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The Birding Year 2002

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The Birding Year 2002

Introduction

2002 again saw a significant increase in birding activity nationwide, with a growing number of domestic birders active at several key sites (e.g. Seosan, Gangneung, Haenam, Gumi), and a record number of foreign birders visiting both in spring and winter, with teams from Finland, Ireland, the US, the Netherlands, Belgium and the UK.

The increased number of observations and data flow has helped improve understanding of several species’ status and added at least 9 new species to the Korean (unofficial) checklist, opening with Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei* in January, and closing with Great Black-headed (or Pallas’s) Gull *Larus ichthyaeatus* in Seoul in December. The following aims to provide a brief review of some of these highlights.

(NB: Listing here does not imply any ownership of such records; nor is it meant to undermine the very good work being performed by the already established Korean ornithological body. In respect of the existing system, by which researchers are often not able to open up their data until it has been published in a formal journal, several significant records by local ornithologists have been omitted, pending their publication).

If you know of better information or "good" records not included here (e.g. especially those species of special conservation concern or species that are not listed in Lee, Koo & Park [2000], please mail us at wbkenglish@aol.com. We will then both add them to the review and pass them on to the relevant ornithological authorities. (Last update to this article made on 08 January 2003.)

Many thanks to the many contributors who sent us records and images during the year, and best of birding for 2003!

January

On the 1st 110 *Russet Sparrow* *Passer rutilans* were found wintering inland near Gyeongju. On the 2nd 5 *Scaly-sided Merganser* *Mergus squamatus* were in the Andong region (BF). On the 4th at Yeongam Lake in Haenam 200 000 *Baikal Teal* *Anas formosa* (LJS website), while in the Cheorwon Basin there were 140 *Red-crowned Crane* *Grus japonensis*, 1 *Steller’s Sea Eagle* *Haliaeetus pelagicus* and 1 *Steppe Eagle* *Aquila nipalensis* (probably less than 5 previous records). An extremely late or over-wintering *Yellow Bittern* *Ixobrychus sinensis* was found on Ganghwa on the 5th (all BF).

On the 7th, single *Oriental White Stork* *Ciconia boyciana*, *Glaucous-winged Gull* *Larus glaucescens* and *Upland Buzzard* *Buteo hemilasius* were at the Nakdong; on the 9th a *Slender-billed Gull* *Larus genei*, the first of 2002’s new species, was found at Galsa, Gwangyang; it remained until at least the 11th.
A Dusky Warbler Phylloscopus fuscatus at Posong was probably the first January record of the species. On 17th, 4 Red-crowned Cranes were found wintering again in Saemangeum, as well as a Little Owl Athene noctua, the first South Korean record for perhaps a decade (still present one week later: KJM). On 19th, 2 Lesser White-fronted Geese Anser erythropus were (still) at the Geum. (All NM & KSK)

February

Korea's first Ferruginous Duck Aythya nyroca was found at Joonam on the 2nd: a male, it kept company with a female Baer's Pochard A. baeri, and was last seen on the 11th. (NM, KSK,& CM)

Also at Joonam on 2nd, 1 Lesser White-fronted Goose still present (with 2 there most of month), and 1 Steller's Sea Eagle still on the Nakdong estuary (NM & KSK): 4 had been recorded in late December. Both of these species were also present at Cheonsu Bay, along with both Japanese Murrelet Synthliboramphus wumizusume and Spectacled Guillemot Cepphus carbo claimed at Guryongpo: the former is very rare away from the southwest, the latter with few recent records nationwide. In addition, a juvenile Saker Falcon Falco cherrug was observed at Haenam (all PK, Alula 3/2002).

March

(Birds Korea website opened in March, and no noteworthy records received: if any observers have records for March please send to us and we will update accordingly.)

April

Up to 3 Brown Thrush Turdus chrysolaus at Daejongdae on the 12th (NM, KSK, MWM) constituted probably the first mainland record: 3 females were also present here on 16th along with at least 106 Pale Thrush T. pallidus, an exceptional concentration (NM). The same site also held 3 Japanese Robin Erithacus akahige (probably the second mainland records, the other being in Busan in spring 2000) on the 12th and 17th (NM & KSK).

