



## BIRD TOURISM REPORTS 2/2015

# KYUSHU, JAPAN, IN DECEMBER 2014

Petri Hottola ([phottola@gmail.com](mailto:phottola@gmail.com))



**Fig. 1. White-naped and Hooded Cranes** at one of the Arasaki feeding station.

In 2014, after a nine-day birding visit in South Korea, I explored the southernmost larger island of Japan, Kyushu, between 25<sup>th</sup> December and 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2015 (6.5 days in the field). The following report will give the details of the trip, which main motivation was to see three species not yet on my world list: **Copper Pheasant**, **Japanese Green Woodpecker** and **Japanese Waxwing**. In addition, I was looking forward to see Arasaki and its wintering cranes, and also hoped to add a number of winter species on a Japan life list. All the target species were eventually seen, with a total of 112 species on the Kyushu trip list. My Japan list currently stands at 239, after five short visits covering Okinawa, Amami, Miyakejima, Kyushu, Chiba Prefecture (Honshu), and Hokkaido.

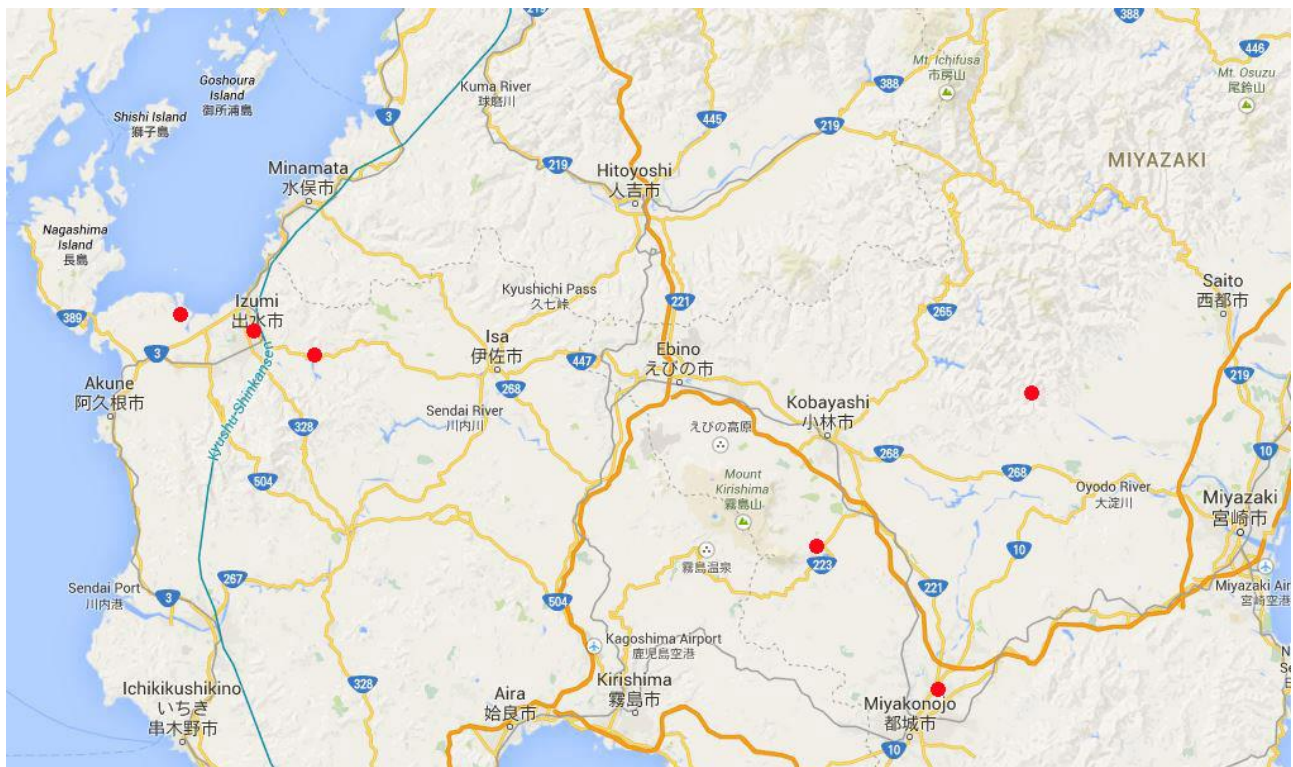
Visiting Japan tends to be a pleasure, partly because of the as a rule polite and hospitable Japanese people, well-organized and secure society, interesting culture and beautiful nature. Even the large cities are much more welcoming than in other destinations; safe and easy to move around. Nowadays, many people speak English and are therefore able to communicate with foreigners, including a Finn who has learned his English at school. Unfortunately, access to local birdwatchers has proved to be more complicated, with less success

than I have hoped for. It would be nice to give and receive information on spot, on rare species in particular. On this trip, I had limited success by showing people digital images of some of the more unusual discoveries and their locations on the map.

Towards the end of the visit, I caught an influenza virus, with fever on the 28<sup>th</sup>. This made birding a bit slow on the last four days, at least in terms of walking in the forest, not to mention rock climbing (see the Lake Miike incident). I did, however, full birding days till the end. The illness did not force me to the bed. This happened later in Finland, where I was sick for a full month, and still have not yet completely recovered (mid-February). I suspect the virus was caught at a 7-Eleven, where a local lady coughed on me, unable to control herself. The fact that I had been birding for two weeks in cold conditions, without a break and from sunrise to sunset, probably did not help the situation.

## ROUTE, TIMETABLE, WEATHER, ACCOMMODATIONS AND FOOD

Compared to South Korea, the climate was very mild in Kyushu. The only snow on ground was at Okawachi-goe Pass, the highest point of Road 388 between Yuyama and Ozaki. Even there, it was a few melting patches in roadside depressions. Around Cape Huyga, for example, trees were full of ripe mandarins and many ornamental plants had flowers. Sun was shining almost all the time and the weather remained calm. The fine weather added to the general pleasantness of bird observations.



**Map 1.** The location of key points in South Central Kyushu, the red dots from left to right: Arasaki crane reserve, Hotel Tsuru in Izumi, Kogawa Dam, Lake Miike, Hotel Vessel in Miyakonojo and Aya Gorge, west of Aya. Cape Hyuga is located some distance north on the east coast, and Fukuoka way up north on the west coast. Toll expressways are marked by orange. The yellow highways were of rather diverse quality. Some were fast and well-managed, some less than two lanes wide and under repairs.

## Route and timetable, with daily weather

**25<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Korean Airlines flight Incheon, Seoul to Fukuoka International Airport, Kyushu, and drive to Izumi. ACC: Business Hotel Tsuru, Izumi. Sunny and calm, +9 C.

**26<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Arasaki (sunrise – 12.40) – Kogawa Dam (13.20 – 16.45). ACC: Business Hotel Tsuru, Izumi. Sunny and calm, +8 C.

**27<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Lake Miike for the whole day. ACC: Hotel Vessel, Miyakonojo. Sunny and calm, -1 C at night on the mountains, +13 C at Lake Miike. The drive from Izumi to Miike, via the slow Road 447 (mountains, possible to see **Copper Pheasant** at dawn), took 2 hours, with some over the speed limit driving on the expressway.

**28<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Aya Gorge. ACC: Hotel Vessel, Miyakonojo. Morning rain, overcast and +7 C. Afternoon calm and sunny, +13 C. The rain started again at sunset.

**29<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Aya Gorge – Cape Hyuga. ACC: Hotel Vessel, Miyakonojo. Sunny and calm, +8 C.

**30<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Lake Miike – Izumi. ACC: Business Hotel Tsuru, Izumi. Sunny and calm, +2 C at sunrise, +13 C in the afternoon.

**31<sup>th</sup> Dec:** Arasaki – Fukuoka. ACC: Hakata Green Hotel Annex, Fukuoka. Sunny and calm, +2 C before sunrise, +14 C in the afternoon, strong winds and some rain between Kumamoto and Fukuoka.

**01<sup>th</sup> Jan:** Fukuoka – Narita – Helsinki – Oulu, on board of JAL and Finnair. Sunny and calm, +15 C.

## Business Hotel Tsuru (Izumi)

A standard hotel for traveling businessmen, the Business Hotel Tsuru (Crane) had a competitive room rate (yen 4.500; €30) and hard to beat location (next to a 24/7 Family Mart, easy access both to Arasaki and highways), good parking (free) and very friendly staff. As a result, Tsuru would be my choice for the next Izumi visit, too. The place is/has been known also as Hotel Plaza II.

Yes, the rooms may be small and a bit worn out, but they were clean, warm and peaceful, with all the facilities I needed (television, air conditioning, water boiler, fridge, enough electric outlets). Last but not least, the old bathtub was deep, without an overflow drain, and consequently did allow neck deep immersion in hot water, an absolute pleasure after a day of winter birding! In terms of overall comfort, Hotel Tsuru beat Hotel Vessel (see below), despite a difference in star rating.

On the same main street, north towards Minamata (yes, the historical origin of 'Minamata disease', mercury poisoning), there is Nishimuta Super Center (east of the street; see Map 3), an extensive budget department store from where it is possible to buy some Japanese quality products for a good price: porcelain, Zojirushi thermos cans, Kai 400 grade carbon steel kitchen knives, three liter bottles of sake etc. Groceries are there, too.



**Fig. 2.** Hotel Tsuru entrance, with drink vending machine and plenty of parking space. The white building on the right has a large 7/24 Family Mart.



