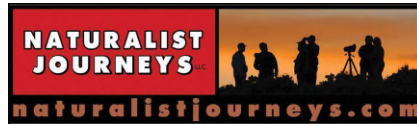
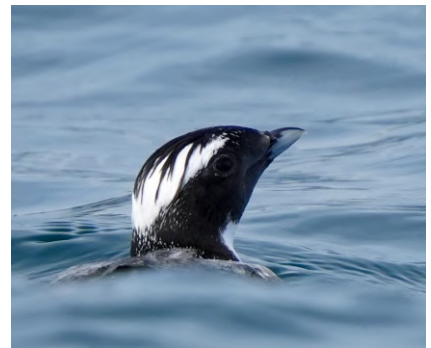


Spring in Japan: The Southern Islands

April 1 – 14, 2026 | Trip Report by Kent Skaggs



Guides Bryan Shirley and Kent Skaggs, with nine participants: Carol, Cathy, Loretta, Margaret & Clifton, Penny, Rita & Gene and Wendi



Wednesday, April 1 Arrivals in Tokyo

Everyone arrived early to Japan, with most doing a little exploring of Tokyo on their own before the tour got underway. The group officially gathered a little before 6:00 PM in the lobby of our hotel before taking a short walk to a restaurant nearby for dinner. We started to get to know one another while enjoying some tasty dishes and then returned to the hotel where Bryan gave the group the plan for the morning. Then everyone retired to their rooms to get packed up and get some rest before our flight to Kyushu in the morning.

Thursday, April 2 Flight to Oita | Explore the Kunisaki Peninsula

With our flight to Oita scheduled for 9:30 AM, everyone was able to eat breakfast at their leisure before gathering our things and heading to the airport. Once there, we went through the process of checking in, checked our bags and headed to the gate to await our flight. It wasn't long before we had boarded and were in the air, leaving behind rainy conditions in Tokyo. On route to Oita we eventually saw the dense cloud cover break up enough to see patches of the landscape below before it clouded back up again and started raining just before landing. Once we were on the ground, we went inside the terminal to collect our bags and meet the last member of our party - our driver, Koichi. He informed us that the rain was coming to an end and the sun was to make an appearance shortly, so in the meantime we decided to grab some lunch to go at a 7/11 in the terminal



and then walked a short distance to where our bus was parked. Bags and people all on board, the sun broke through the clouds and the afternoon was shaping up nicely.

Now we were off to explore the Kunisaki Peninsula with our first stop being the Futago Temple located on the forested slopes of Mount Futago. Upon arrival we took a path that led us to a red bridge, which we crossed, bringing us to two Nio guardian statues and the entrance to the temple. Then it was up some stairs to the temple and beyond that was a small pond. The deciduous trees in the area were just beginning to leaf out, but the cherry blossoms (sakura) were in full bloom. While we enjoyed the scenery around us, we heard a bird singing that might have been a Japanese Thrush but it stayed out of view. We did however get good looks at a Varied Tit and a pair of Asian Tits. As we continued to explore the area, a Japanese Woodpecker was heard calling so we tried to locate it. As it turned out there were two, apparently a pair, and we got fleeting glimpses of each as they flew back and forth on the hillside. They eventually landed in a stand of trees near us and we were able to see both of them albeit only briefly and in the shadows of the trees.

From here we continued on to Kitsuki and took a stroll through part of the Kitsuki Samurai District before stopping at the Yasaka River estuary and the San River mouth along Beppu Bay. Several species were seen including Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Common Pochard, Little Ringed Plover, Black-headed Gull, Black-tailed Gull, Great Crested Grebe and Blue Rock-Thrush. It was late in the day, so we continued on to the Kamenoi Hotel where we would be staying the night. After getting checked in and getting settled into our rooms, we gathered again for dinner, updated the checklist and then retired for the evening.

Friday, April 3 Kunisaki Peninsula to Nobeoka | Japanese Murrelet by Boat

The group gathered for breakfast at 6:40 and then departed at 7:45 with our first stop being Beppu Park. This large, manicured park had several flowering trees in bloom, including cherry trees, plus lots of other flowers that caught the eye. It also had lots of mature trees so we set out to see what birds we could find. We walked around the park for about a half hour, seeing our first Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Long-tailed Tit, Pale Thrush and Japanese Wagtail, as well as other species already previously seen.

