



Top: Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*); Bottom: Red-necked Phalarope (*Lobipes labatus*). Photographed by S. Takano (See- Bird Watching in Japan, by Frank H. Bell, pg. 108)

BIRD WATCHING IN JAPAN  
By Frank H. Bell

The "Land of the Rising Sun" has a relatively great appeal to the tourist, and even though it is a long distance from the main tourist-supplying areas of the world - the United States and Europe, it still receives many tourists from these areas. Since a small percentage of these must have some interest in birds, it is hoped that the passing on of some of my knowledge gained on this subject in 4 years of residence in Japan will be of help to amateur ornithologists going there. For nearly 3 years I was a member of the Ornithological Society of Japan, and of the "Tokyo Bird Watching Group". Business trips and family, however, kept me from going on most of the weekly (Sunday) and holiday field trips of the friendly Tokyo group. However, it is felt that a fairly good appreciation was obtained of the bird population in many areas of Japan, especially the Tokyo region, through local trips made alone, through visits at all times of the year to the Lake Yamanaka area, where we had a vacation house at an altitude of 3500 feet on the slopes of Mt. Fuji for 2½ years, and through business trips to nearly every corner of Japan, on which there was an occasional opportunity to go on an early morning walk or spend a weekend at an interesting spot.

For the bird enthusiast going to Japan, the only book now available in English - Dr. Yamashina's excellent book "Birds of Japan" is a must, and can be found in the major hotel bookshops. Its only shortcoming is that it illustrates in color only 168 of the some 430 species which have been recorded in Japan. At the end of the book there is a checklist of Japanese birds, with a notation of their abundance. This is of great assistance as many of those not illustrated are found in European guides. Dr. Yamashina is preparing a new edition with many more plates. Of course, there are several books in Japanese on birds. The best for identification purposes is one by K. Kobayashi, since every species found in Japan is illustrated in color. It is Volume 6 of an encyclopedic series on natural history.

The birds of Japan are generally not so "exotic" for Americans, especially for those who have been to Europe, since Japan is in the "Arctic" region, although it is "Palaeartic" like Europe, and not Nearctic as is the United States. The checklist of Dr. Yamashina's book contains 424 species. I have compared this with other lists, and, excluding a possible error or two, found that 236 of the 424 birds are in "A Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe", by Peterson et al, 140 are in Peterson's "Guide to the Western Birds", and 75 in Poole's "Pennsylvania Birds" (accidentals in these books excluded). A representative, however, of a few families usually associated with tropical areas in the Old World are also found in Japan, such as the White-eye, the Brown-eared Bulbul, and the Ashy Minivet. The first two are common.

It was my impression that Japan is not "full" of birds, either in-

dividuals or species, in any one locality, when compared with some areas I have visited, such as the eastern part of the United States, many places in South America and India. In my experience it can be compared to Europe in both species and individuals. The approximate number of species seen by the Tokyo Birdwatching Group on a bird walk to some typical spots is as follows:

Meiji Shrine Park-Tokyo -from about 15 in summer to 25 in winter.  
Niihama-Shinhama (head of Tokyo Bay) 40 to 50 in spring and fall  
(mostly shore and water birds)  
Yamanaka Lake (near Mt. Fuji)- 35 on a December 28th trip, including 7 ducks.

These are group counts, so an individual would see fewer species. Since the Japanese groups always take public transportation and then generally walk for many hours from one spot, they do not cover the various habitats Americans might, on a similar days outing. In the winter only, I could get 25 species in Tokyo by going to both the Imperial Palace Moat and Meiji Shrine Park. A spring weekend at Lake Yamanaka would give about 35 species (no ducks), and a winter weekend about 25 (no ducks included).

Specific Bird Watching Areas. Bird watching would probably start in Tokyo, since most visitors to Japan arrive at the Tokyo airport. Especially in winter, it is not such a bad place at that, in spite of the fact that it is the world's largest city. The Grey Starling, Jungle Crow, Brown-eared Bulbul (mostly in winter only), Great Tit, and of course the Tree Sparrow are likely to be seen anywhere there is a park or a few trees, and an occasional flock of pretty Blue Magpies or an individual Black Kite sailing over the city are not uncommon sights. The Palace Moat on the southwest side is full of wild ducks in winter, mostly Spot-billed ducks and Widgeons. Also, there can be a few Mallards, Shovelers, Little Grebes and the beautiful Mandarin ducks. A large flock of Black-headed gulls is often around.

The best overall place for birds in Tokyo is the large, wooded park surrounding the Meiji Shrine. Here the choice area is the Inner Garden (small admission charge). This is perhaps the surest spot in all Japan for seeing the pretty Varied Tit. In winter the pond has dozens of wild ducks - Pintail, Teal, Mallard, Spot-bill and generally a few wild Mandarins around the edges. Permanent residents in the park include the Jay, Blue Magpie, Chinese Greenfinch, Meadow Bunting, White-eye and Eastern Turtle Dove. Often heard is the Bamboo Partridge with its loud, long series of 3-syllable notes. The park also has wild ring-less "Ring-necked" Pheasants (the Japanese variety). In the winter one often gets a glimpse of a Black-faced Bunting and a Dusky Thrush. In the fall the Bull-headed Shrike becomes very vocal, and permits the viewing of a not uncommon species which is otherwise often overlooked.

Finally, Ueno Park in Tokyo has hundreds of wild wintering ducks,

including most of those mentioned above, but since it has a permanent population of semi-domesticated ducks (and cormorants and egrets) in the lake next to the zoo, it is not so attractive to the wild bird watcher, even though it is important from the educational and conservation point of view. (Incidentally, the zoo itself has a good collection of several groups of birds, such as birds of prey, penguins, etc.)