**Fig. 3** ...and the opposite view, with my Mazda Axela and the main street of Izumi. For crossing the river, on the way to Arasaki, one turns left at the junction where the bright blue car has stopped. It is a small town and not busy at all in the evenings.



**Fig. 4.** A Hotel Tsuru room, small but comfortable for a right price. There is a coat rack by the door.



**Fig. 5.** The toilet unit of the room, with an old school deep bathtub! Heated toilet seat, of course, with its special bidet functions.

## Hotel Vessel (Miyakonojo)

The towering Hotel Vessel was not my ideal choice for accommodation but rather the least bad deal for a room at a reasonable distance to Lake Miike. I do not know any sensible budget accommodations along the Road 223 towards Kirishima. On this route, rooms appear to be very expensive and one also has to rely on hotel restaurants for meals. There were three (love?) motel-style establishments at the Kobayashi City junction (Road 1 and Miyazaki Expressway), not far from the lake in the northeast, but they appeared to be a bit run down (see Google Street View). The one on the east side of the expressway might be worth a visit.

At Hotel Vessel, the room rate was yen 5.300 (€36), for a large and comfortable even though a bit cold room with new facilities. Parking was free in three rows of some 150+ cars. Finding a vacant space did, however, always take some time. It is large hotel and there are a pachinko hall Sirius and McDonalds next door. On the plus side, the one hour driving distance (Road 221) between the lake and the hotel was ok, at least in winter, when the sun sets early, also because there were a few supermarkets conveniently on the way. There are no such services at Lake Miike.

Driving to Aya Gorge area and back was almost equally easy, with a Lawson's (supermarket) on the way. Both connections would have been pretty fast if one drove the toll expressway instead of the regular highways (I admit I am a penny-pincher). Moreover, the access to the Hotel Vessel was easy at the northern edge of Miyakonojo (population 169.000), on the left just before a McDonalds, south of the roads 221 and 10 Y-junction. There are plenty of services in Miyakonojo. The room rate included a 'continental' (?) breakfast, but I never tried it, being busy in the mornings and with more than enough food with me. It was always possible to make a hot cup of tea in the room, for a more personal breakfast.



**Fig. 6.** My Hotel Vessel room, nice and spacious but not as warm as the Hotel Tsuru room.



**Fig. 7.** ...and the fresh toilet unit, with a small and low modern bathtub.

### Hotels Richmond Hakata Ekimae and Hakata Green Annex (Fukuoka)

In Fukuoka, it is good idea to stay close to the Hakata Station (Map 2). There is a five minute (yen 260 one way) subway connection to the airport, starting around 5.30, also on the New Year's Day. The station has a diverse variety of services, varying between Tiffany & Co and a bakery outlet. On arrival, when transiting to Seoul, I stayed at Richmond Hotel Hakata Ekimae, a place well recommended for an Agoda rate of €49.10. On the way (200 m) to the hotel, along Takeshita Dori, there was a large store for electronics and optics, with a selection of cameras, lenses, binoculars, scopes, straps, trekking equipment and other useful items for competitive prices. The city branch of Times Rent-a-Car was located on the same street, too.

On the other side of the station, about the same distance to it, was the Hotel Green Annex, a choice superior to its neighbor, the original Hotel Green. It was my hotel for the last night. In December 2014, the Agoda New Year night room rate was €41.30. The both Hakata Station hotels had very comfortable rooms, new and clean, and offered a peaceful place to rest and make plans for future birding, or celebrate an accomplished journey. The Green Annex was a slightly better deal.

After the South Korea & Kyushu trip had been successfully completed and a room secured, I did some shopping at a Family Mart (they are everywhere; two right next to the hotel) across the street. When the menu for the New Year dinner had been decided, it was time to have a hot bath at the Hotel Green Annex, and to enjoy the Japanese television. At first, there was some political analysis of the past year and anticipations of the next 'Abenomics' year, but towards midnight entertainment ruled, with some unusual content. The moment of New Year passed almost unnoticed as there were neither fireworks nor big party on the streets, or perhaps the room was so well insulated that I missed it all?

The next morning, one of the few days when most Japanese have a day off, everything worked perfectly at the airport. Well, except me. Being ill and having finished a bottle of wine in the previous night had made me to forget a rather large Finnish knife in hand luggage. The airport security and a JAL representative did their very best to organize things without confiscation, but in the end it was the Helsinki Airport which could not be passed by special arrangements. The knife had to remain in Fukuoka. Landing in Narita, the year 2015 started with a perfect view of Mt. Fuji.



**Fig. 8.** Hotel Richmond room, with new equipment.



**Fig. 9.** At Richmond, somebody has had an eye for details – black cotton swabs to fit the color code!





**Fig. 10.** My Hotel Green Annex room, a perfect place to spend the New Year night, before a 04.40 wake up.

## Food

In regard to food and drinks, I was well supplied by a multitude of small markets under the chain names of Lawson's, Family Mart and 7-Eleven. They had a good selection of takeaway meals, including hot items such as grilled chicken and meat balls, dairy products, cold drinks, desserts, sweets and also some fresh fruit, to mention few categories. Among of my favorites were the easy-to-carry rice triangles, filled with a variety of meats, fish and sauces. Often open for 24 hours, 7 days a week, the roadside markets made shopping easy after and before bird observations. There was also a larger supermarket conveniently on the way to Miyakonojo, at Tarobocho, in addition to the above-mentioned Nishimuta Super Center.

Overall, I felt no need for restaurants, being more interested in resting and preparing myself for the next day in the evenings. After a full day of winter birding, making notes, cooking tea, having a hot bath and filling one's belly are the priorities, in addition to a rest and a bit of news and entertainment. Bothering oneself with restaurants, not to mention bars, in a setting such as that is unthinkable. Birding in the outdoors is immensely rewarding and one just cannot wait for the next sunrise and the adventures it will bring. Well, in retrospect, I should have tried the Hotto Motto chain take away meals. They are said to be excellent, and the name sort of intrigued me. Hotto apparently means 'hot' or 'to feel relieved'. I wonder how the name Hottola translated to the locals?



Fig. 11. A New Year meal: Chilean red wine from the Cellars of the Devil, crackers, salami, cheese and smoked fish. For dessert, a pancake wrap with cream, strawberries and a sprinkle of nuts.



Fig. 12. Entertainment ruled the evening in television, with a show which had a group of men (some in drag) and rather variable activities to test their ability to keep a straight face. If not, they were spanked, again and again. At this stage, two men receive a liberal doze of pressurized air (see the number and size of the cans!), with soon-to-follow explosive consequences. Travel is educative, is it not?

## CAR RENTAL AND DRIVING

A compact sedan was reserved at Times Rent-a-Car (reservation@rental.timescar.jp), a Mazda representative in Japan (formerly, Mazda Rent-a-Car). The reservation was made with their Fukuoka branch. I had chosen Fukuoka (population 1.5 million) as the entry point to Kyushu, because its airport had the best international and domestic flight connections, allowing a visit South Korea from there.

It was more economical (€100 less) to fly to Seoul via Osaka/Tokyo and Fukuoka than to fly directly there from Helsinki, to visit Kyushu afterwards. For some reason, connections starting from Japan and ending in South Korea were priced lower than vice versa. Perhaps there is more demand on the Korean side? On board, both directions were, however, equally well occupied.

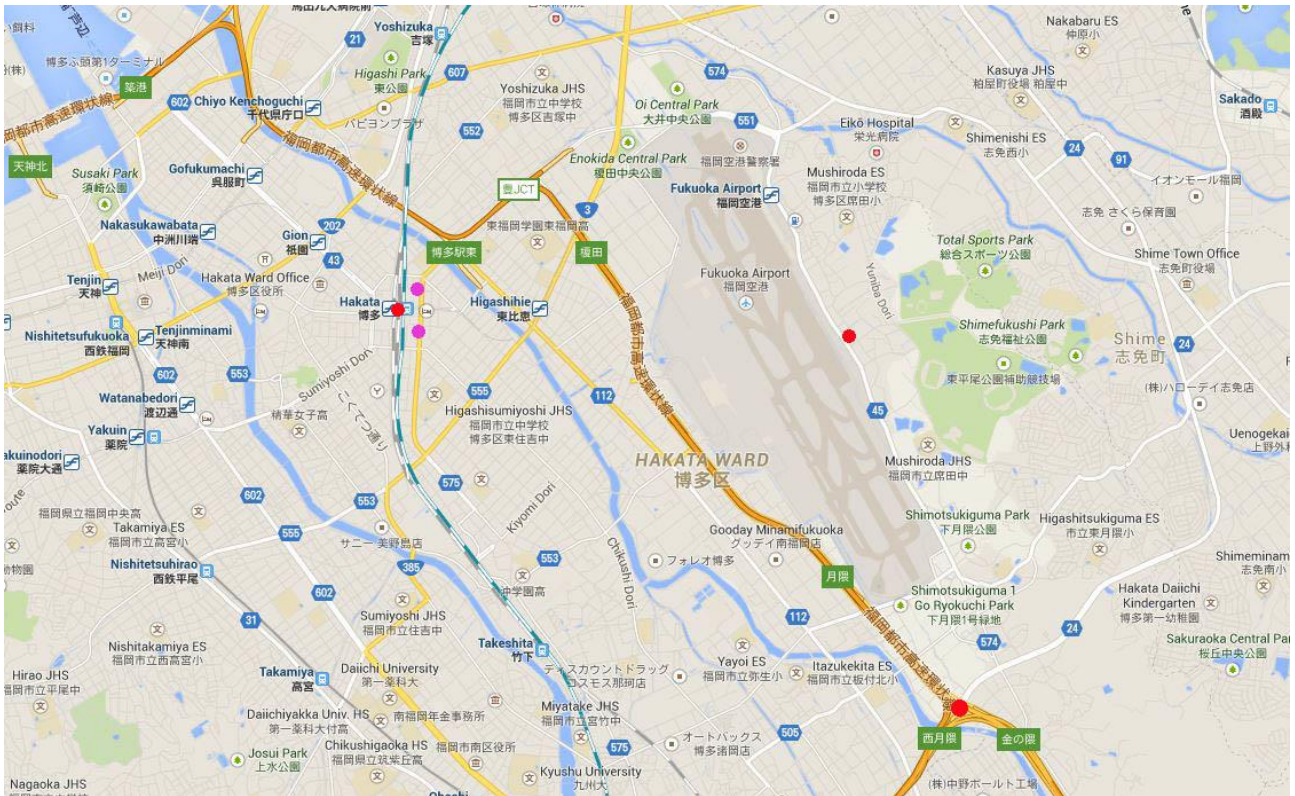
At Times Rent-a-Car, I got a Mazda Axela, unfortunately a hatchback (luggage remains visible to potential thieves, who fortunately are very rare in Japan), for €390, for seven days with unlimited kilometers and basic insurances. The price excluded PAI, because I did not need it. A gas station was right next to the Times office, for convenient refill at return.