Then we proceeded out of the city, driving up in elevation to the Tsurumi/Beppu Ropeway where we got out and walked for a bit. There were lots of flowering trees here as well, continuing our visual feast of spring in Japan. The birds were a bit harder to see as they had a lot of cover to hide out in, but we did see a new bird in a Ryukyu Minivet. Then we headed back down into the valley and went to the confluence of the Ono and Ototsu Rivers, where we found several species including Green Pheasant, Little Grebe, Eurasian Skylark, Zitting Cisticola and Japanese Bush Warbler. Then it was back onto the bus to head for Kadogawa Harbor for our boat tour to look for Japanese Murrelets.



Our tour to look for the Japanese Murrelets had originally been scheduled for Saturday, but pretty stout winds were forecast for that day so the itinerary was rearranged to take advantage of very pleasant conditions this afternoon. Once we arrived we went down to the harbor and loaded onto two boats, where we made our way towards Biro Island which has a nesting colony of the murrelets. As we passed beyond the last seawall protecting the harbor, Biro Island could be seen off in the distance. As we made our way towards the island, we eventually encountered a small group of murrelets. Then another and another. Pretty soon we seemed to be surrounded by them. They tolerated the presence of the boats to the point that we were able to get fairly close to them as they floated on the water, allowing us the opportunity to get some photos of this cute little alcid. Once we had our fill, we said goodbye to the murrelets and returned to the harbor where we thanked the captains and the owners of the charter company for a great afternoon on the water.

Then we took a drive to a location close by to look for Copper Pheasants which had been reported recently. Upon arriving at the spot we got out and walked along the road for a while, but the pheasants weren't obliging. As a consolation, we were treated to the beautiful sound of several singing Red-billed Leiothrix, eventually getting a glimpse of a couple of them. We checked out one last area with a view of the coast before continuing on to Nobeoka for dinner and then to our hotel where we would be staying the next two nights.

Saturday, April 4 Hitotsuse River Estuary

Rain had moved in overnight so it was breakfast at our leisure and catching up on the checklist before departing at 9:00 for the Hitotsuse River estuary in Miyazaki Prefecture. It was a little over an hour to our destination so we settled in and watched as much of the countryside as we could through the rain and low clouds. Upon arrival the rain had begun to lighten up to where we could at least do some birding through the windows of the bus. As we drove along a road that was bordered by flooded rice paddies, we came upon some Common Snipe in one of them. As we watched the snipe, some shorebirds flew by so we continued on to search the ag fields to see what else we could find. The weather was starting to improve but the bird activity was still pretty quiet. We did come upon our first Chestnut-cheeked Starling perched on top of a utility pole, saw a couple of Bull-headed Shrikes and got a flyby from a Eurasian Kestrel.

From here we headed into Shintomi for lunch and afterward we met up with Yutaka Nakamura who gave us a presentation on his research on the nesting colony of Japanese Murrelets on Biro Island. Then it was back out to the Hitotsuse River estuary to look for more birds. As we traveled along the river we scanned waterfowl sitting along the banks and in the water. As we were looking through one group of ducks, Bryan located a male Baikal Teal among several resting Mallards on the bank. Something flushed the ducks so we tracked the teal going back and forth along the river in front of us until it eventually went out of sight. We proceeded a little further down

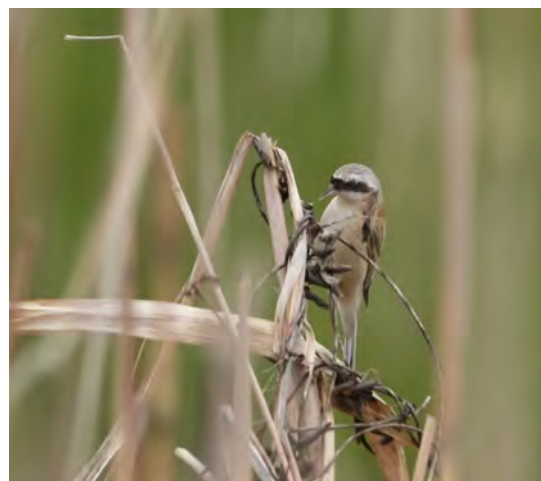


the road where we had a better view of the river and relocated the Baikal Teal and found two male Garganey as well which was a great surprise. We got the ducks in the scopes for everyone to get a good look before continuing to the estuary where we came upon lots of resting shorebirds. Again we set up the scopes to better see what was in front of us. Most were Bar-tailed Godwits, a couple of Kentish Plovers, some Black-bellied Plovers and a lone Ruff. Then it was back to the hotel in Nobeoka where we updated the checklist before heading to dinner at a Korean BBQ restaurant. Then back to the hotel and off to bed as we would have an early departure in the morning.

