

Birdwatching on Hegura-jima, 8-11 May 2012

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We first heard of Hegura island as a birdwatcher's paradise from the papers published by David Cooper and Brenda Kay in *Birding World* 22/12 (2009) and 23/8 (2010). We thereafter read more on this island from various web sites, including David and Brenda's site <http://hegura.blogspot.fr>. However, considering that Hegura is far out at sea (c.50 km from the mainland), its 80 inhabitants hardly speak a word of English, there is no shop and the only accommodation is 100 % Japanese style, there were a lot of parameters meaning that one can hardly jump from an international flight directly to Hegura. Back from our third stay in Japan in September-October 2011 (typhoon experience on Sado island, where we saw seven wild, released, Toki or Japanese Crested Ibises *Nipponia nippon*), we felt confident enough travelling in Japan and were ready to include a trip to Hegura to our May 2012 fourth visit to the country. Contact with David and Brenda greatly helped organizing our stay; they kindly provided a lot of usefull information and recommended us to Rob Edmunds who booked for us in at one of the two Hegura's *minshuku* (Japanese accommodation, mainly dormitories).

Hegura is a flat island (up to 14m asl), about 2 km long and 500m wide, with a rich vegetation. On the NW shore (toward the Japan Sea) the seabord vegetation is dense but quite low, while the inland luxurious vegetation, primarily consisting in bamboo stands and planted pine trees, offers ample room for the birds to hide. The vegetated area can be searched from a network of concrete paths. In the village lying on the protected SE shore, birds accommodate with limited green areas and small gardens, and many interesting birds can be found over a wide wasteland situated at the eastern side of the harbour. The shoreline is 100% rocky, and the Sea of Japan has almost unexistant tides (a few tens of centimetres), there is little room for waders: this might be the main limitation to the island's birding interest.

We were not alone on Hegura. At migration time, Japanese birdwatchers and bird photographers are used to coming to the island, often booking one year in advance. They usually stay for two-three days, and every boat to and from the island mostly carries birders. At first glance, Japanese birders obviously differ from western ones by their equipement: few of them carry telescopes, most of them carry a camera often fitted with an impressively costly telelens. Even those with a telescope usually have a camera fitted on it. During our four day stay, we met only one telescope-equipped birder who was not primarily there for bird photography. This being, although they look like mere bird photographers, they can prove to be very sharp-eyed birders, identifying distant rare birds with their naked eye.

We travelled to Hegura under fine settled weather in the morning of 8 May, two days after a front went across the area. The island was full of warblers and flycatchers, some species in impressive numbers. Weather was still good on 9 May, allowing an obvious daylight migration of raptors and passerine birds. The situation changed markedly that evening when Siberian cold air (10°C !) suddenly arrived over most of Japan. Weather remained as cold until the end of our stay, with frequent mist and occasional showers on 10 May, then improving although still cold and wet on 11; better weather allowed the arrival of many species in small number on this last day of our stay on Hegura.

Hereafter is our report of the number of birds seen by us, or in a few cases reported to us, from 8 to 11 May 2012. When a species was seen (almost) daily in variable numbers, the number for each day is presented as N/N/N/N where the first number is for 8 May, the second for 9 May, and so on.

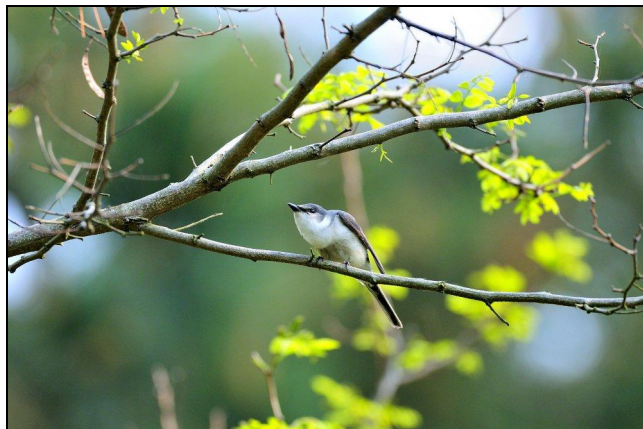
Species sequence and nomenclature follow Brazil (2009, *Birds of East Asia*). Many thanks to Matsumura Katsuki and Takai Sigemi for kindly allowing us to reproduce photos they took in Hegura during our stay on the island, and to Ms Kaoli Ono-Drouin for her assistance in translation.



Hegura jima, the island where women dive for seaweeds, and Japanese bird photographers gather during both spring and autumn migration, with particular interest in the artificial fresh water pond, and celebrate. Good food at Tsuki *minshuku*. May 2012. Photos Pierre Yésou.

1. Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*. One male, 9-11 May. A shy bird.
2. Eastern Spot-Billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*. A pair at sea on 8 May near the bird islands half way to Hegura. One male at Hegura SW shore, 10-11 May.
3. Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*. On 8 May c.50 near the outer jetty of Wajima harbour, then only 11 all along the way to Hegura. None seen from the island itself (admittedly, little seawatching was carried out since there was obviously no movement at sea). Over 300 all along the way back to Wajima on 11 May.
4. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*. One 8-10 May, the only bird seen on the main pool.
5. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. 2/4/3/1.
6. Great white Egret *Casmoderius albus*. 2/1/1/2.
7. Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*. 1/4/4/2.
8. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*. One, 9-10 May.
9. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. One immature seen close enough on 11 May.
10. Temminck's Cormorant *P. capillatus*. 22/6/5/7.
11. Pelagic Cormorant *P. pelagicus*. 0/1/3/1.
12. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*. One adult, 8-10 May (not *F. p. calidus*, probably *F. p. japonensis*).
13. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*. One flew over on 9 May, coming from SW.
14. Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*. 1/2/1/1.
15. Eastern Marsh Harrier *circus spilonotus*. A female flew over on 9 May, coming from SW.
16. Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*. Four (1 m, 3 f) flying over on 9 May, coming from West. One male on 10 May.
17. Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*. One, 11 May.
18. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*. One on 11 May, flying twice around the wasteland as if wanting to land, then disappearing over the island.
19. Grey-tailed Tattler *T. brevipes*. Two, 9-10 May.
20. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*. 2/2/1/1.
21. Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*. One, 10 May.
22. Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. On 8 May, 20+45 at sea a few minutes before reaching Hegura. No less than 10 groups totaling over 1500 birds on the way back on 11 May, including one large group conservatively estimated at a minimum of 1000 individuals (perhaps twice that number), the other groups each were of 35, 25, 30, 250, 30, 50, 70, 35 and 5 birds.
23. Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*. Common both at sea (hundreds between Wajima and Hegura, not counting the numerous pairs breeding on the islands mid-way) and around Hegura). No detailed count on the island.

24. Vega Gull *L. vegae*. Four (3 ad., one 2CY) on 11 May, flying north.
25. Slaty-backed Gull *L. schistisagus*. Two (one 2CY, one 3CY) on 10 May, one 2CY on 11 May, all flying north.
26. Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*. On 8 May, 2 at sea not far from the seabird islands mid-way from Wajima to Hegura.
27. Black Wood Pigeon *Columba janthina*. One perched, briefly seen before it disappeared, early morning of 10 May.
28. Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*. 2/5/9/10. Obvious some passage / arrival on the second part of our stay.
29. Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus*. Two singing males, 8 May, one escaping a Peregrine's attack.
30. Dollardbird *Eurystomus orientalis*. One, 11 May. The last species seen during our stay. Arrived from SW over the harbour, briefly landed at the top of the highest pine tree at the village edge, just to dive into the island's wood.
31. Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus*. 1/3/0/5. Possibly one very mobile group staying on the island for some days.



Female Ashy Minivet, Hegura, May 2012. Photo Matsumura Katsuki

32. Bull-headed Shrike *Lanius bucephalus*. One male, 8-9 May.
33. Japanese Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone atrocaudata*. One female, 9 May.
34. Rook *Corvus frugilegus*. One, 8-11 May.
35. Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*. One, 8-11 May.
36. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. 3/14/2/0.
37. Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*. Two, 9 May.
38. Greater Short-toed Lark *Calendrella brachydactyla*. Three, 10 May.
39. Brown-eared Bulbul *Microscelis amaurotis*. 3/2/0/0, including a singing male on 8 May.
40. Japanese Bush-Warbler *Cettia diphone*. Over 20 singers daily, occasionally showing well.

41. Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*. One, 11 May.
42. Black-browed reed Warbler *A. bistrigiceps*. One, 11 May.
43. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*. One, 9 May, at the wood edge near the lighthouse.
44. Arctic Warbler *P. borealis* complex, possibly Japanese Leaf Warbler *P. xanthodryas*. Although Alström *et al.* (2011, The Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* – three anciently separated cryptic species revealed. *Ibis* 153: 395-410) have proposed to split the species, only vocalizations (which were not heard) presently allow a straight species identification. Seen daily, 8-10 May, three or four different individuals: two birds supposed to be either *P. b. kennicotti* or *P. xanthodryas* from the yellowish wash on their underparts, one of them clearly greener with a wider wingbar (suggesting *P. xanthodryas*); two contacts (same individual?) with a bird showing olive brown upperparts and almost no yellow beneath (more indicative of *P. borealis*).
45. Sakhalin Leaf Warbler *P. borealoides*. >6/1/2/1.
46. Eastern Crowned Warbler *P. coronatus*. Hundreds/a few tens/9/4. A front went across the Japan Sea two days before our arrival, possibly leading to this fall of warblers and flycatchers (see Brown and Narcissus Flycatchers below).
47. Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus*. One on 11 May.
48. Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Sturnus philippensis*. 3/1/10/7. This sought after species showed well only on the last day (including one 2CY male).
49. Red-billed (=Silky) Starling *S. sericeus*. One pair, 8 May.
50. White-cheeked Starling *S. cineraceus*. Two, 10-11 May.
51. Siberian Thrush *Zoothera sibirica davisoni*. One male, early morning of 9 May.
52. White's Thrush *Z. dauma*. One on 8 May, a flying bird: still have to see the species well on the ground!
53. Grey-backed Thrush *Turdus hortulorum*. Six on 9 May, arriving from W over the sea; a male briefly landed, a female was photographed later the same day. One female, early morning 10 May.



Male Eyebrowed Thrush and female Grey-backed Thrush, Hegura, May 2012.
Photos Takai Sigemi (left) and Matsumura Katsuki

54. Eyebrowed Thrush *T. obscurus*. One male, 11 May.
55. Brown-headed Thrush *T. chrysolaus*. One male, 10 May.
56. Dusky Thrush *T. eunomus*. 3/6/7/18. Mostly in open habitats, including rocky shore; obvious arrival on the last day, with a group of 8 on the island southwesternmost rocks.
57. Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*. One male, 8-9 May.
58. Siberian Blue Robin *L. cyane*. Three, 8 May (ad. male, 2CY male, female). The only species seen only from the hide at the artificial fresh water pond.
59. Red-flanked Bluetail *L. cyanura*. One female, 10-11 May (information for the first date given by a Japanese birder when we told him about our own observation).
60. Swinhoe's (Red-tailed) Robin *L. sibilans*. One on 8 May (seen on photograph only!), two different ones on 9 and 10 May.



Swinhoe's Robin, Hegura, May 2012.
Photos Takai Sigemi (left) and Matsumura Katsuki

61. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*. One female, 9 May.
- (White-throated Rock Thrush *Monticola gularis*. One male photographed on 8 May, we have been informed the next day).
62. Grey-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*. 0/1/1/1. Probably two different birds.
63. Dark-sided (Siberian) Flycatcher *M. sibirica*. >5/5/0/2.
64. (Asian) Brown Flycatcher *M. daurica*. >20/>30/8/9.
65. Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissima*. Over 50/tens/11/13.
66. Mugimaki Flycatcher *F. mugimaki*. 5/6/3/6. Mostly females and 2CY males, also two stunning adult males.



Blue-and-white and Mugimaki Flycatchers (males), Hegura, May 2012.
Photos Matsumura Katsuki (left) and Takai Sigemi

67. Taiga Flycatcher *F. albicilla*. Two (m, f) on 9 May, one male on 11 May at the very same seaweed deposit on SW shore.

68. Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*. 5/4/2/1, mostly ad and 2CY males but two females on 9 May.

69. Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*. 1/4/0/1.

70. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*. >15/>15/15/12. Most were *M. a. lugens*, including (mostly?) local breeders, but also *M. a. ocularis* (one on 9 May and two on 10-11) and *M. a. leucopsis* (one male, 11 May).



Siberian White Wagtail *M. a. ocularis*, Hegura, May 2012. Photo Matsumura Katsuki

71. Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*. One each day, three different birds.

72. Tree Pipit *A. trivialis*. One, 9 May.

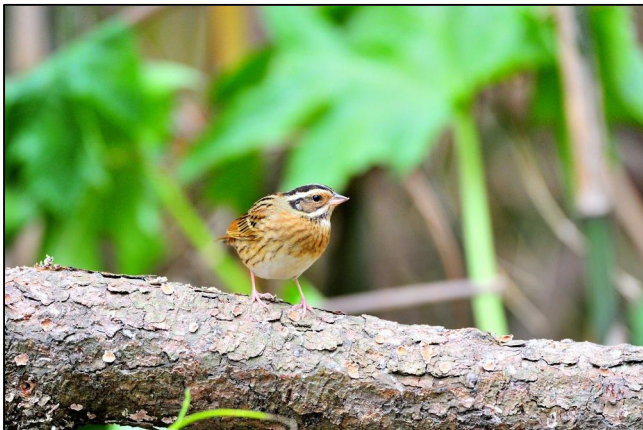
73. Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*. Five, 10 May, then four, 11 May (including 3 or 4 from the previous day).

74. Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens japonicus*. One, western shore, 9 May.

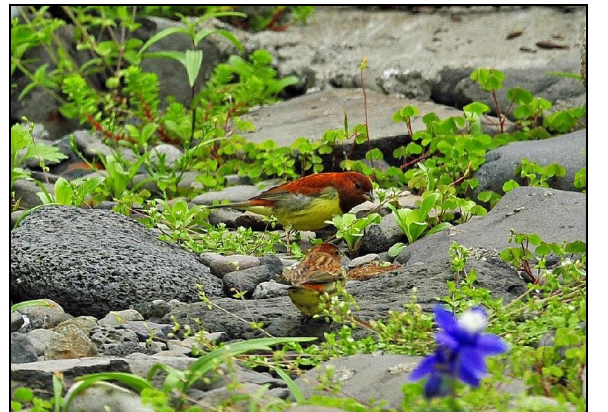
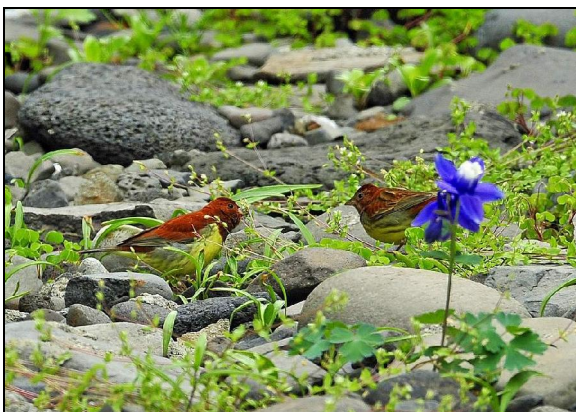
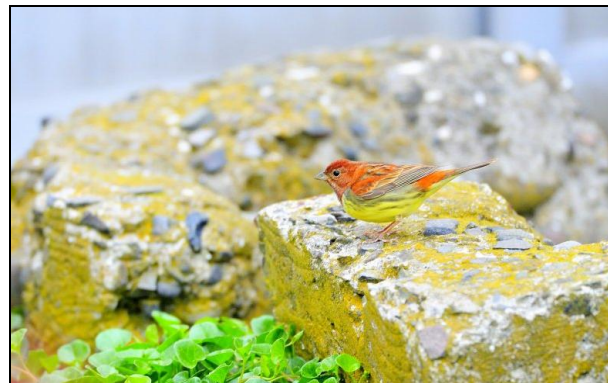
75. Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*. One female, 8 and 10 May, then at least 26 birds on 11 May.

76. Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*. At least 40 daily, probably including local breeders.

77. Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*. Two, 10-11 May.
78. Meadow Bunting *Emberiza cioides*. One male, 10 May; one pair, 11 May
79. Chestnut-eared Bunting *E. fucata*. One pair, 10-11 May.
80. Little Bunting *E. pusilla*. Two, 10-11 May.
81. Yellow-browed Bunting *E. chrysophrys*. One or two males. One shown to us on photograph on 10 May had been found near the school, and we searched for it without success (however, the search led to the observation of an Eye-browed Thrush and the discovery of a very co-operative, although tired, Swinhoe's Robin). Was it the same male that showed nicely to us for a short time on 11 May near the Chestnut Buntings we discovered at the western end of the harbour?
82. Rustic Bunting *E. rustica*. One male, 10 May; three (1m, 2f), 11 May.
83. Chestnut Bunting *E. rutila*. One pair, 10 May ; three (ad male, 2CY male, female), 11 May, this discovery was enjoyed by many photographers.
84. Japanese Yellow Bunting *E. sulphurata*. 0/>>4/6/6. Possibly missed on 8 May, as this group stayed on the wasteland which was not searched properly on our first day.
85. Black-faced Bunting *E. spodocephala*. 2/4/10/8. Mostly *E. s. personata* (local breeders – including up to four singers; also migrants?) but two *E. s. spodocephala* (m, f) seen separately on 10 May.
86. Grey Bunting *E. variabilis*. 1/1/1/0: three different birds (two 2CY males, 1 female).
87. (Common) Reed Bunting *E. schoeniclus*. Two (m, f, not in pair), 8 May.
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Birds we missed: Tristram's Bunting *Emberiza tristrami* and Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus* (both females), Hegura, May 2012. Photos Matsumura Katsuki.



Chestnut Buntings, Hegura, May 2012.
Photos Takai Sigemi (two upper left) and
Matsumura Katsuki.