Car rentals are not among the best organized services in Japan. The office hours are limited, the office locations at airports tend to be unpractical, language problems do occur, and something unexpected often happens. In my case, the car was waiting for me at the Fukuoka city branch, next to the busy Hakata Station, instead of the confirmed Fukuoka airport branch. I had been to the city branch office on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Dec, to find out the location of the other office, and had been assured that everything would be ok. In reality, a mix up had occurred.

Well, in 20 minutes, they delivered the vehicle to the airport office, which was a bit inconveniently located several few hundred meters away from the Domestic Terminal, on the opposite side of the airport if one arrived on an international flight, as I did. I had taken a taxi from the International Terminal to the office, as the bus between the terminals is a bit slow and there was also the walking on top of that. On the plus side, leaving the city and returning the car are easier if the starting point is by the Domestic Terminal, and not in Hakata. The streets are less congested to the east of the airport.

‘Easier’ is, however, a relative term. I had a navigator with English speaker but Japanese texts, my Kodansha Road Atlas and some Google Maps prints. Nevertheless, they did not prepare me for a certain complicated intersection east of the airport (**Fig. 13**). In there, one is supposed to drive up and right, one level higher, in order to enter Kyushu Expressway (toll).

The problem is that a number of roads meet in the busy crossing. Entering the site, I heard the navigator to say something confusing in arrogant British English, but there was no map of the intersection. I had to choose one of three options, and made a mistake, being therefore forced to continue towards another expressway which was about to take me to a wrong direction. Leading a lane full of cars, I moved to the center of the crossing, to wait for a gap in the traffic, while desperately trying to figure out some sort of solution to the surprising situation.



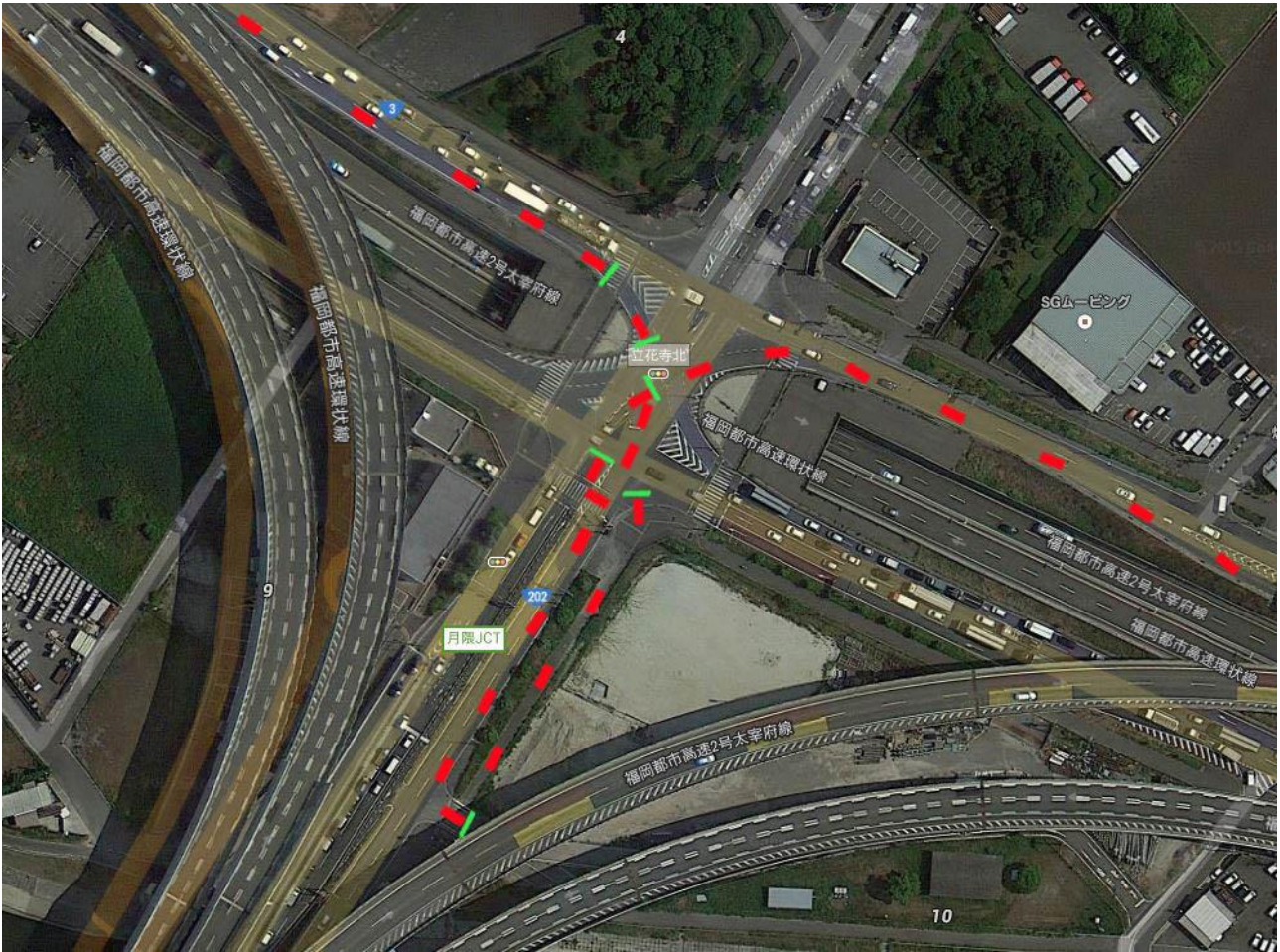
**Map 2.** Central Fukuoka and the airport. On the left, the red dot indicates the location of Hakata Station, the lower purple dot being the location of Hotel Richmond and the upper one Hotel Green Annex. On the right, the upper red dot points to the approximate location of the Times Rent-a-Car airport branch, and lower one a complicated intersection to toll expressways (more below).

Across the crossroads, I happened to see a short left hand entry to a steel gate, at a closed back door entrance to some industrial development, and abruptly turned there. I was off the street, just before the 'point of no return' at toll gates! Next, I reversed a bit, to be able to turn left and drive on a narrow bicycle lane between a fence and some trees, all the way back to the intersection. Two oncoming cyclists narrowly missed me, staring with wide eyes.

I could feel more eyes on me as the passengers of some hundred cars speculated what the foreigner was going to do next. My car was there in the corner of the crossroads, and potentially capable of doing something very dangerous. Was I going to zoom diagonally across the intersection, despite the traffic?

In a minute or two, I took my chances when the lights were on my side. There were, after all, no police around to help me and I could not stay there forever. Driving on a pedestrian zebra crossing, I passed the first two lanes and turned right, parking the car in front of the others who were about to drive to the desired direction. Leading the way to the center, I finally managed to turn right and up, to the toll gates! Sighh.... I wonder if there is a movie in Youtube or somewhere else...

To make everything more understandable, I have made a map of my negotiations here, on the next page. It may look amusing but just wait till it is your turn! It is a good idea to study this intersection before entering it. It looks very different on a street level!



**Fig. 13.** The confusing Fukuoka intersection. The red squares mark my car and its route, the green lines indicating points of full stop. The navigator failed to produce a map of lanes, necessitating a guess.

I had also reserved a Kyushu Expressway Pass (KEP), to decrease the cost of driving the toll expressways which potentially save a lot of driving time in Kyushu. The promised pass was not, however, there as it would have been expired in a few days. Some authority had decided to cancel the program, at least momentarily.

Instead, I got a regular e-pass for the same office fee, meaning that I could pass the gates faster but would need to pay full fees at the time of car return. All in all, the total cost was yen 12.550 (€87), of which a lion's share (yen 9.000; €64) accumulated when leaving and entering Fukuoka. The driven toll sections were: Fukuoka – Hinaguonsen, Ebino – Takaharu, Kijo – Miyakonojo, Takaharu – Ebino and Hinaguonsen – Fukuoka.