Sunday, April 5 Aso-Kuju National Park | Kumamoto Castle

An earlier start this morning as we gathered for breakfast at 6:30 and hit the road around 7:00. Our primary destination was the Aso-Kuju National Park with our first stop being at the Minami Aso Visitor Center in Takamori where the plan was to walk some of the trails to see what birds we could find. As we neared Takamori, we entered the Aso caldera which is the largest active volcano in Japan. In short order we were at the visitor center so we gathered our gear and headed out on a trail. It was a little quiet to start but the bird activity began to pick up as we continued our walk. First we came across a couple of Varied and Asian Tits before finding a tree loaded with flowers that had several Brown-eared Bulbuls in it. Then we came across a small flock of Bramblings and shortly after that a Japanese Woodpecker that was much more cooperative than the pair we had seen a few days prior. In the same area as the woodpecker, we also found several Japanese Waxwings, a Japanese Grosbeak and a Chinese Hwamei. We finished up our walk and loaded back onto the bus to start towards Kumamoto, making a brief stop at the Aso Sanjo Terminal to take some photos of the steam rising from the Aso Nakadake crater.

Once we arrived in Kumamoto, we headed directly to the Kumamoto Castle. With it being a Sunday and essentially the peak of the Sakura season, we had a few friends while we toured the castle. Damaged by two earthquakes two days apart in 2016, the castle and other structures on the grounds were in the process of being restored, but we were still able to see a lot. Once we finished up at the castle we headed to our hotel nearby, got checked in and then had a little downtime before gathering again for dinner. It was a short walk to the restaurant where the main item on the menu was Okonomiyaki, which is a savory Japanese cabbage pancake. After filling up on this delicious treat, we returned to the hotel to get some rest as we would have an early start in the morning.



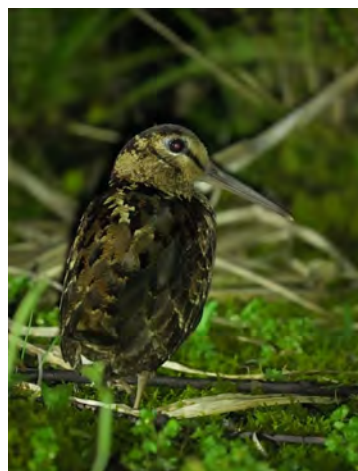
Monday, April 6 Higashiyoka Tidal Flats & Shiroishi

The group gathered for breakfast at 6:30 again and departed around 7:15 for the Saga Prefecture and the Higashiyoka Tidal Flats north of Kumamoto. The drive would take an hour and a half so we settled in and enjoyed the countryside. Upon arrival, we headed directly to the sea embankment and one of the viewing areas that allowed for a great panoramic view of the Ariake Sea and the tidal flats. It was nearing high tide so we could see lots of shorebirds scattered about along with some waterfowl and gulls, all of which would get closer to shore as the tide continued to come in. We eventually made our way to the seaward side of the embankment where you could walk on a concrete path that allowed a closer view of the birds as well as the other animal life on the flats. As we started scanning, the diversity of what was in front of us began to reveal itself. In the water there were several duck species including several Falcated Ducks which were new for the trip. On the mud flats there were literally thousands of shorebirds, most of which were Dunlin. Other shorebirds observed were Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Pacific Golden-Plover, Siberian Sand-Plover, Kentish Plover, Eurasian Whimbrel, Far Eastern Curlew, Eurasian Curlew, Bar-tailed Godwit, Long-billed Dowitcher, Marsh Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Common Greenshank, Great Knot, Red Knot, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Red-necked Stint and a wayward Hudsonian Godwit. There were Saunders's Gulls and Little Terns as well and both Eurasian and Black-faced Spoonbills. We were very fortunate that the timing of our visit coincided with the high tide, making for a spectacular birding experience.

