island form?

Okinawa Woodpecker, *Sapheopipo noguchii*

One pair seen well at Ada village on Okinawa and another two drumming birds heard nearby. This species is reported to be on the brink of extinction.



Okinawa Woodpecker. This one is certainly different, but actually the morphology mimics a Dendrocopos woodpecker, so maybe not a separate genus? Strangely enough it was sometimes seen gleaning insects from the undersides of leaves.

- Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica gutturalis*
20+ at the tidal area just north of the airport on Amami.
- Pacific Swallow, *Hirundo tahitica namiyei*
Frequently seen in lowlands on Amami and Okinawa.
- Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea robusta*
Two at Supo-Rindo on Amami and two at Sumiyo Dam on Amami.
- Ryukyu Minivet, *Pericrocotus tegimae*
Two at Supo-Rindo on Amami, five at Sumiyo Dam on Amami, three at Amami Nature Reserve and three at Ada village on Okinawa.
- Brown-eared Bulbul, *Ixos amaurotis amaurotis, ogawae & pryeri*
Common around Tokyo (*amaurotis*) and on Amami (*ogawae*) and Okinawa (*pryeri*).
- Blue Rock-Thrush, *Monticola solitarius philippensis*
Around ten on Amami and frequently seen on Okinawa, mostly in urban areas.
- Amami Thrush, *Zoothera major*
Five singing individuals around Sumiyo Dam on Amami. It was easy to hear this species, but it proved much harder to see. We only managed two separate flight views. More surprisingly we discovered that at least one bird had an interesting song flight. In total darkness before dawn, one bird was heard flying in large circles (100+ m in diameter) at an estimated height of 50+ meters. During each round it sang about 5 times. The song is completely different from the taxon *aurea*, although reportedly similar (how similar?) to that of the widely allopatric nominate *dauma*.
- Pale Thrush, *Turdus pallidus*
Four at Sumiyo Dam on Amami and three at Ada village on Okinawa.
- Zitting Cisticola, *Cisticola juncidis brunniceps*
One at Ada village on Okinawa.
- Japanese Bush-Warbler, *Cetta diphone riukiensis*
Two at Sumiyo Dam on Amami, 10-20 on Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa and five at Ada village on Okinawa.
- Yellow-browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*
One at Ada village on Okinawa.
- Owston's Flycatcher, *Ficedula owstoni*
Two at Supo-Rindo on Amami (one 2yr male and one heard-only), 5-8 at Sumiyo Dam on Amami (one adult male and the rest heard-only) and one heard on Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa. Separated from Narcissus Flycatcher based on different morphology and song. One simple playback test with Narcissus resulted in no response.
- Ryukyu Robin, *Luscinia komadori komadori & namiyei*
Ten at Sumiyo Dan on Amami, three at Supo-Rindo on Amami (*komadori*), ten at Ada village on Okinawa and five at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa (*namiyei*).
- [Siberian Stonechat, *Saxicola maurus*
One seen by Jesper at Amami Nature Reserve.]
- Great Tit, *Parus major amamiensis & okinawae*
Ten at Supo-Rindo on Amami, five at Sumiyo Dam on Amami (*amamiensis*), two at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa and five at Ada village on Okinawa (*okinawae*).
- Varied Tit, *Sittiparus varius amamii*
Three at Supo-Rindo on Amami, four at Sumiyo Dam on Amami and five at Terukubi-Rindo on Okinawa.
- Japanese White-eye, *Zosterops japonicus ssp*
Common on both Amami and Okinawa.

Lidth's Jay, *Garrulus lidthi*

A total of seven at Amami Nature Reserve and two seen and also heard at Sumiyo Dam on Amami. Amami Nature Reserve seems to be a very reliable place to see this species.



Lidth's Jay, a most stunning Jay

Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos japonensis* & *connectens*

Common around Tokyo (*japonensis*) and on Amami and Okinawa (*connectens*).

White-cheeked Starling, *Sturnus cineraceus*

A few seen around Tokyo and one at Sumiyo Dam on Amami.

Russet Sparrow, *Passer rutilans rutilans*

One at Yambaru Wildlife Center on Okinawa and two seen by Jesper near Amami airport.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus saturatus*

Common around Tokyo.

Black-faced Bunting, *Emberiza spodocephala personata*

One at Ada village on Okinawa.

Mammals

Wild Boar

One at Supo-Rindo on southern Amami.

Amami Black Rabbit

One at Sumiyo Dam on Amami and four seen on southern Amami. This rabbit has some very special habits. The female give birth to only one baby and bury it in the ground and only return every second day to breast-feed it. This behavior is to protect it from the Habu snake. It also does not use smell to keep in contact with other rabbits, but instead have a pishing call.

Bottle-nosed Dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*

One flock seen near Torishima.

XX Dolphin, *Delphinus delphis*

One flock seen near Torishima.