Interestingly, the driving culture of Kyushu was very different to Okinawa or Hokkaido. People were really stepping on it both on toll expressways (some in excess of 200 km/h) and on other main roads. Tailgating (in my mind, I called them 'tailgators') and blowing the horn to slower vehicles occurred in some sections, such as the Road 10 between Miyakonojo and Yamashita.

Also in Arasaki, some of the locals made a point of protesting against slow birdwatching vehicles on the local roads. The roads are narrow and therefore easily congested by a mixture of parked and speeding

vehicles. I guess both parties could be a bit more accommodating to one another. Fortunately, the majority of Kyushu drivers were polite, patiently waiting if I needed a few extra seconds to find the correct way.

On the first visit to Aya Gorge, I visited some steep side roads with rocks. Even though driving only 10 km/h, one of my tires collapsed (no puncture, the structure just failed). It was later found out, that I had had three Bridgestones and one Yokohama. One may guess which one exploded... In rain, I changed the tire and drove to Kunitomi, east of Aya, borrowing a mobile phone and calling the Times Rent-a-Car, to inform them that I would replace the inferior tire with a brand new Bridgestone (yen 12.964 (€82), work included) at a local JaSS station. I would not risk anybody's life with low grade parts. Luckily, the Yokohama tire did not give in on an expressway, at 100 km/h!



**Fig. 14.** Are the WWII brothers in arms still celebrated in Japan? Or is there some sort of SS revival going on? A colony of German war veterans in the samurai heartland of southwestern Kyushu? The text is clearly in German ('Go, Schutzstaffel!') and also in ideologically accurate red, white and black, the black reserved for the Schwarze Korps! Well, it was just Japan Service Stations, a chain of gas stations. I guess it is not possible to stop the brain from analyzing visual objects and their messages... including politically incorrect ones.

The roads were generally in a very good shape, with two notable exceptions: On mountain passes two-lane highways were frequently reduced to one lane tracks with sharp curves and this made driving very slow. Fortunately, there was a mirror at each blind curve, to help in avoiding head-on collision with oncoming traffic. Not many cars drive on these slow roads. Neither do many people live on the mountains, in valleys well suited for small scale farming, far away from the crowds.

Unlike in South Korea, there were very few tunnels and the tunnels were comparatively dark, narrow and rough, some apparently constructed many decades ago. The expressways were fast and easy, but not

necessarily much faster than the regular highways, unless the latter had a lot of traffic, which could happen around sunset, for example, when approaching a city or a large town (e.g. Miyakonojo, Miyazaki, Fukuoka).

I did not meet any other Westerners in Kyushu, except on the Kyushu Expressway back to Fukuoka, (and at Hakata Station, Fukuoka). My Mazda had a blue-cross flag sticker in the back and a driver in a Volvo with a yellow-cross sticker noticed it. We drove together for a few kilometers, in a rare meeting of Nordic neighbors in Japan.



**Fig. 15.** A 'fast' and 'wide' mountain road, much better than the ones up in the passes. Habitat such as this was favored by **Bullfinches**.



## SITES AND BIRDS

In this section, some information on the sites and the most interesting birds will be provided. I have, however, omitted the records of a few most widespread species, namely **Rock Doves**, **Oriental Turtle Doves**, **Brown-eared Bulbuls** and **Large-billed Crows**, which can and will be observed just about anywhere in Kyushu.

### RANDOM ROADSIDE RECORDS

It pays to keep one's eyes open when driving between birding sites, not only for traffic and people, but for birds and animals. The following records were among the most interesting ones I made on the roads.

- In Fukuoka, an **Osprey** and a party of seven **Great Egrets** were spotted.
- In the first afternoon, 25<sup>th</sup> of Dec, four **Japanese Waxwings** crossed the expressway in front of my car at Kikusui. Given the ideal height and light conditions, this proved to be the best flight view of the species I had in Kyushu, as unbelievable as it may sound. The red tip of the tail and the mask extending to the nape could be seen very clearly, together with brown plumage tones and the rounded, small body! In the forests, trees often prevented unobstructed flight views.
- My only two **Night Herons** were also seen in the first evening, 25<sup>th</sup> of Dec, crossing the road at the end of the toll expressway at Hinaguonsen.
- On the 27<sup>th</sup>, one hour before sunrise, a **Japanese Scops Owl** was spotted on a wire at the outskirts of Izumi, towards Okuchi and Ebino.
- On the 27<sup>th</sup>, early in the morning, a **White-bellied Green Pigeon** crossed the Miyazaki Expressway.
- On the 30<sup>th</sup>, after a below zero night, wintering **Barn Swallows** gathered in villages between Miyakonojo and Takaharu, where a total of 80 were seen from the car, in lines on roadside wires.
- On the 31<sup>st</sup>, two **(Oriental) Magpies** crossed the road when approaching Fukuoka, soon after a sign depicting them as an emblem of the region. I also saw about 700 **Rooks** and a party of 20 **Common Starlings** between Kumamoto and Fukuoka.



**Fig. 16.** Four very long distance East Siberia migrants to Arasaki; a family of **Sandhill Cranes**.



## ARASAKI



**Map 3.** Arasaki and Izumi. The red dots indicate two convenient entry points to Arasaki. Rcon = **Chinese Penduline Tit**, Rind = **Eastern Water Rail**, Efuc = **Chestnut-eared Bunting**, Ccyg = **Whooper Swan**, Pfus = **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, Aame = **American Wigeon**, Cdau = **Daurian Jackdaw** and Prut = **Russet Sparrow**. For the services, see text.



**Fig. 17.** Cute children spread their 'wings' and their mom takes a photo at Arasaki Crane Center.



**Fig. 18.** From upstairs, there is a view to a major feeding station. It may well be worth one's while to pay for the entrance to one level higher, for open air scoping of birds. I did not go there.

Arasaki is diverse area of coastal fields and reclaimed land, marsh and gardens, west of Izumi Town (population 56.000). It is managed to support a major population of endangered cranes. There is a Crane Observation Centre, mostly for information, snacks and souvenirs, but most of the area is regular agricultural land. In December 2014, all the entry points and some points within the area had men sanitizing cars against the bird flu virus.

It is impossible to see and identify all the cranes at Arasaki and the surrounding agricultural lands. Personally, I saw about 10.000 **Hooded Cranes**, 2.000 **White-naped Cranes**, 9 **Sandhill Cranes** (including a family with two young ones; **Fig. 18**), a single adult *lilfordi* **Common Crane** and a hybrid **HoodedXWhite-naped Crane**. The **Sandhill Cranes** had undertaken a major move from the Sea of Okhotsk to Kyushu! There were dozens of **Grey Herons**, **Great Egrets** and **Little Egrets** around, too. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, five **Eurasian Spoonbills** rested there. **Great** (>150) and **Temminck's Cormorants** (200) were equally plentiful.

Geese were completely absent, as they apparently usually are, but smaller wildfowl were numerous. Without visiting a number of their favorite haunts (see a Crane Center brochure), I nevertheless counted 4 **Common Shelducks**, 700 **Mallards**, 700 **Eastern Spot-billed Ducks**, 1.500 **Eurasian Wigeons**, 40 **Gadwalls**, 2.500 **Northern Pintails**, 4 **Shovelers**, 400 **Eurasian Teals**, 3 **Tufted Ducks** and an eclipse drake **Common Pochard**. Overall, almost 6.000 ducks. There were two **Little Grebes**, too.

Arasaki is a good site for birds of prey as well, with great opportunities to photograph fishing **Ospreys** (4) in winter. The other raptors included **Black Kites** (50), **Eastern Buzzards** (2), a **Northern Goshawk** and **Eurasian Kestrels** (2). In regard to waders, **Northern Lapwings** (20), a **Common Snipe**, **Green Sandpipers** (3), **Common Sandpipers** (10) and **Sanderlings** (20, fly-over) could be observed at the fields. A few **Vega Gulls** patrolled the area, and 40 **Common Gulls** were recorded at Izumi town. If time was available, I would have visited the estuary there.



**Fig. 19.** Grassy edges of fields and dam walls hide a surprising number of small birds: a **Common Sandpiper**.

The reedy areas of Arasaki hold special interest for a few nice species. The marshy river along 378 had an **Eastern Water Rail**. A **Ruddy-breasted Crake** was both heard and seen in the southernmost field-side ditch across the main channel which penetrates the area (see Map 3). On the 26<sup>th</sup>, a visit to the former site (drive the peaceful east bank track, the 'Reed Drive') produced only the calls of **Chinese Penduline Tits** but on the 31<sup>st</sup>, a big party of 26 could be admired with close, prolonged views (15 minutes). My first *bengalensis* **Common Kingfisher** for Arasaki was also seen there, to be followed by three along the channels on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

In the hedges and grasses around marshes, fields and gardens, an interesting variety of birds were located, passerines such as **Oriental Turtle Doves** (20), **Bull-headed Shrikes** (8), **Eastern Great Tits** (5), a **Japanese Bush Warbler**, a **Japanese White-eye**, **Common Starlings** (4), **White-cheeked Starlings** (8), **Pale Thrushes** (3), a **Naumann's Thrush**, **Brown-headed Thrushes** (2), **Daurian Redstarts** (25), **Tree Sparrows** (450), **Oriental Greenfinches** (1.000), **Eurasian Siskins** (12), **Meadow Buntings** (24), **Elegant Buntings** (3) and **Masked Buntings** (15). There was a male **Chestnut-eared Bunting** and a number of *pyrrhulina* **Reed Buntings** (60) at the north(east)ern fields (see Map 3). I also managed to find a party of 8 **Russet Sparrows** in a garden when entering the Arasaki area.