On 13th, one Greater Short-toed Lark Calendrella brachydactyla and a male Grey Thrush T. cardis at Guryongpo, the latter also possibly the first mainland record (NM & MWM). A Pectoral Sandpiper Calidris melanotos was at Song-do on the 14th, along with an exceptionally late Siberian Accentor Prunella montanella (NM & MWM)

On a visit to Eocheong Island, 2 Himalayan Swiftlet Collocalia brevirostris (the 2nd record for Korea), a Japanese Robin, 3 Grey Thrush, 3 Brown Thrush, a Silky (or Red-billed) Starling Sturnus sericercus, and two "Chinese" Blackbird Turdus (merula) mandarinus (perhaps Korea's 6th record) were found on the 18th.

On the 19th a singing male Red-throated Thrush Turdus ruficollis ruficollis, and a Common Rosefinch Carpodacus erythrinus (an early record of a supposedly rare migrant) were found. On the 22nd one and on 23rd 6 Himalayan Swiftlets claimed. Also a male Black-throated Thrush T. r. atrogularis.

On the 29th, again on Eocheong Do, Korea's first Crag Martin Ptyonoprogne rupestris was picked up several times during the day by different birders, as well as an estimated 2000+ Olive-backed Pipit Anthus hodgsoni.

On the 30th, amongst 122 species, Korea's first Ferruginous Flycatcher Muscicapa ferruginea was seen (though 2 unidentified flycatchers seen on 28th by TL&JD were later considered also to be this species), as well as a
female Citrine Wagtail Motacilla citreola (perhaps Korea's sixth record) found by NL, a Eurasian Tree Pipit Anthus trivialis (about the fourth for Korea), at least 3,000 Olive-backed Pipits, and 1 or more Hume's Leaf Warblers Phylloscopus humei (possibly 3rd for Korea), whilst on Jeju Island there were 50-60 Red-cheeked Starlings Sturnus philippensis - believed a new national high count (MG).

May

Between the 1st and the 9th on Gageo Do there were another two Eurasian Tree Pipit, male Pied Harrier Circus melanoleucos, 2 Blyth’s Pipits Anthus godlewskii, another Citrine Wagtail, and an adult male White-shouldered Starling Sturnus sinensis (about the third for Korea) (all PJY).

On Eocheong Do, 300 Ashy Minivets Pericrocotus divaricatus on the 1st was presumed a new Korean high count for recent years, as was 6 Common Rosefinch on the 7th. A count of 230 Eye-browed Thrush Turdus obscurus in one flock on the 6th was also exceptional, as were 174 Mugimaki Flycatchers Ficedula mugimaki there on the 7th, and ca 305 White-throated Needletailed Swifts Hirundapus caudacutus on the 8th.

On the 3rd, 1 Little Stint Calidris minuta and three Asian Dowitcher Limnodromus semipalmatus were at Dongjin (NM et al.), while on 4th a Greater Short-toed Lark and Korea’s third Long-billed Dowitcher Limnodromus scolopaceus, were both at Seosan (KHT), along with two extremely late Swan Goose Anser cygnoides.

On the 10th, a summer-plumaged gull seen by TA at the Geum estuary appeared to be either an extremely late Relict Gull Larus relictus or more probably a Brown-headed Gull Larus brunnicephalus, a species not yet reliably claimed in Korea.

At the Dongjin River, Saemangeum, on the 13th highlights included 6 Black-faced Spoonbill Platalea minor, another Pectoral Sandpiper, a second Little Stint and a Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybridus (considered “rare” in Korea, but increasingly recorded and obviously significantly overlooked). (NM, KSK, MWM)

On the 14th Korea’s first Long-tailed Skua Stercorarius longicaudus (a near full-tailed 3 CY or subadult) was seen from the ferry from Daehuksan Island. (NM)

Back on Eocheong Do, records included at least one Chestnut-flanked White-eye Zosterops erythopleurus (on the 20th), a late Brown Thrush on the 21st, and Korea’s first fully documented Pomarine Skua Stercorarius pomarinus photographed from the ferry back to the mainland on the 23rd (all NM).