From here we made our way to a local restaurant for lunch before continuing to do some more birding near Shiroishi. Our primary target was Oriental Stork and fortunately for us we found one at its nest. After getting out to take some photos, we continued to explore the area finding a Great, Medium and Little Egret in the same paddie. Shortly after, we found a couple of Chinese Penduline-Tits and a boatload of waterfowl. Then we made our way back to Kumamoto and our hotel before going out for dinner at a conveyor belt sushi restaurant. Then it was back to the hotel to pack as we would have an early departure for Kagoshima where we would be boarding our flight for Amami.

Tuesday, April 7 Morning Birding | Flight to Amami | Night Outing

A 6:30 breakfast, then we grabbed our bags and hit the road at 7:30 for the drive to Kagoshima. Just outside of Kagoshima, we took a drive to the Nagao Viewpoint where our target was Copper Pheasant. As we slowly drove along the road, Bryan heard a flycatcher singing so we stopped to see if we could locate it. Bryan did just that and it turned out to be a male Blue-and-white Flycatcher. We continued on a little further up the road looking for the pheasant, but were unsuccessful so we headed for the airport.



About 15 minutes later we were at the Kagoshima International Airport. We grabbed our bags and went inside to get checked in and wait for our flight that was scheduled for 1:10 PM. Our flight was delayed slightly but we eventually were on our way to the island of Amami. Less than an hour later we were on the ground, grabbed our bags and loaded up into two vans to start exploring the island. Our first stop was near the airport along the coast where we found a Black-winged Stilt, three Temminck's Stints and a couple of Red-necked Stints. We continued on a short distance before we came across a Lidth's Jay perched on a powerline scolding a couple of Large-billed Crows. We drove through the Ushuku Port adding a couple of Little Ringed Plovers, a Wood Sandpiper and a Blue Rock-Thrush. Then it was on to our hotel.

Once there we checked in and got settled into our rooms before gathering for an early dinner and then taking a 45 minute drive to the Amami Forestpolis Park to look for some nocturnal critters. The first one encountered was an Amami Woodcock, followed by an Amami Black Rabbit, then a couple of Ryukyu Scops-Owls, followed by a Okinawa Pitviper. We heard several more scops-owls, saw several more woodcocks and on the way out came across an endangered Otton Frog. Then it was back to the hotel for some much-needed rest.

Wednesday, April 8 Amami Island

After breakfast, we loaded up at 7:30 and made a brief stop at a grocery store to grab some items for lunch as we would be eating somewhere in the field. Then we hit the road for the Modama Native Forest where we were hoping to add some endemic bird species to our list. After about 45 minutes we turned off onto a road where we continued to drive slowly, birding from the vans. We stopped briefly as we found a Whistling Green-Pigeon perched in a tree. While observing the pigeon, a couple of Lidth's Jays flew in providing brief looks before moving out of sight and a Gray-faced Buzzard was seen riding a thermal close by as well. As we continued our drive in the forest, we heard a Ryukyu Robin singing so we stopped to see if we could locate it. Bryan found it fairly quickly but it was playing hide and seek with us before we finally got good views of this striking endemic. We continued on a little further before parking the vans and getting out to walk for a bit. An Amami Thrush was heard singing nearby so we set out after it. We were able to locate the bird but it was in the shadows and at a distance before it disappeared out of view. We decided to let it go for the moment and see what else we could find. We didn't walk far before we found a White-backed Woodpecker, which is a different subspecies on Amami, from those found elsewhere in Japan. We continued walking and Bryan heard a Ryukyu Flycatcher singing, so we tried to get it to show itself. The flycatcher was playing hard to get, showing itself briefly before retreating out of sight. It continued to sing but wasn't coming any closer so we decided to make our way back to the vans and try one more time for the Amami Thrush. On the way there we did encounter a couple of female/immature male Ryukyu Flycatchers, with everyone getting good looks. We did relocate the thrush but only had a fleeting glimpse so we called it good and set out for our next stop.



We headed for the Uken Sports Park in the village of Uken, known to attract rarities. We set out to walk around the park to see what we could find. The first birds we encountered were some Chestnut-cheeked and White-cheeked Starlings followed by several Wood Sandpipers feeding in some grassy areas surrounding a track. It was fairly quiet as we walked around but we did find a bonus bird in a Brown-headed Thrush that was a bit tardy for its northern migration. We then made our way back to the city of Amami where we continued on to the village of Akina to check out some paddies for waterbirds and whatever else might be present. Once we got there we found several waders in the paddies including Little, Medium, Great and Eastern Cattle Egret, a Black-winged Stilt, several Wood Sandpipers and a few White-breasted Waterhens. Other species seen included Zitting Cisticola, Gray Wagtail and Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Then it was time to return to Amami to update the checklist, eat dinner and pack up our things as we would be flying to Okinawa the following day.