In more open environments, a lone **Barn Swallow** with a brick red underside was seen, probably a *tytleri*, together with **Eurasian Skylarks** (400), **Dusky Thrushes** (70), **White** and **Black-backed Wagtails** (135), **Grey Wagtails** (25) and **Red-throated Pipits** (12). The concrete dams had a male **Red-bellied Rock Thrush** and dozens of *japonicus* **Siberian/Japanese/Buff-bellied Pipits** (common also on fields, with a total of 150).

A chance to move between open fields, channels, marshes and gardens in a limited area, and the large numbers of birds, created a site very enjoyable for anybody interested in birds and their observation, with endless opportunities for photography, too, using one's car as a moving hide.



**Fig. 20.** A female **Chinese Penduline Tit** at Arasaki 'Reed Drive'.



**Fig. 21.** A very common winter species in Japan; a **Siberian Pipit** *Anthus (rubescens) japonicus*.

The resident (**Eastern**) **Rooks** (up to 800) hold a special interest for visiting winter birders, because **Daurian Jackdaws** regularly join their flocks. On the 26<sup>th</sup>, only one immature was seen, but on the 31<sup>st</sup> I hit the jackpot, with close views of a juvenile, 'dark phase' immature and a pied adult, socializing together. There were also about 10 **Carrion Crows** in the area, in addition to the ubiquitous **Large-billed**.

It is very difficult to believe in the suggested plumage sequence of **Daurian Jackdaws** in the literature: both the juvenile and adult are supposed to be pied and the immature in-between all dark. That does not appear to make sense, but then again, what do I know? Next to nothing.



**Fig. 22.** A 'full hand' of **Daurian Jackdaws**; a juvenile (?), adult and immature (?) bird with **Rooks**.

A large and diverse wintering location such as Arasaki with its tens of thousands of birds is bound to include some of scarce vagrant birds. In the very limited time, I was able to find the following ones:

- **Whooper Swan**; 1 juvenile favored the northern fields and the Crane Center feeding area, in the company of cranes. Considering the many thousands of wintering birds across the Tsushima Strait, in Busan region, South Korea, it is amazing so few reach Kyushu.
- **American Wigeon**; an adult drake in breeding plumage was discovered on the second visit (31<sup>st</sup> Dec), among **Eurasian Wigeons** which roosted at the main channel south of the Crane Center.
- Hybrid **Baer's Pochard X Tufted Duck**; a drake with intermediate features was seen with an unidentified *Aythya* female, in a reedy pond close to Warabi Island.



**Fig. 23.** Two **White-naped Cranes** had taken the vagrant **Whooper Swan** 'under their wings'. The swan was still young and would normally have been wintered with its family. I bet they will migrate north together!



**Fig. 24.** A adult drake **American Wigeon** rests among **Eurasian Wigeons** and **Teals**. A hybrid is always a possibility: there is some yellow tone on the pale pate stripe, the upper surface of the wing is relatively grey and the striped cheek appears a bit rufous in this light (low morning sun). All these features may, however, occur in 'pure' **American Wigeons**, too. On the other hand, the pate stripe is wide and extends to the nape, the green sides of the head are very clear and shiny, the flanks are red, the smaller coverts on wings are rufous and the bird is larger than the drake **Eurasian Wigeons**.



**Fig. 25.** An amusing printing error at the Crane Center. I did no teat there, for sure! I might have, if one was available.

(Foreign language texts are always difficult for non-native speakers. In each of my trip reports, many mistakes may be found).



**Fig. 26.** A Great Egret, subspecies *modesta*, at Arasaki. I have not been able to find any reliable criteria for separating *alba* and *modesta*, breeding or non-breeding, and therefore treat them as a single species.

## **KOGAWA DAM**



**Map 4.** The location of Kogawa Dam, east of Izumi. Osem = Japanese Scops Owl (cf. text).

The Kogawa Dam has been suggested by Japan Nature Guides ([www.japannatureguides.com](http://www.japannatureguides.com)) and I went there to maximize my chances on **Japanese Green Woodpecker** and **Copper Pheasant**. The dam provides access to forest east of Izumi, close enough for a short morning or afternoon visit. In principle, it is possible to drive around the lake. Unfortunately, a section of the road was under construction and access was closed only a short distance before I could return to the highway.

Overall, the dam area had a bit too much disturbance on the 26<sup>th</sup> of Dec, with three bulldozers, about 10 trucks and an equal number of other vehicles on the move, not to mention the road construction workers. Peaceful spots could be discovered, but the situation was far from ideal. On the other hand, there were only two other visitors at the dam, Japanese nature photographers. I drove around the Kogawa Dam and back, making two dozen stops, and also walked one kilometer on a forest track on the east side of the dam.



**Fig. 27.** The Kogawa Dam road, tarmac all the way except at a road construction site in Dec 2014.

Nothing special could be identified at Kogawa Dam, the best bird being the only **Ryukyu Minivet** of the trip. Otherwise, about 10 noisy **Mandarin Ducks** occupied the reservoir, together with small numbers of **Mallards**, **Eastern Spotbilled Ducks**, **Shovelers** and **Eurasian Teals**, and a **Great Cormorant**. At the forest edge, **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers**, **Eastern Great Tits**, **Varied Tits**, **Long-tailed Tits**, **Japanese White-eyes**, **Brown-headed Thrushes** (20), **Daurian Redstarts**, **Grey Wagtails**, **Oriental Greenfinches** and **Masked Buntings** were reasonably common.

As implied, I missed my target species at Kogawa Dam. Approaching one curve by the western side of the reservoir, I did however see a large bird with an extremely long tail to drop down from a tree, to the shadows of a gully. It was likely to have been a male **Copper Pheasant**, but had to be left unidentified because of insufficient views. I could not find anything in the gully, despite arriving there only ten seconds



later. There was too simply much bamboo to see the ground. Based on this, I nevertheless suspect that the species may be present at Kogawa Dam, too.

According to forest track foot prints, there was a healthy population of **Sika Deer** around the reservoir, even though I did not actually see any.

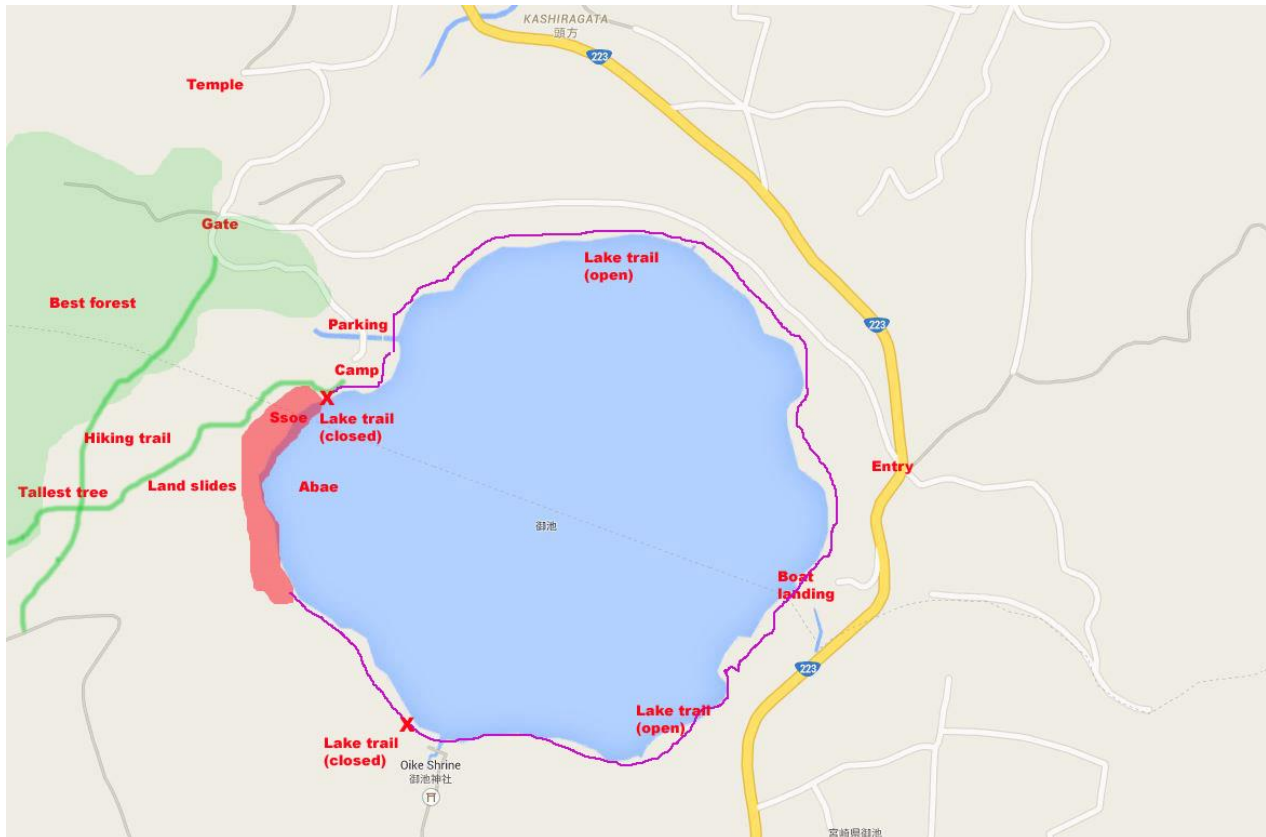


**Fig. 28.** A male **Daurian Redstart**, one of the common and widespread Japanese birds.



**Fig. 29.** A male **Masked Bunting** *Emberiza (spodocephala) personata*, another very common sight.

## LAKE MIIKE



**Map 5.** Lake Miike and its trails (more details in the text). Abae = **Baer's Pochard**, Ssoe = **Copper Pheasant**. The red area indicates a section of several landslides, to be avoided (**DANGER!**).