June

4+ Minivets heard at Goje on the south coast on 4th were considered to have been possible Ryukyu Minivet Pericrocotus tegimae (NM & KSK).

On 6th, two Sooty Shearwater Puffinus griseus seen at sea close to Busan were believed the first records for Korea (NM).

Also 5 pairs of Chinese Grey Shrike Lanius sphenocercus were found nesting in the Cheolwon Basin (DMZ)- a remarkably high count, and also the first confirmed breeding records for the country (LKS).

In addition, a pair of Grey-capped Woodpecker Dendrocopos canicapillus were observed on June 22nd in the Bukhansan National Park, Seoul. (TA)

July

On 29th, 3 White-throated Needletails Hirundapus caudacutus and especially 4 Tristram’s Bunting Emberiza tristrami, found in Odaesan National Park (JS), were strongly indicative of breeding. The Korean National Parks Association had previously announced that Tristrams Buntins as well as Pallas Leaf and Raddes Warblers Phylloscopus proregulus and P.schwarzi, along with Dusky Warblers have all been found through the summer in the Sorak Mountain area, Kangwon province (NE region), a significant extension of the previously listed summering range of all four species in to South Korea (via PJY).
August

Korea’s third documented Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* was found moribund inland near the Nakdong River on the 8th and taken into care - it died on the 10th.

On 24th, another Pomarine Skua was seen between Gunsan and Eocheong island. Surveying on Eocheong again brought 3 Common Roselinches on the 25th, and a (Himalayan) Swiftlet in the late evening, a Blyth’s Pipit *Anthus blythi* on the 26th, and 2+ Little Swift *Apus affinis* (about the sixth record for Korea) in with 160 Pacific Swifts *Apus pacifica* in the evening on the 27th.

September

On Eocheong a juvenile Rose-coloured Starling *Sturnus roseus* on the 1st was presumed a first for Korea: other records included 4 Common Roselinch.

On the 4th another Eurasian Tree Pipit was found. A juvenile White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos* on the 12th was a surprise visitor to Eocheong, but was followed by a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperthrus* on the 14th (believed to be the first Korean record for many years).

An Eurasian Tree Pipit (the second of the autumn, and the seventh record for Korea) was found on the 15th, and at least 3 Chestnut-flanked White-eyes in a large group of white-eyes on the 16th - with probably 60+ the next day!

On 18th, 37 Little Swift flew past Bongrae Mountain in Busan, followed by 4 more on 20th(KSK); there had been less than 15 individuals recorded in total prior to this. On 24th, 115 Needletailed Swifts southwest was also considered an exceptionally high count (NM).

At Yeongjong on the 25th there were 12 Black-faced Spoonbill, whilst at Saemangeum on the 26th were 3 Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* (1 juvenile and 2 adults), 4 Nordmann’s Greenshank, 2 more Black-faced Spoonbill, and a Long-billed Dowitcher (ca the 4th record for Korea).

On Eocheong there were more Chestnut-flanked White-eyes and a Hume’s Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* on the 30th.

October

On Gageo Do three Long-tailed Shrikes *Lanius scach* between the 4th and 12th were perhaps the 7,8, and 9th Korean records!

On the 7th, a huge passage included at least 45+ Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, 1500+ Grey-faced Buzzards *Butastur indicus* (Korea’s highest count), Korea’s second or third Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, a probable Red-headed/Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza bruniceps/melanocephala*, several thousand Yellow-browed Warblers *Phylloscopus inornatus*, and three White-shouldered Starlings. A presumed immature male Red-throated Thrush seen briefly on the 8th, became subject of a detailed note on this site when it showed features of hybridisation.
On Ganghwa on the 11th, 62 Black-faced Spoonbill still, 2 Amur Falcon Falco amurensis, a Chinese Nuthatch Sitta villosa (possibly the first confirmed record nationwide for several years), and a Gray’s Grasshopper Warbler Locustella fasciata: the last a species very rarely recorded in autumn (AB & MR). On the 13th 2 Eurasian Collared Doves Streptopelia decaoacto were seen on Ganghwa, perhaps just the second record in ten years. (TA & PE)

On 15th, 5 Amur Falcon at Okku (AB&MR), while on Eocheong an immature Black Stork Ciconia nigra was seen on the 17th (with perhaps the same bird on the 19th), as well as another Red-throated Thrush. On 18th, a massive movement of buntings and 10-15 Amur Falcon were also recorded there (NM).