Thursday, April 9 Flight to Okinawa | Yambaru National Park

An early start today as we departed the hotel at 6:00 and stopped briefly to grab some breakfast items to go. Then we were off to the Amami Nature Forest to see if we could get a better look at an Amami Thrush. Once we arrived to our destination we got out of the vans and checked out some areas near the road. We found a few species that we had already encountered, but no thrush. However, we did find a couple of species of newts which were new for the trip.

Then it was back to the airport for our flight to Okinawa. It was a short flight, but with a twist. Prior to reaching Okinawa, we landed on the island of Yoron where we deplaned for about 15 minutes before we were allowed to reboard the plane for the remainder of the flight to Naha. Once in Naha, we loaded into our bus and started north to where we would be staying for the next two nights - the Ada Garden Hotel. We did take a slight detour along the way to see if we could find a wayward bird near the Burikena Agricultural Fields. An Ashy Drongo had been hanging out in this area for a while and we decided to try our luck. We drove slowly through the area, getting out once to walk a bit before getting back onto the bus to continue our search. As we drove, Bryan spotted some Bramblings in the top of a tree. As we viewed the birds from the bus, Bryan saw the drongo fly into the same tree but was obscured by branches and leaves so we got back out of the bus to try to locate it. A couple in the group thought they got a brief look at the bird, but nothing definitive and the bird wasn't seen again. We walked a bit further on the road and found another bird that was unexpected in a Little Bunting perched in the top of a small tree. Everyone was able to see it before it decided to move on.

Then we continued on to our hotel. Once we arrived the first thing we did was check out a small man-made pond next to the parking area to see if by chance one of our target birds was there. We were in luck as an Okinawa Robin was perched on a rock on the edge of the pond. As we continued to watch, we got another



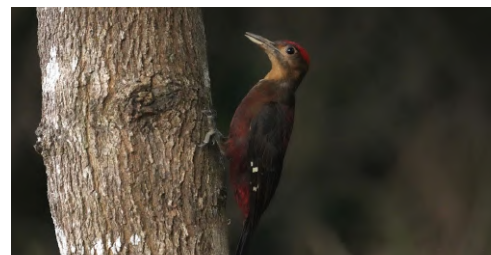
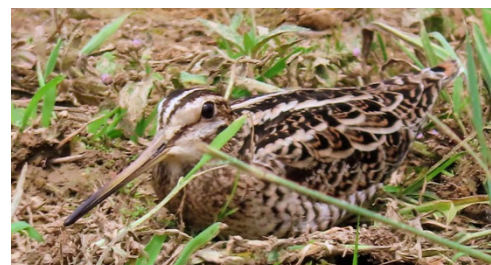
surprise when an Okinawa Rail walked out from some vegetation to the pond and began taking a bath. Then a second came out from the same area and walked over to the pond. We hadn't even made our way into the front door of the hotel and we already had two species that we were hoping to see. The rails eventually retreated back to some cover, so we grabbed our bags and went inside to get checked in. We settled into our rooms and returned back to the main level to eat dinner in the restaurant. We had decided to forgo a night outing after dinner as the rail was our main target, so we updated the checklist and turned in for the night. Or so we thought. It wasn't but a few minutes before Bryan messaged everyone that a Boobook was sitting in a tree near our bus. Everyone that received the message then met outside to see the owl. It stayed for a few minutes before moving on. Since we were outside we walked out to the road to check to see if we could find the rails roosting in the trees. We didn't find any rails, but we did hear a couple of Ryukyu Scops-Owls calling and had one fly over us heading toward the other owl. What a great finish to our first day on Okinawa!

