Winter bird observations on Tsushima, Japan

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From 5th to 8th of January 1973, I had the opportunity to visit Tsushima together with Mr. Kamogawa, an expert on the birds of this islands. Due to his excellent preparations in advance we could do the utmost out of our precious time. We are especially grateful that through the courtesy of the islands government we had for three days a taxi for our disposition. The taxi gave us the opportunity to survey most places of the islands.

What surprised me-as a stranger-was the mild climate of Tsushima in early January. The average temperature on the 5th was f. ex. +4.5°C, on 7th +10.9°C. It snows sometimes a little bit, but only in February. It is therefore no wonder that practically all the typical winter-birds of northern Japan, as f. ex. Snow-Bunting, Glaucous Gull, Long-tailed Duck, were never observed on Tsushima. My idea of Tsushima changed completely after I set my feet on its soil. In skyline and landscape it has much in common with Sado-Island, but Sado-Island is much more northern in its climate and in its winter birds, too.

Tsushima has a good net of streets, public buses, and footpaths. In many villages and towns it is possible to find accommodations for the night. It is within easy reach by ferry-boat from Fukuoka. The journey takes up to 5 hours. Some of the daily departures provide for car-transports. For an ornithologist visiting Japan Tsushima is a place to remember. A visit can be warmly recommended. My thanks go to the head of the islands government, Mr. Masaharu Takahashi, to his co-worker, Mr. Honma, and—of course—to my college, Mr. Kamogawa.

In this paper I only discuss birds new to Tsushima or birds where we were able to add something to our present knowledge. In the four days we could see all 47 species in all, which, compared with Kansai-area, is very much. The best and most up-to-date paper about the birds of Tsushima certainly is that of Yamaguchi & Kamogawa, of which the first two parts have been published so far. I take this paper as basic reference.

Observations

1.-3. Crows. Three species are wintering on Tsushima. *C. macrorhynchos* was surprisingly the most common species (overall figure 297 birds counted), followed by *C. frugilegus* (283 birds observed). *C. corone* counted 69 birds, they kept singly or in pairs, but a flock of 50 once seen suggests that Tsushima is reached also by migrating birds of this species.—*Macrorhynchos* appeared in single pairs

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1. C. frugilegus only occurred in flocks.
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4. Eophona migratoria. One flock of 7 pairs at Saka on 7th.
5. Emberiza cioides was the most common bunting (69 birds counted) and was observed singly, or in small flocks of up to 12 birds. Many were paired, but we observed also small flocks of only male or female birds.
6. Emberiza elegans was a common bunting, too (46 birds), and was observed in smaller flocks of up to 10 birds, both sexes mixed.
7. Motacilla alba lugens. 3 single birds and twice a pair seen. Scarce.
8. Parus atricapillus. One bird seen at Kin on 7th, together with one Parus varius.
9. Parus ater. On the 8th, climbing the mountain west of Isuhara on the way up from Kyozuka: three Coal Tits in a leaveless tree, and one hour later a flock of 20 at the mountain path.
10. Phoenicurus auroreus. We saw 14 single birds all over Tsushima. Of those, which we could sex, 8 were males and 4 females.
11. Prunella montanella badia. We were fortunate in discovering for the first time this rare Chinese winter-guest on Tsushima. When we had stepped out of the taxi on 6th morning at Komoda, just in front of the seaside shrine, I met a party of 4 Emberiza cioides and with them a strange bird in the reeds and bushes along a rivulet.

I always had made it a habit to look carefully on every group or party of Meadow-Buntings and was rewarded twice, here now on Tsushima and again on 27th of March 1973 at Hinode on Shiretoko Peninsula, when I met a party of 2 Meadow-Buntings together with a brilliantly coloured male of Emberiza leucocephalos. I am convinced that a careful study of Meadow-Bunting parties will bring a lot of surprises also in the future. But back to our observation on Tsushima on the 6th of January. The party fled towards the bushes and small coniferous trees in front of the shrine. The strange bird shortly posed in one of the free standing bushes and then followed the Meadow-Buntings into the line of small pine-trees in front of the concrete shorewall. Here now the 4 and a female Meadow-Buntings and two Chinese Mountain-Hedge-Sparrows were searching for food on the ground under the pine-trees. At this moment, Mr. Kamogawa joined and could see the birds clearly. But the party, already disturbed by two ornithologists, did not hold and entered the thicker bushes of the shrine, disappearing finally beyond the shrine into a small forest of young pine-tree, where many other Meadow-Buntings (of both sexes) were present. We had to decide whether to observe carefully the strange birds we saw or to concentrate on making a picture. The time was too short to do both. There was no alternative as to watch these birds carefully. Both Hedge-Sparrows were equally in colour, most distinctive was the light grey patch behind the chocolate-brown ear. Wonderfully coloured in a dark golden yellow the
superciliar band and the throat and breast. There was no doubt that we had met two Prunella montanella hadia at the western coast of Tsushima. We had the field-guide of Kobayashi in hand, too. According to Gore & Won this species is a common winter visitor from November onwards in South Korea. The distance between Korea and Tsushima is negligible. Perhaps this species comes more often to Tsushima than we know.

12. Trogldytes troglodytes. Near the peak of the mountain just west of Izuhara, which I climbed on 8th, I met on an open cutting 1 ex., consistently warning.

13. Pandion haliaetus. On the neighboring island of Iki one Osprey at the coast on 5th.

14. Egretta garzetta. 1 single bird at Kashihama fjord on 6th. First sure observation for this time of the year. Ardea cinerea Demigretta sacra were observed several times.

15. Podiceps griseigena. Keeps to the coastal waters. We saw twice 2 birds in winter plumage.

16. Mergus serrator. Also seen at coastal waters. Once two females and once a drake.

17. Gavia arctica. 1 seen at Kin on 7th on the ocean.

18. Gallinago species. One big snipe flew off in zigzag-flight but silent at a water edge out of man’s high reed. It was not G. hardwickii or G. gallinago.

19. Larus crassirostris. The most common gull along the coasts of Tsushima. We saw a total of 3800 birds, the biggest gatherings were at Kin bay with 1600 ex., and 1000 at Izumi. The percentage of young birds was up to 9%. (Exactly counted were a total of 760 ad : 65 juv. at several places=8% juv.).

20. Larus schistisagus. Scarce at Tsushima (total figure: 72 birds), but just half an hour away by ferry-boat towards Iki on the 8th afternoon, hundreds of this species gathered on the surface of the sea. Very few young birds among them and just 2 L. crassirostris. They certainly live from the remains of the thriving Kalmar-fishing here. Of the 72 birds seen at Tsushima, 60 were ad., 11 young birds in brown plumage and just one in its 4th winter plumage.

21. Larus ridibundus. 1 ad. in winter plumage at Isuhara harbour on 8th. First observation for this time of the year.

**Literature**