On Guryongpo on the 19th a sea-watch recorded ca 3,000 Streaked Shearwater Calonectris leucomelas and ca 200 Pomarine Skuas an hour (apparently all adults, Pomarines had been previously recorded less than 15 times in Korean waters), and ca 10 Flesh-footed Shearwaters Puffinus carneipes (AB/MR).

On Eocheong on the 22nd a party of at least 5 Long-tailed Tits Aegithalos caudatus contained 3 northern form nominate caudatus japonicus, the first in a series of records in the west and northwest. At Gumi on the 23rd, the Hooded Crane migration reached its peak, with 2,400 passing through, joined by 6 White-naped Cranes Grus vipio(KDH).

On 24th, the last Spoonbilled Sandpiper of the autumn was at the Dongjin, while on 25th there was a Greater Spotted Eagle Aquila clanga and 15 Hooded Crane Grus monacha at Seosan (AB & MR).

On the 27th another Red-throated Thrush (a first winter female) was found, before 1-2 apparent adult male Dark-throated Thrush on the 30th. Highlight of the late autumn, though, was Korea’s first Chinese Bulbul Pycnonotus sinensis found on the 29th (remaining until at least the 31st).

November

Winter visitors and migrants included 800 Swan Geese on the Han - Imjin estuary on the 3rd (PBS), and an estimated 300,000 + Baikal Teal at Seosan on the 5th with a minimum 100,000 still there on the 8th (KHT), with also 150,000 - 200,000 at Haenam by the 7th (LJS website).

Raptors recorded in Busan included at least one Upland Buzzard Buteo hemilasius on the 5th, 2 very late immature Amur Falcon on the 13th, and 11 Cinereous Vulture Aegypius monachus and 3 Upland Buzzards (usually a very scarce winter visitor to Korea) on the 15th.

During the month 100 Cinereous Vultures were also recorded in the Haenam region (LJS website news), and up to 36 were claimed in the Nakdong estuary.

In Busan, an immature-type Red-billed or Silky Starling on the 6th (followed by 2 more on the 23rd at Guryongpo) and an apparent first winter nominate Heuglin’s Gull Larus heuglini heuglini on 14th(NM).

On 16th, a Chinese Nuthatch was found near the National Arboretum at Gwangneung, and in the same week a Glaucous-winged Gull at Shihwa-Oido, likely
very scarce in the NW of the country (both JeH). On a seawatch at Pohang on the 22nd, 3 more Pomarine Skua were seen (along with 3885 Ancient Murrelet Synthliboramphus antiquus and 3200 Pacific Diver Gavis pacifica). While on the 23rd in the same area a Pine Bunting Emberiza leucocephala and a male cioides ("Japanese") Meadow Bunting Emberiza cioides (presumed to be a previously unrecorded taxon).

At Ganghwa, also on the 23rd, there were 11 Red-crowned Crane and another (presumed) Black-throated Thrush (TA), along with 1 Hooded Crane and another Chinese Nuthatch (PH), while at Seosan, 15 Hooded Crane were recorded (HJJ), as well as an adult Lesser White-fronted Goose and a 3 CY Steller’s Sea Eagle on the 24th, presumed the same bird that has wintered here in 2001 and 2002(PH). On the 25th, also at Seosan, a juvenile and an adult Snow Goose (PH).

On the 27th, a first winter Glaucous-winged Gull was found at Hadori, Jeju, along with another exceptionally late Richard’s Pipit (one had been at Guryongpo until at least the 23rd) (PH).

On the 28th a Collared Dove was photographed in Gangneung City (CSK), while on 29th 1 female and 1 male American Wigeon Anas americana (or hybrid Eurasianx American) were at Taejongdae, along with at least 2 Grey Buntings Emberiza variabilis, while a male Scaly-sided Merganser was found in Yeongdeok (KWS). In addition, a Common Crane Grus grus was found in with 85 Hooded Crane at Suncheon Bay, while 9 Pacific Golden Plover can be considered an exceptionally late record. (PH).