Friday, April 10 Yambaru National Park & Northern Okinawa

The group gathered at 6:15 for a pre-breakfast bird walk at the pond where we had seen the rails the previous day. The rails were a no show, but we did see a couple of Okinawa Robins before we walked a portion of the road that goes by the hotel. It was pretty quiet so we turned around at a bridge and started making our way back. As we neared an intersection a bird came flying into a little stand of trees right next to us, vocalizing as it did so. Bryan recognized that this was an Okinawa Woodpecker, which was one of our target birds. While we tried to get a good look at the bird that was in front of us, Bryan spotted another in a dead tree on the other side of the road. We turned our attention to it as it was out in the open, but it soon joined the other woodpecker and they both moved into a larger tree a little further away. The birds appeared to be looking for something to eat and slowly moved about in the tree for a few minutes allowing us to get good views before they finally moved on. On that note, we returned to the hotel to eat breakfast.

After breakfast, we loaded onto the bus and made our way to the Benoki Dam to see if we could find the trio of birds (Rail, Robin and Woodpecker) with Okinawa in their name. As we arrived at the dam some of the group was able to get a brief look at a Little Heron. Then we walked a bit to see what else we could find. There were a couple of Great Cormorants on the lake along with some Pacific Swallows flying over the water as well and in the trees along the road we found Japanese Woodpecker, Ryukyu Minivet, Varied Tit, Asian Tit, Japanese Bush Warbler and Warbling White-eye. We did hear an Okinawa Woodpecker and a couple of Okinawa Robins, but they all remained out of sight.

We finished up at the dam and then headed for Kunigami and the Kaganji rice paddies. As we drove on the roads that intersected the paddies we came across several species previously seen before finding a restaurant to eat



lunch. Refueled, we checked out another location nearby where we added a Pacific Reef-Heron and a Green Sandpiper to our list before heading back to the hotel to take a siesta.

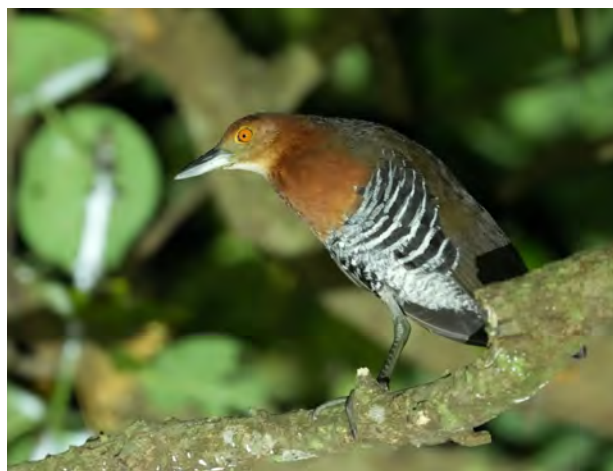
We gathered again at 6:00 for dinner and afterwards went for a night drive to see if we could find some more night critters. Our first stop was at a dam near the hotel where we were hoping to locate a Northern Boobook. We were successful as we were able to see two and heard another. Then we tried for a Japanese Scops-Owl at another dam, but were unsuccessful although we did hear and see a Ryukyu Scops-Owl. Much of our drive was looking for roosting Okinawa Rails and Bryan finally located one. Everyone was able to see this unique bird perched on a nearly horizontal tree branch. We enjoyed the bird for a few minutes before heading back to the hotel to call it a night.

Saturday, April 11 Yambaru | Kin Wetland | Shuri Castle

Most of the group gathered at 6:15 for a pre-breakfast bird walk where we saw several of the usual suspects including an Okinawa Woodpecker again, plus three Eurasian Siskins which were unexpected. Then it was back to the hotel for breakfast before gathering our bags and departing at 7:30. We were headed to Naha where we would be staying the night, but we made a couple of stops along the way. The first was at the Burikena Agricultural Fields again to see if we could manage to spot the Ashy Drongo. Try as we might, we were unsuccessful again so we continued on.

Our next stop was at the Kin rice paddies to look for waterbirds. Upon arrival we drove a little ways on a road next to the Okukubi River where we stumbled across a Little Heron. We got out of the bus to get a better look, but the bird moved on so we continued to walk along the road that paralleled the river. We soon came across a Common Kingfisher and saw several waders in one of the paddies. We got back on the bus and continued to drive the roads that intersected the paddies. While looking at several Black-winged Stilts in one paddie, Bryan spotted a Oriental Pratincole in flight. We watched the bird until it eventually disappeared from view, so we continued to look for more birds in the paddies. Most of what we found was familiar, but we did find a snipe (species undetermined) and a flock of Scaly-breasted Munias.