Almost equally well-known as Arasaki, Lake Miike is a round volcanic lake on the southeastern side of Mt. Takachiho, by the road from Takaharu to Kirishima. It is surrounded by protected forest and therefore has a good selection of interesting species, either resident or visitors. The access (signposted) is to the right about 5.5 km west of Takaharu. The main entrance gate with information tables, at the northeastern corner of the lake, will not open before 08.00. In the first morning, I walked in after parking the car at the junction. There was an ample dose of anti bird flu virus agent to be crossed, both at the gate and at the start of a hiking trail beyond it. I am not sure when they close the gate but guess that happens around sunset.

At Lake Miike I birded the access road and camp area, and also did the circular hiking trail which starts soon after the entrance gate and ends at the western perimeter of the camp (see Map 5). The trail was not particularly birdy beyond the first 300 meters but could have had **Copper Pheasants** towards the end, as one approaches a section of steep stairs down to the lake and to the camp (more will follow). There was a Japanese couple with dogs on the trail too, and the bear bells they carried made one to wonder: Are there still **Asiatic Black Bears** in Kyushu? They should be extinct.

Additionally, I walked around the lake (4 km) or, more accurately, did my best to walk, because at that point I was weak of fever/influenza and the last 500 meters were cut by landslides. Almost killing myself in the process, I went through, nevertheless, on all fours, in places. Leaving a story of a two hour struggle out of this report, I can only tell that at one point I was hanging on my fingertips on a 20 m vertical cliff, had to

climb it up and down, got stuck between two huge trunks of trees about to fall to the lake and injured my knees, hands and face in the process. I cannot praise the Icebug shoes enough. They saved my life on the cliff and were ideal not only for ice and snow, but stone, gravel and steep tarmac.

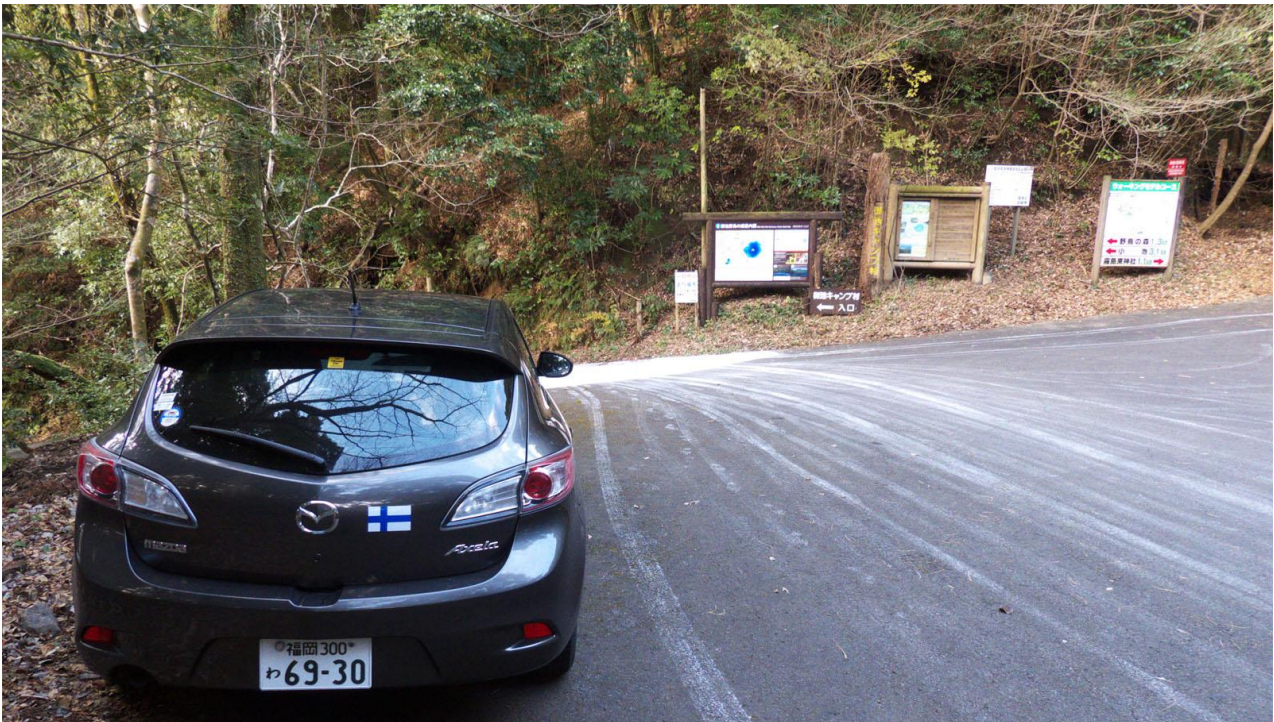


Fig. 30. The entrance gate, with information tables. Note the white anti bird flu agent on the road.



Fig. 31. One of the information tables, with a map of the trails. It is advisable to photograph the map before hiking the trails.



**Fig. 32.** The camp and the Lake Miike itself. The lake trail starts like this...



**Fig. 33.** Counterclockwise, towards the landslide area, there is warning sign and a barrier at the end of the camp area, beyond the steep stairs mentioned in the text. Sections of the lake trail are narrow like here.

Incidentally, dragging myself through some thorny bushes on the cliffs, with bleeding hands and face, I also scared off first a male and then a female **Copper Pheasant**. Struggling for my life, I had no real interest for them at that point! This happened about 250 meters before the camp, close to site where rock climbers have left ropes on a 30 meter cliff. Going there cannot be recommended as the ground is unstable and there is a real danger of breaking one's leg or neck. For the moment, it is not possible (or allowed) to walk around the lake, as several signs undoubtedly informed, in Japanese... Nevertheless, the potential area can be observed from the circular hiking trail above it. Be careful, if you leave the trail towards the edge of the drop by the lake. It may be a good idea to go a little bit closer, but I would rather sit down and observe the area from some suitable vantage point. The forest is relatively open there.

On both visits, I also drove the main Miike access road slowly back and forth, and explored some side tracks and trails, also up to the temple beyond the above-mentioned access gate. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of Dec, during the slow mid-afternoon hours, I tried to locate other routes to the forest west of Lake Miike, also in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the area. There were several potential tracks on maps, but they all proved to be unsuitable for cars, being either gated, degraded or under repairs by road management teams.

Only at the boat landing at the south of the lake it was possible to drive in to have a look at the lake and its wildfowl. On the beach, children played with domestic ducks, which were apparently considered safe, unlike the notorious wild birds, potential carriers of the bird flu! In reality, it is the domestic fowl people should avoid in East Asia, not the wild ducks.

The tall forest with trees up to 40 meter high, along the lakeside recreation camp access road and the forest hiking trail, is good for woodpeckers. Several were heard drumming around the entrance gate early in the morning. *Namiyei* **White-backed Woodpeckers** (4) were the noisiest, frequently drumming and moving about in the canopy, but the more timid **Japanese Green Woodpeckers** (2) were around, too. It was a great relief to finally connect with the species, the fifth-to-last land bird I missed in Japan. **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers** (15), generally the most common woodpecker species, were of course there, as well.



**Fig. 34.** A nice surprise at the Lake Miike car park, a winter **Forest Wagtail!**

At the camp parking area, I had a lucky encounter with a **Forest Wagtail**, a tropical species which was in retrospect learned to be a scarce breeder and winterer in Kyushu. As usual with the species, the bird never stopped for a moment, but ran around and under the cars before leaving to the nearby forest. I nevertheless managed to take a few photos. The camp was also good for **Olive-backed Pipits** (up to 6; looked like *hodgsoni*), **Grey** and **White Wagtails**, **Daurian Redstarts**, **Oriental Greenfinches**, **Eurasian Siskins** and **Elegant Buntings** (12).

At the time of my visit, the lake itself had a surprisingly large number of wildfowl for such a barren body of water. These included **Mallards** (700), **Eastern Spotbilled Ducks** (70), **Eurasian Wigeons** (270), **Northern Pintails** (120), **Eurasian Teals** (50, only on the 27<sup>th</sup>), **Baikal Teals** (2 males, only on the 27<sup>th</sup>), a drake **Baer's Pochard** (on the 30<sup>th</sup>) and **Tufted Ducks** (2), in addition to **Little Grebes** (2), a **Black-necked Grebe**, **Eurasian Coots** (14) and **Great Cormorants** (8). All in all, 1.310 ducks! On the 27<sup>th</sup> of Dec, I was not able to survey the whole lake, unlike on the 30<sup>th</sup>, and certainly missed a number of birds, possibly also the **Baer's Pochard**.