On 30th, South Korea’s fifth or sixth Red-crested Pochard Netta rufina was found at Joonam: possibly the same female as that which wintered in 2001/2002 (PH).

December

On the 1st, Korea’s first documented Great Black-headed Gull Larus ichthyaeatus (a third-winter) was photographed on the Han River (TA). Although occasionally absent, it was present until at least the 21st.

Almost as rare, 3 Pigeon Guillemot Cepphus columba were seen on the west side of the Guryongpo peninsula: not listed in Lee, Koo & Park, this is probably the third record of the species in South Korea. Also present was an exceptional count of ca 1000 Black-necked Grebe Podiceps nigricollis and a single Japanese Crested Murrelet: the second record in the area this year (PH).

On the 3rd, at least 3 Grey Bunting at Taejongdae, while on the 4th a single Long-billed Murrelet Brachyramphus perdix was seen from a ferry ca 15 km offshore from Busan (NM).

On the 5th, 60 Cinereous Vulture and 4 Snow Goose Anser caerulescens were on the Han-Imjin (AS), along with 3 white-headed Long-tailed Tits, 67 White-naped Crane and another out-of-place Hooded Crane (PH), while at Ganghwa there was a Saker Falco cherrug and the single Hooded Crane still (FW & FS).

On the 6th at Ganghwa, also 1 Red-throated Thrush and 2 Rough-legged Buzzard Buteo lagopus. (AS).

On 7th, 7 more white-headed Long-tailed Tits, 2 Chinese Nuthatch (4th record of the winter) at Song Do, while at Seosan an apparent wintering Dusky Warbler (AS), a Water Rail, rather scarce in winter, and 2 Snow Geese still (PH). Up to 145 Hooded Crane were at Suncheon (FW & FS).

On 8th at Haenam, 14 Little Bunting Emberiza pusilla, 1 Black-faced Bunting Emberiza spodocephala and 2 exceptionally late Barn Swallow Hirundo rustica were presumably very late autumn migrants, while 8 Swan Goose and 2 Upland Buzzard could be considered more seasonal. An exceptional count of ca 61 Hen Harrier was also recorded at Gocheonnam (FW & FS).
On 8th and 9th at Seosan, 2 Oriental White Stork, 2 overwintering Red-necked Stints (as in 2001/2002), 1 Eastern Imperial Eagle Aquila heliaca and the local Stellers’s Sea Eagle were recorded along with an exceptionally late Whiskered Tern at the Geum (AS): one also attempted overwintering at Seosan in 2001/2002.

On 10th, on Jeju, an over-wintering Ruddy Turnstone Arenaria interpres (first December record?) but only 5 Black-faced Spoonbill (PH); while 1 Black-faced Spoonbill was also seen very distantly at the Nakdong, with 13 White Spoonbill Platelea leucorodia, while at Taejongdae 2 female Grey Bunting still present, and 33 White-naped Crane Grus vipio seen moving NW in the evening (presumably considering crossing to Japan, having been displaced from further north by severe weather conditions) (NM, FW & FS).

On 11th, 1 Eastern Imperial Eagle Aquila heliaca on Jeju (rather unusual record) and one Oriental White Stork in the Haenam area, where an estimated 250,000 Baikal Teal were on Gocheonnam.

On 12th, a Common Crane Grus grus and 4 hybrid CommonxHooded were at Suncheon, along with an over-wintering Bar-tailed Godwit Limosa lapponica (usually only 1 or 2 over-winter in far southwest) (PH).

On 13th the Red-crested Pochard was still at Joonam/Dongpan, along with 1 Snow Goose and an exceptionally late Chinese Pond Heron Ardea bacchus, while a Steller’s Sea Eagle was seen between Busan and Pohang and 2 Relict Gulls Larus relictus appeared back on the beach at Pohang (AS). In Gwangneung, a female Grey-capped Woodpecker Dendrocopos canicapiillus was perhaps only the second record of the year; 25 Pallas’s Rosefinch Carpodacus roseus there was also a very high count. Between Gwangneung and the Cheorwon Basin, 18 Cinereous Vulture, with a further 130 counted there (NM, FW & FS).