From here we headed to the Shuri Castle to explore the grounds and see some of the reconstruction that was taking place to several structures that were destroyed in a fire in 2019. A world heritage site, Shuri Castle was constructed by the Ryukyu Kingdom and reflects the architectures of both China and Japan. We spent about an hour at the site before continuing on to our hotel. After getting checked in, everyone got settled into their



rooms, with some of the group heading back out to do some shopping while the rest took advantage of a little downtime. Then we gathered for dinner at 7:00 before retiring for the evening.

Sunday, April 12 Naha Area | Flight to Ishigaki Island

A leisurely start to this morning so after eating breakfast and getting all of our bags loaded onto the bus, we hit the road at 8:00 for the Komesu Beach. Upon arrival we walked down a path to the beach and began scanning the now exposed rocky bottom as the tide was out. Several shorebirds were present including Pacific Golden-Plover, Siberian Sand-Plover, Eurasian Whimbrel, Gray-tailed Tattler, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Temminck's Stint, Long-toed Stint and Red-necked Stint. There were also several Pacific Reef-Herons looking for breakfast, an Osprey that had some, and a Peregrine Falcon patrolling the shoreline looking for some as well. Then we moved on to an area known as the Triangle Pond in Tomigusuku where we added Pied Avocet and Common Redshank to our growing list. Then it was on to the airport in Naha to await our flight to Ishigaki.

The flight took about an hour and once we landed we gathered our bags while Koichi went to get our bus. Upon his return, we loaded up and headed for our lodging. On the way we came across a couple of introduced species in Ring-necked Pheasant and Indian Peafowl. It wasn't long before we were at Nagura Village where we would be staying for two nights. We settled into our accommodations and then headed to a local restaurant for dinner where we tried Taco Rice, which originated in Okinawa. Then we met Masahiro Kobayashi for some night birding north of Ishigaki City. We started by driving through some rice paddies where we got a distant look at a Cinnamon Bittern. Then we checked out Banna Park, hoping to see Malayan Night-Heron in particular, without success. Then he took us to a place that he had reserved for last where he had a couple of our targets waiting for us. Upon arrival, we got off the bus and walked down a path looking up in the trees for roosting birds. It wasn't long before Mr. Kobayashi spotted a Malayan Night-Heron. Everyone got a good look at this bird that was pretending to be an upright branch, before retreating and leaving the bird to the night. It wasn't but a couple of minutes later, before he spotted a male Slaty-legged Crake at roost in a tree. Everyone got great looks at this bird before moving a short distance where Mr. Kobayashi had found a female of the same species in another tree. We loaded back onto the bus, dropped Mr. Kobayashi off back at his vehicle, and thanked him for a wonderful evening. Then it was back to our lodging and off to bed.

Monday, April 13 Ishigaki Island

An optional early start to this morning as most of the group went on a quest for a Watercock that had been located along the Miyara River. En route we happened upon our first Ruddy Kingfisher perched on a wire along the roadway. It was overcast so our view was of a kingfisher silhouette against a grayish white background. We continued on to the site where the Watercock had been reported and got out and walked for a bit. As we



walked there were a few Black-crowned Night-Herons flying overhead, some nervous Eastern Spot-billed Ducks in some rice paddies looking on, and Ruddy Kingfishers calling in the distance, but no Watercock. So we loaded up and headed back for breakfast and got a nice consolation along the way in the form of two Ruddy Kingfishers perched on a railing right next to the road, providing brief but great looks.

After breakfast it was back out for more birding starting with a drive up towards Mount Omoto. On our way there we came across a Crested Serpent-Eagle perched on a sprinkler head. The bird was watching a tractor-like vehicle that had people on the rear end planting what appeared to be sugarcane. Eventually it flew to the field where this was taking place to look for a mid-morning snack. We continued on toward Mount Omoto, eventually stopping and getting out to walk on a road. Medium to large sized trees with a thick understory beneath them bordered each side of the road, appearing to be great habitat for something but all was quiet. We were hoping to find an Iriomote Tit and ultimately were successful. We also added an Olive-backed Pipit and heard an Asian Emerald Dove calling repeatedly but it stayed out of view. From here we returned to lower elevation, driving through some agricultural fields. In one freshly worked field there were several Pacific Golden Plovers and five Oriental Pratincoles. Both species blended in so well with the soil that it was hard to see them with the naked eye, but were seen well with binoculars. Then we drove to the city of Ishigaki looking for some new starlings and Common Myna, but with no success, so we grabbed some food to go for lunch and returned to our lodging for a couple of hours of free time.

