

# Tokyo, Japan



*Japanese Night-Heron at its nest*

**31 May 2008**

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## General

Japanese Night-Heron was on my Palearctic target list. Having birded in Japan on three previous trips, I had still not managed to connect with it. Eventually my chance came in form of the opportunity to join a person doing research on them. Thanks to some friends in Japan, I thus had the unique opportunity to visit two active nests.

Japanese Night-Heron is apparently decreasing at an alarming rate and it is thought that less than 1000 individuals remain. The reasons are not entirely clear, but habitat loss is most likely to be the key factor. They favor mosaic bamboo and deciduous interspersed with open wet soil. In fact it is frequently found near human habitation, where it can feed on back-yards adjacent to well-wooded gullies. In Japan these hilly areas have been too much developed and the traditional paddy fields in ravines have disappeared.

In addition to the Night-Heron, I also decided to go and look at the pryeri taxon of Japanese Marsh Warbler. This taxon that is resident in Japan is sometimes thought to potentially be a different species from the migratory Chinese form. Japanese Marsh Warbler is easy to see at Tonegawa, not far away from Narita airport. In fact I saw them so easily that I even managed to get on an earlier flight back to Beijing the same day.

## **Itinerary**

30/5

I flew from Beijing on the Friday evening and took the train to Shinjuku, where I stayed at Kadoyo Hotel.

31/5

I woke up to drizzling and cold weather and the first thing I did was to buy an umbrella. After a train ride to the foothills in suburban Tokyo, I was met by the people who knew the nest sites. Within an hour we had visited both sites and had seen adults at both. Unfortunately the first bird was only seen in its freezing camouflage position, while it was sitting on eggs. The second nest was more conveniently located so that we could look down at it (although it was still halfway up the tree). This bird was also seen in freezing posture, but in clearer side-view. After a while this bird flew off, and could be followed through the trees. According to the researcher this was not really caused by us, as they frequently do that.

Around noon, I travelled back through Tokyo for almost four hours to Sasagawa at Tonegawa (river). It was still drizzling, so I was quite happy to see and hear the Japanese Marsh Warblers still being very active by around 16.00.

Thanks to the quick success, I decided to rebook my return flight to a 19.30 departure. This was possible in spite of no mobile phone and a friendly non-English speaking train station manager. Amazing what a smile and some gestures can do.

## **Weather**

Very poor weather the entire day as it was drizzling and was rather cold, sometimes also a bit windy. Clearly the early summer monsoon had already set in.

## **Logistics**

As usual in Japan it is very easy to get around with the trains. They always leave on time and are very frequent.

## **Site descriptions**

Tonegawa is easy to reach from Narita. The local train from Narita station (i.e. not the airport station) takes about 50 minutes to Sasagawa station. From there one can walk to the river or, as I did, take a taxi. The river sides are covered with low reed beds that support both the warbler and Japanese Reed (Ochre-rumped) Bunting.

## **Birds**

Not a very impressive bird list due to much travelling and poor weather.

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*  
One at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Great Egret, *Ardea alba*  
One near Narita.

Little Egret, *Egretta garzetta*  
Many between Narita and Tone River at Sasagawa.

Black-crowned Night-Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*  
One near Narita.

Japanese Night-Heron, *Gorsachius goisagi*

Two active nests visited. One held an adult bird with most likely not yet hatched eggs, the other held one adult and two pulli that hatched the day before.



*Adult Japanese Night-Heron on its nest*



*Two one-day old Night-Heron chicks*

Yellow-knibbed Duck, *Anas zonorhyncha*

Several at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Black Kite, *Milvus migrans*

One at The Night-Heron site and one at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Oriental Turtle-Dove, *Streptopelia orientalis*

A few around The Night-Heron site.

Lesser Cuckoo, *Cuculus poliocephalus*

One heard at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Pygmy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopos kizuki*

One pair at The Night-Heron site.

Eurasian Skylark, *Alauda arvensis*  
One heard at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*  
A few seen.

White Wagtail, *Motacilla alba lugens*  
Two at The Night-Heron site.

Grey Wagtail, *Motacilla cinerea*  
One at The Night-Heron site.

Brown-eared Bulbul, *Ixos amaurotis*  
Several at The Night-Heron site.

Zitting Cisticola, *Cisticola juncidis*  
A few at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Japanese Bush-Warbler, *Cettia diphone*  
One heard at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Oriental Reed-Warbler, *Acrocephalus orientalis*  
One heard at Tone River at Sasagawa.

Japanese Marsh Warbler, *Megalurus pryeri*  
3-4 at Tone River at Sasagawa. During the winter and migration, this species can be extremely skulking. However, when singing they perform a most peculiar song-flight with a very loud song. They also often sit right out in the open in between the song flights. The taxon *pryeri* differs from the Asian mainland form *sinensis* in that it is mostly resident as well as slightly darker overall, upperparts more reddish-brown, unstreaked nape and less pointed wing-tip. Recent molecular work has indicated that these taxa should probably better belong to the genus *Locustella*. The *pryeri* taxon is only breeding at six localities and numbers less than 1000 birds.



*Japanese Marsh Warbler*

Great Tit, *Parus major*  
A few at The Night-Heron site.

Japanese White-eye, *Zosterops japonicus*

A few at The Night-Heron site.

Large-billed Crow, *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Several seen.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow, *Passer montanus*

Commonly seen.

Japanese Reed (Ochre-rumped) Bunting, *Emberiza yessoensis*

Two at Tone River at Sasagawa.



*Japanese Reed Bunting*