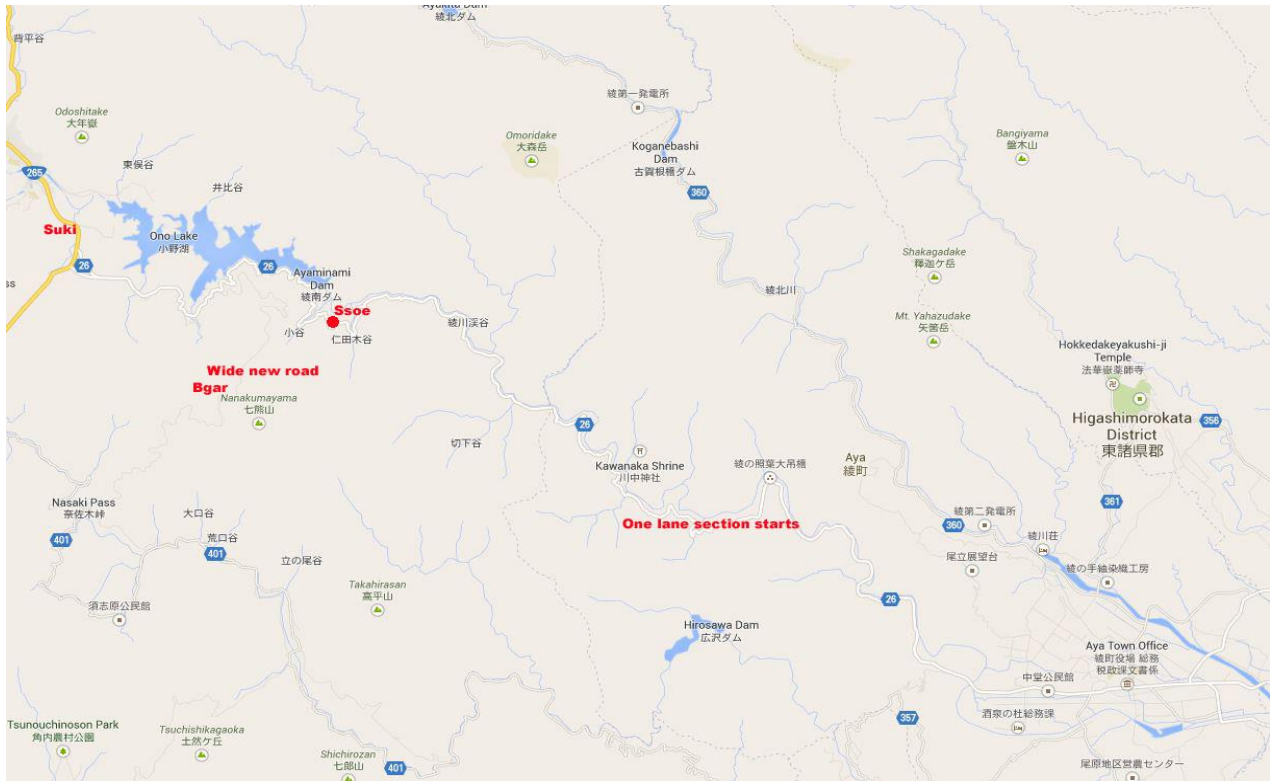
Other notable birds at or over the Lake Miike forests were **Black Kites** (2), **White-bellied Green Pigeons** (2), a **Crested Kingfisher**, a **Eurasian Jay**, three parties of **Japanese Waxwings**, **Eastern Great** and **Varied Tits**, **Long-tailed Tits** (>50), **Red-flanked Bluetails** (8), **Japanese White-eyes**, *fumigatus* **Eurasian Wrens** (8), *roseilia* **Eurasian Nuthatches** (10), a **White's Thrush**, **Brown-headed** (40) and **Plain** (50) **Thrushes**, **Japanese** (22) and **Chinese** (8) **Grosbeaks**, **Elegant** (15), **Masked** (15) and **Rustic Buntings** (2).

Two **Grey Buntings** were seen when walking around the lake, the first about 300 m south from the camp. The buntings were shy by the lake and I only managed to identify 40% of them. As a rule, the birds disappeared into the forest, when approached by walking.



**Fig. 35. Olive-backed Pipits**, at Miike Camp. They favor park-like habitats in winter.

## AYA GORGE



**Map 6.** Aya Gorge area and the location of a male **Copper Pheasant (Ssoe)**. Bgar = **Bohemian Waxwing**.

In my search for Internet information on **Copper Pheasants** in Kyushu, very meager indeed, I had unearthed couple of tidbits confirming that they had been seen west of Ayagawa, around an area known as Aya Gorge. Further analysis revealed that the Aya Gorge forests were mixed and relatively lush, including bamboo, and therefore quite suitable for the species, and a number of other forest birds. As nothing better surfaced, I had decided to spend two to three days there, as a part of the get-the-target-species strategy. Spotting a roadside **Copper Pheasant** required either time or luck, or both, and the idea was to spend most of the time in Kyushu in search for them, at the two known localities, Lake Miike and Aya Gorge. If successful, I would visit Cape Hyuga and/or spend more time around Izumi.

From Aya Town westwards, the Road 26 starts as a two lane mountain highway, following the southern shore of a river. At Aya Gorge (huge suspension bridge across the river valley), the road becomes a narrow one-lane one, and continues as such almost to Lake Ono. Towards the end of the road, it passes the Lake Ono Reservoir and meets Road 285 south of Suki. I checked out a few side tracks, too, notably a long one at the end of the wider road (turn left and up right) and a short one between 26 and the reservoir.

On the south side of the reservoir, an interesting connection goes south and up to Mt. Nanakuma, reaching relatively high ground before meeting Road 401 in the Honjo River valley. On maps, the route is marked as a minor road but is actually new and wide, albeit with many fallen rocks which needed to be avoided. When broken, volcanic stones develop rather sharp cutting edges and may consequently damage car tires.

Road 26 was according to my judgment the best road for **Copper Pheasants** in the area and I therefore did it three times: once in mid-morning, once just before dusk and once early in the morning. The method was

as follows: drive 15 km/h, windows open and keep also your eyes and ears open for any roadside movement. Fortunately, not many other cars (less than 10, on three drives) were encountered on the narrow section. I also checked the parallel road in the north, the 360, which runs from Aya west towards the Ayakita Dam, but it was closed and gated already before Kaganebashi Dam. Moreover, I followed the above-mentioned Road 401 and tried to enter some side roads, for example the one towards Mt. Tsuchishikagaoka, but found them to be closed. All in all, I think I drove about 350 km on the small mountain roads before scoring.

The climax of the 'Aya Gorge campaign' was on the 29<sup>th</sup> of Dec, at 08.58, when a splendid male *ijimae* **Copper Pheasant** suddenly appeared on the left edge of the road, where it was prospecting on some heaps of fallen leaves. The pheasant appeared in its full glory, in bright sunshine against dark background, before briskly walking uphill, into the shadows of the forest. Two days, two hours and 43 minutes of focused search had delivered and I was on cloud nine!!

The exact location of the record is likely to be arbitrary, as suitable habitat occurs all along this section. It was, however, towards the end of the one-lane stretch, between (small) kilometer signs 37 and 38, and before a larger Kobayashi City sign. The bird stood right next to a yellow information sign with a message on conservation of the local wildlife. That is what JAL ladies told me when I showed them the photo and requested a translation. When I described the pheasant, they knew what I was talking about!



Fig. 36. The Yellow Sign at the Site of the Trip!

As there were no target species left and plenty of time had already been spent in forests, I paid less attention to other birds at Aya Gorge. Perhaps the most interesting record was a party of 80 **Bohemian Waxwings**, relatively far south for such a large number, along the above-mentioned Mt. Nanakuma Road. Two **Sika Deer** were seen at the same spot. Also, there were interestingly yellow-bellied (**Eastern?!**) **Great Tits** there, the color being practically identical to the color of **Northern Great Tits**.





**Fig. 37.** If you see this sign, you are already past the **Copper Pheasant** site. Well, good habitat is also here.

The other birds in the area included **Japanese Pygmy Woodpeckers**, **White-backed Woodpeckers** (2), **Bull-headed Shrikes**, **Eurasian Jays**, **Red-billed Leiothrixes** (5), **Japanese Waxwings**, **Eastern Great and Varied Tits**, **Japanese White-eyes**, a **Eurasian Nuthatch**, a **Red-flanked Bluetail**, **Brown-headed** (60) and **Pale** (120) **Thrushes**, **Grey** (10) and **White Wagtails** (40), an **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Oriental Greenfinches**, **Eurasian Siskins**, **Bullfinches**, **Japanese Grosbeaks** (10), **Elegant** (20) and **Masked** (50) **Buntings**, and a **Grey Bunting**.

In Aya Town, a **Grey Heron**, a **Little Egret**, **Barn Swallows** (50), **Dusky Thrushes** (4) and **Tree Sparrows** (40) were seen. According to Brazil (Birds of East Asia, the recommended field guide), **Barn Swallows** do not winter in Japan. Nevertheless, many were present in Kyushu in December 2014.