During our break, some of the group checked out a local art studio next door while others took the opportunity to rest. We gathered again mid afternoon to catch up on the checklist and then went out to look for more birds. We started by exploring some areas near Kabira before going to the Ohama coast to look for shorebirds. Once there we found a mixed flock, most of which we had seen before but did find a couple of new species in Greater Sand-Plover and Terek Sandpiper. From here we drove through some agricultural fields where we found lots of egrets along with several Purple Herons eagerly waiting for sugarcane harvesting equipment to expose some goodies for dinner. Then we took one last drive through some rice paddies to see if we could find a Greater Painted-Snipe to no avail before heading to a local izakaya (Japanese pub) for our last dinner together. After enjoying several courses and enjoying the talents of some local musicians as well, we made our way back to our lodging to get some rest as we would fly back to Tokyo in the morning.

Tuesday, April 14 Ishigaki Island | Flight to Tokyo & Departures



Most of the group was up early for a bird walk along a road nearby our lodging. Shortly into our walk Bryan heard a Black Paradise-Flycatcher singing from a dense stand of trees. He attempted to draw it out, but the bird remained out of sight. We continued on until we left the woodlot behind and the landscape opened up into agricultural land. When we reached the end of the road, we had gained enough elevation to have a good view of the land around us and of Nagura Bay. As we took in the view a Ruddy Kingfisher came flying in and landed in a tree right next to us. It didn't stay long but long enough to provide us with another great look at this striking bird. Then we made our way back for breakfast, packed our bags and loaded onto the bus for the ride to the airport. Bryan and Koichi were extending their stay in the region, so we thanked them for a great trip and said so long to them at the airport.

It wasn't long before we were in the air and headed back to Tokyo. After an hour and a half, we were on the ground. We deplaned and headed to baggage claim to get our luggage, wished each other well, and then went our separate ways. It had been a wonderful time exploring the southern islands of Japan with beautiful scenery, great company, and lots of birds. Here's hoping our paths cross again on another adventure with Naturalist Journeys.

A BIG THANK YOU TO BRYAN FOR PUTTING US ON SOME GREAT BIRDS AND TO KOICHI FOR GETTING US TO ALL OF OUR DESTINATIONS SAFELY!!

Best bird(s) and/or experience

- Bryan - Slaty-legged Crake, Iriomote Tit & Japanese Murrelets
- Carol - All of the birds & Ryukyu Flying Fox
- Cathy - Japanese Woodpecker & the night drives
- Cliff - Japanese Woodpecker & the night drives
- Gene - Japanese Murrelets, Okinawa Rail & Amami Black Rabbit
- Kent - Oriental Pratincole & Ruddy Kingfisher
- Koichi - Hudsonian Godwit
- Loretta - Okinawa Rail, Slaty-legged Crake, good views of shorebirds & the food
- Margaret - Japanese & Okinawa Woodpeckers, Japanese Murrelets, Okinawa Rail & Slaty-legged Crake
- Penny - Okinawa Rail, Slaty-legged Crake & walking through the forest at night
- Rita - Okinawa Rail, Slaty-legged Crake & being with experienced birders
- Wendi - Okinawa Rail, Japanese Murrelets, the shorebirds, the land crab & the group

Group Photo: Takumi Koichi (TK), Japanese Murrelet (TK), Ryukyu Scops-Owl (Cliff Hensel - CH), Varied Tit (Kent Skaggs - KS), Asian Tit (KS), Futago Temple (KS), Black Kite (KS), Kumamoto Castle (KS), Brown-eared Bulbul (CH), Dunlin & Plovers (KS), Chinese Penduline Tit (Bryan Shirley - BS), Wood Sandpiper (KS), Ryukyu Scops Owl (BS), Amami Woodcock (BS), Birding in the Amami Nature Forest (KS), White-backed Woodpecker (amami) (BS), Okinawa Woodpecker (BS), Swinhoe's/Pin-tailed Snipe (KS), Shuri Castle (KS), Slaty-legged Crake (BS), Black-faced Spoonbill (TK), Birding near Mt. Omoto (KS), Ruddy Kingfisher (CH), Greater Sand Plover (BS), Ishigaki Island (KS)