The rice and lotus fields, and the beaches at the head of Tokyo Bay, near the border of Chiba Prefecture and near the village of Urayasu (now practically contiguous with Tokyo), used to be excellent for water and migratory shorebirds, but in the four years I was in Japan it was rapidly being taken over by enormous reclaimed areas for factories. The local conservationists have however, managed to save a small waterfront area, and it still contains the private Imperial Household Shinhama Waterfowl Preserve. It is difficult to know where to go in this area, so a guide is recommended. Adventurous souls can now take a new subway line to Urayasu, walk south to the bay, then east past the Imperial Preserve to a paved road, and then back inland to the next subway (elevated) stop beyond Urayasu. The walk would be several kilometers, but in spring and fall one should still see 30-35 species, with the following nearly always present in the uncompleted fills near the shore, and the fields behind: Wood, Common, Rufous-necked, and Terek Sandpipers, Wandering Tattler, Turnstone, Godwits (2 spp. possible), Greenshank, Curlews (3 spp. not uncommon), Dunlin, Mongolian, Kentish, Little Ringed, Black-bellied and Golden Plovers, "white" egrets (3 spp. generally around except in winter), etc. Worthwhile if you are a good hiker is to continue eastward to the Edogawa Canal (river), and then walk up the river to a paved road where a taxi can be found. This last part is the most pleasant since it is the last to be industrialized, and the mudflats of this river usually yield something, the swampy fields behind are full of Great Reed and Fan-tailed Warblers in late spring.

The summer population of birds, both species and numbers, is low in the coastal areas and southern Japan. One must go to the mountains to hear the "spring chorus". There are two well known areas of this type in Japan - one around the base of Mt. Fuji at an elevation of circa 3500 feet, and the other near Karuizawa, on the rail line to Nagono. At the former, the Lake Tamanaka area is well known for birds - and affords nice views of the famous mountain. It is recommended that one stays at the attractive, old Fuji-view Hotel on Lake Kawaguchi, and go by car or taxi to the golf course a mile west of Lake Yamanaka. Leisurely walks along the wooded roads of the surrounding vacation-house area at any time of the year are rewarding and one should see the very common Brown Thrush, whose actions and song remind one of the American Robin, three Tits - Great, Coal and Long-tailed, Meadow and Black-faced Bunting, Japanese Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and the Indian Tree Pipit. The nice Japanese Grosbeak is not rare, but is generally located by means of its strong call note. In the spring and summer add the Japanese Bush Warbler, difficult to observe, but almost always singing somewhere.

For my money it is one of the world's best singers. It has only two songs, so is lacking in repertoire compared to the Wood Thrush and the Nightingale, but they are so different - not generally alternated but sung at different times - that one thinks at first that they are two different birds. The clearness of the notes is exceptional. Also in the spring, the following can be seen if you have a song to lead you: Grey Thrush, Blue Robin, the pretty Narcissus Flycatcher, Brown Flycatcher, Crowned Willow Warbler, the noisy Little Cuckoo and the unmistakable Common Cuckoo. In the village of Yamanaka there are many Swallows (Barn or House, as you like), and always a few Grey Wagtails on the rooftops. If you go up Mt. Fuji on the excellent toll road the monotonous notes of the Arctic Willow Warbler is the most commonly heard song. Also, near the end of the road at about 7000 feet you may see a Nutcracker or a Japanese Accentor near the buildings, or hear a Siberian Bluetail singing near the tree line.

Dr. Yamashina's book lists many special places to see birds in Japan, such as islands off Hokkaido for sea-birds, the (winter) Japanese Crane Sanctuary in Hokkaido, the places to see wintering swans (2 species), the summer cormorant fishing "attraction" near Nagoya, etc. I saw a few, and one I highly recommend is the crane wintering area on the southern island of Kyushu, near Izumi, which is on the rail line between Kumamoto and Kagoshima. It is not easy to reach, but certainly there are few places in the world where one can be assured of seeing hundreds of two species of cranes - the Hooded and the White-naped - and the possibility of seeing a specimen of three other species. In addition to the cranes there are many ducks of a few species, spoon-bills, egrets, etc. The surrounding ponds and fields, and the nearby open sea and inlet, contain other interesting species. As usual language is a problem in such places not frequented by foreign tourists, but also as usual the Japanese are very friendly and helpful. To make the trip even more pleasant touristically, it is suggested that one take the train to Minamata, and then a taxi to the nearby pretty little seaside hot spring of Yunoku. Plan on 2 or 3 nights at one of the Japanese-style inns, as the area is pleasant and good for bird walks. Your inn can arrange for a taxi to the crane area some 15 miles away, where at one spot a building with telescopes has been set up. The cranes are there from late November to early March.

Last but not least is the Yamashina Institute for Ornithology, 49 Nampaidai-machi, Shibuyu-ku, Tokyo. However, since it has very few specimens on display, it is primarily for study. Professionals should contact Dr. Yamashina, Dr. Kuroda, Mr. Yoshii, or Mr. Hasuo, and serious amateurs will find the last two gentlemen helpful - if they are in town, and have time in their busy schedules. Also sometimes at the Institute, or at least he can be contacted through it, is Mr. Takano, a well known amateur and excellent field man. Since the institute is about as hard to find as some birds in Meiji Shrine Park, the telephone is the best

first contact. The number is 461-4259.

Farm. Carbonell 18-20, 2a, Barcelona 17, Spain.

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Dr. Frank H. Bell is a brother of Ralph K Bell, who writes our "Bird Bander's Diary".

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