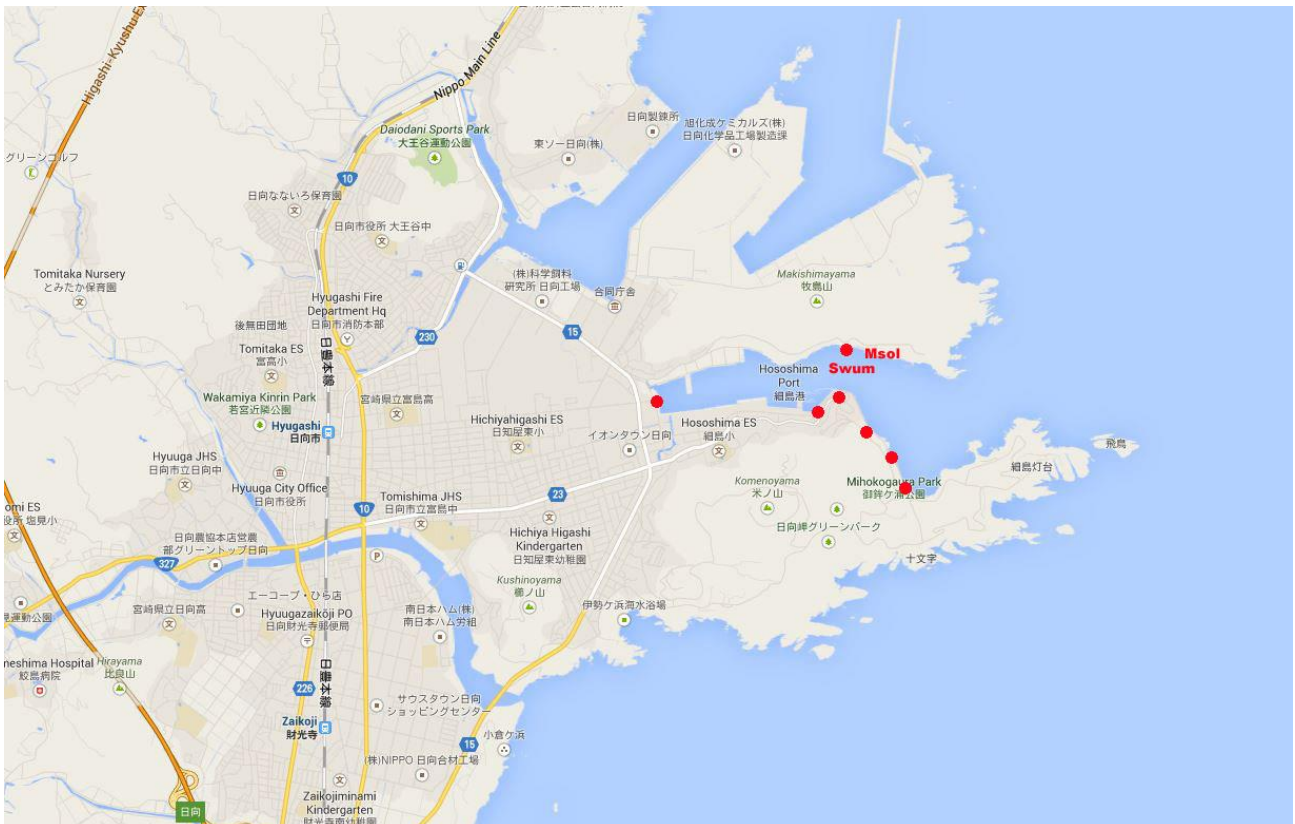


**Fig. 38.** **Dusky Thrushes** prefer open habitats such as fields, unlike several other Japanese thrushes.

## CAPE HUYGA

After scoring with **Copper Pheasant** at Aya Gorge, I decided to visit Cape Hyuga (population 64,000). Some high mountain sites had looked interesting in satellite images and as the mountain and coastal routes were equally long, I chose to drive uphill. That was a decision to be regretted. Instead of the highways on the map, the roads were often reduced to one-lane serpentine steep up and down passes and driving was so slow that I struggled to reach Cape Hyuga before sunset. The inland route probably was twice as time-consuming as the coastal route had been. Moreover, there was no gas along the route and consequently a risk of running out of it, if the road was closed and a U-turn had to be made. The fact that there was hardly any other traffic on high mountains made me wonder: Is there going to be a landslide or deep snow on the road? I could not understand the many signs in Japanese, but some of them appeared ominous.

My route was: Aya Gorge – Suki (Road 265) – Kirei Pass – Omata Pass (to 219) – Yunomae (388) – Yuyama Pass – Ozaki (to 446) – Tsuboya (to 327) – Hyuga. In the beginning, a side exploration towards Mt. Kunimi was made, before I realized that there was no time for them. Along Road 143, when attempting to return to the main road on a gravel side road, an irate truck driver gave me a long lecture in Japanese, of which only 'Go! Go! Go!' could be understood. That was what I was trying to do until he parked his truck across the road, blocking the way! On the 400 meters back to the tarmac, 12 (!) other trucks waited for me to pass. There apparently was some construction going on lower down the side road, probably at another landslide. One of the signs at the road junction had probably warned against an entry, in Japanese.



**Map 7.** Cape Hyuga and my observation points at Hososhima Bay. Swum = **Japanese Murrelet**, Msol = **Blue Rock Thrush** (*pandoo*).



**Fig. 39. Black Kites** are common in Kyushu, and are also relatively tame.

Along the slow mountain roads I kept on looking for eagles and hawk-eagles, in vain despite excellent weather and visibility. The most interesting bird species and numbers included: **Black Kites** (6), **Eurasian Jays** (5), **Rook** (a party of 70), **Long-tailed Tits** (>100), **Brown-headed** (80), **Pale** (40) and **Dusky** (2) **Thrushes**, **Daurian Redstarts** (50), **Grey Wagtails** (35), an **Olive-backed Pipit**, **Bramblings** (140), *rosacea* **Bullfinches** (10), **Japanese** (>10) and **Chinese** (a party of 16) **Grosbeaks**, and **Meadow** (5), **Elegant** (8) and **Masked** (30) **Buntings**.

Having arrived at Cape Hyuga late in the afternoon, I decided to focus on Hososhima Bay. I first drove to the end of the southern shore road and turned around, stopping five times for scoping before reaching the western end of the boat harbor. Having spotted two winter-plumaged **Japanese Murrelets** close to the opposite shore, I went there for the last 45 minutes of observations. With the low sun behind my back, the largely white murrelets originally shone like beacons against the dark blue waves, and were easy to spot. In June 2014, I had seen my first **Japanese Murrelet** close to Miyakejima, Izu Islands, and this was the second record.

Otherwise, there was not much to see. Fortunately, the few birds included good ones. There was a 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar-year **Mongolian Gull** at the bay, relatively far west for the species, a lone juvenile **Turnstone** and the best of all, a male **Blue Rock Thrush** on a stony shore. The all-blue bird (apparently subspecies *pandoo*) could be observed for more than ten minutes. The (sub)species is supposed to be a rare vagrant in Japan.

The common birds included 80 **Eastern Spotbilled Ducks**, 10 **Grey Herons**, 8 **Eastern Reed Egrets**, 3 **Temminck's Cormorants**, one **Osprey**, 20 **Black Kites**, 8 **Black-tailed Gulls** and 10 **Vega Gulls**.

Leaving Hyuga at 17.10, I followed the Highway 10 south, before joining the toll expressway at Kijo. It was a long but fast drive to Miyakonojo, on the Higashi-Kyushu and Miyazaki Expressways. Hotel Vessel was far from Hyuga but conveniently close to Lake Miike, the next destination in the morning, on the way back to Izumi and Arasaki.



**Fig. 40.** On the northern shore, there is a good access to the seashore, and a high vantage point. One may park either up in the junction or drive down this way (space for couple of cars), or park here, following the example of this car. There is a pier down there, the favorite spot of some local anglers and also a useful place for scoping the seashore. In the opposite direction, there is a private house.

## AN AFTERTHOUGHT

The trip became more adventurous than expected, largely because my inability to understand signs in Japanese and the differences between road map information and the realities on the road. After South Korea, I had expected level mountain roads and tunnels in Kyushu, too. Driving times were, however, difficult to estimate on the mountains because of varying road conditions. In terms of birding, a visit to Kyushu was a very enjoyable exercise. I only wished to have had more time for Arasaki. Who knows what else could have been discovered if there was a chance to have another day or two for checking out the tens of thousands of wintering birds – waterfowl, shorebirds and pipits in particular.

With the exception of my influenza and the flat tire, the organization of birdwatching was once again quite easy in Japan and allowed great comfort during and after the daily operations. Despite certain exceptions in this text, I again enjoyed the warmth and politeness of the people, and have great respect for them. In the evenings, the television portrayed interesting insights to current developments in East Asia, and to the Japanese consumer culture. My suitcase became heavy of various Japanese products not available in Finland. Hopefully, another visit to Japan will follow soon.

At the moment, I still miss three breeding land bird species in Japan: **Japanese Night Heron**, **Bonin Honeyeater** and **Japanese Yellow Bunting**. In case you would be able and willing to help with the first one, please contact me by email.



**Fig. 41.** In the NHK New Year broadcast, the main 2015 threats to humanity were portrayed. Add North Korea to the neighbors, a barely hidden enmity between South Korea and Japan, the U.S. troops which need to be in Okinawa as a life insurance, even though their presence is also a big problem, and some seismic activity, to understand the neighborhood the Japanese live in! We Finns unfortunately share one of the neighbors, and its goblin ruler, with Japan.



**Fig. 42.** For birds such as these **Hooded Cranes**, national borderlines are arbitrary, even though territories and cultural practices are not. In some nations, there are customs and laws which protect them and citizens who follow the codes of conduct. In some others, their existence is more threatened by pollution, guns and degradation of wetland habitats.