On 14th, 1 Long-billed Murrelet at Guryongpo and 5 Glaucous-winged Gull (3 also on 14th:AS, and several Gangneung area: CHK), while on 15th 3 Scaly-sided Merganser were found back in the Andong-reservoir/river complex(AS), and the first Japanese Waxwings Bombycilla japonica of the winter were reported, at Namsan in Seoul (TA).

On 16th, at least 4 Red-throated Thrush and a further 6+ Japanese Waxwing at Gwangneung (AS). A Scaly-sided Merganser at Seosan on the 22nd was highly unusual (KWS).

A 1stW Relict Gull was at Pohang on the 24th (KWS). On 25th at the Nakdong Estuary, 2 Steller’s Sea Eagles (one 1 CY, 1 2-3 CY), 11 Swan Goose, 3 Relict and 1 first winter Glaucous-winged Gull (SM), while on 27th, again at the Nakdong, 9 White-naped Crane, 1 Cinereous Vulture, 1 Steller’s Sea Eagle, 1 near-adult Upland Buzzard(SM), 5+ Swan Goose, 8 Relict Gull and a probable Thayer’s Gull Larus thayeri, with a Grey Bunting in woodland at Dadapo (NM). Also, 3 Scaly-sides Merganser in Gyeongju (TA).

A Chinese Grey Shrike was a good find at the Nakdong estuary on the 28th (CH), as was a Spectacled Guillemot photographed on the 29th at Ganghung (CSK). 4 Steller’s Sea Eagles, 10 Relict Gull in the Nakdong and 2 Grey Bunting and the American Wigeon at Taejongdae (NM & TA) were a fitting end to an excellent year.

1st W Relict Gull, Pohang. Photo © Kim Woo Soo
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- Brian FOSTER (BF) part of a small group from the UK [Dec-Jan].
- Pekka KOMI (PK), in Alula 2/2002 (pp.82-88): part of Finnish birding group [February].
- KIM Hyun-tae (KH) from South Korea, based at Seosan, with one of Korea's most popular birding websites.
- Dr. PARK Jin-Young (PJY) from South Korea: ornithologist working within the Division for Biodiversity Conservation of the Ministry of Environment.
- Tim ALLISON (TA) from Canada, presently based in Seoul.
- Dr. LEE Ki-Seop (LSK) from South Korea, an ornithologist surveying several sites throughout the country, including sections of the DMZ.
- Tony LANCASTER & John DONNELLY (TL & JD), part of group of 9, including Wilton FARRELLY, Dennis WEIR, Willie McDOWELL (from Ireland) and Jeff GILLIGAN, Tom STAUDT, Nick LETHABY (NL, from the UK), Gerard LILLIE (from the US). [late April-May].
- Dr. Michael GREENE (MG) from the US, part of a team of 3 [late April-early May].
- Martha WALSH McGEHEE (MWM), from The US [May].
- Jan Hein van STEENIS (JS) from the Netherlands (July-August).
- John HOLLAND and Michael O’SULLIVAN (JH & MS) from the US [September].
- Arnoud VAN DEN BERG and Magnus ROBB (AB & MR) from the Netherlands [October].
- Dr. Philip EDWARDS from the UK [October].
- LEE Jeong-Sik from South Korea, a teacher in Mokpo with a birding website covering the Haenam region.
- Jeff HOPKINS (JeH) from the US [November].
- HAN Jong Jyun (HJJ) from South Korea, a teacher in Seosan, working with the Cheonsu Wetlands Centre.
- CHOI Soon-Kyoo (CHK), from South Korea, a birder based in Gangnun, with an excellent website.
- KIM Woo Soo (KWS) from South Korea, a reporter and photographer based in the Pohang area.
- Paul Holt and Sunbird (PH), birdwatching tour company based in the UK. [November and December].
- Frederik WILLEMYNs and Frank De SCHEEMAEKER (FW & FS) from Belgium [December].
- Andy STODDART (AS), from the UK (part of the large Sunbird tour, led by Paul HOLT and Dave FISHER) [December].
- Sean MINNS (SM), overseas birder living in Japan [December].
- Charles HESSE (CH), from the UK, living in Japan [December].