The Birds Korea Network 2003 Birding Year Review

Birds Korea is dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats in Korea and the wider Yellow Sea Eco-region.
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With special thanks to Kim Hyun-tae and Choi Soon-Kyoo, and to all the birders who chose South
Korea in 2003!
The year

2003 was another great year for birds and birders, with much increased coverage by Korean, resident-foreign, and visiting birders (from the UK, Canada, the US, Hong Kong, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland and Australia). Survey work throughout the year by Park Jong-Gill and others in the far southwest islands of Hong and Daheuksan was supported by intensive coverage on Eocheong in spring and then Socheong (in the far northwest) in the autumn, as well as by increased observer activity and networking throughout the year - leading to a major improvement in our understanding of a number of species’ status in South Korea.

Highlights in 2003 included the finding of a small wintering flock of Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* in the southwest, along with a wide range of extralimital gulls in the first three months of the year on the east coast; the first multiple arrival of White-shouldered Starling *Sturnus sinensis* and Drongos *Dicrurus spp* in spring along the west coast (the latter involving more than 35 individuals of 3 species); the suspension, temporary or otherwise, of the Saemangeum reclamation in July; big movements of skuas in the northwest in October; and a near-final rush of unexpected finds in November. Of the 400 species reported during the year, no less than 12 of these were new to the Birds Korea unofficial South Korean list.

Species first recorded/documented (with supporting photographs) in 2003 included: White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys* (the Nakdong estuary: February 3rd), Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* (The Han-Imjin River: March 15th-29th), Northern House Martin *Delichon urbica lagopoda* (Eocheong island and later Socheong island: first on April 19th), Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (parva) (Eocheong island: April 30th), Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (Daheuksan Island: May 1st), Chinese Song Thrush *Turdus munipensis* (Socheong Island: May 31st), Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* (Socheong Island on October 27th, followed by the 2nd record on Hong Island on the 29th), Water Pipit *Anthus spinoletta* (Jeju Island: November 22nd or 23rd, followed by a group of three, at least one of which was photographed, on Daheuksan Island on November 26th) and Grass Owl *Tyto capensis* (Daheuksan Island, found freshly dead, December 25th).

In addition, though claimed in previous years, the 2002/2003 winter produced several well-photographed and thoroughly documented American Herring *Larus smithsonianus* and Thayer’s Gulls *L. thayeri* (on the east coast between January and March) as well as the first formally described record of Beijing *Ficedula beijingnica* or “Elisa’s” Flycatcher *F.(narcissina) elisae* (Daheuksan island: October 10th).

Not only firsts…

Beyond national firsts, there were also a significant number of species seen that had previously been recorded ten times or less in South Korea, including several not listed in “Field Guide to the Birds of Korea” Lee, Koo & Park (2000). For some of these, their published status clearly needs revising. Although a few are perhaps genuinely extralimital, others should not be regarded as “vagrants” or even “rare” in South Korea, as it is increasingly apparent that they were (and still are) simply being massively unrecorded, while a rather smaller number might also have undergone recent changes in number or distribution.
Obvious examples of under-recorded species include Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* (actually the most abundant skua in Korean waters, with hundreds reported in 2002 and amongst many observations, a single flock of 40 in 2003), Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus* and Grey Thrush *Turdus cardis* (probably hundreds of the former and tens of the latter recorded in recent springs), and to a lesser extent Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (with at least 6 individuals reported in spring 2003 alone, despite still very limited coverage), Thick-billed Warbler *Acrocephalus aedon* (shown to be regular at least in the far northwest in both May and early September), and Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* (with a further three records involving four individuals in 2003, one record each on western islands spanning Hong Island in the far southwest to Socheong Island in the far northwest - this despite the obvious difficulties of identification and the comparative abundance of Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*, the typical ‘carrier’ species).

Species undergoing a positive change in distribution look to include Red-billed (Silky) Starling *Sturnus sericeus* and “Chinese” Blackbird *Turdus (merula) mandarinus*. First recorded in 2000, the beautiful “Silky” starling was found again in both 2001 and 2002, and was recorded in 2003 in months spanning March to November, with one flock of 10 reported. Happily, it has also recently been recorded for the first time in DPRK and on the Hebei coast. The *mandarinus* “Chinese” Blackbird also seems to be increasing throughout the region. Found for the first time in 1999 (nesting!), it now appears to be a scarce though regular early-mid spring migrant along the west coast (with at least 5-6 individuals recorded on Hong Island, and a further 6 individuals on Eocheong Island reported in 2003 alone). The species, incidentally, was first recorded in DPRK in the winter of 2000/2001 (Will DUCKWORTH per Tomek), and there are also an increasing number of records in Japan and in coastal Hebei (with one even present and singing into June in 2002, Jesper HORNSTOV in lit.).

Although the rapid increase in records of some such species can be easily explained, the reason for the unprecedented numbers of Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* reported in 2003 (making it one of the most noteworthy species of the year) is less than clear. Following on from the first record of this distinctive and highly visible species in 1998, there were records in both 2000 and 2001, including of 2 birds together. In 2003, however, there were almost 40 individuals reported - with one flock of 15 on Eocheong and records from 6 other locations spanning the entire length of the west coast, from Jeju north to Socheong. The species might just have had a ‘good year’, or was it instead being overlooked previously, or is it now expanding its range? Perhaps, and most likely, it is a combination of all of these three elements. In a few more years, with the continuing growth of the Korean birding scene and improved methods of collating data, we are likely to know much better.
Major Rarities: Other Species Recorded Less Than 10 Times pre-2003

A run-through of additional species that had previously been recorded in South Korea less than ten times pre-2003, and most of which are highlighted in the monthly reviews, includes: Red-crested Pochard *Rhodinessa rufina* between January and February (one lingering from autumn 2002, and a “new” drake in the northeast in March: ca 6th-7th records), 3 Stock Pigeon *Columba oenas* (ca 5th record) near Daejeon in February, single adult and first-winter Iceland Gull *Larus glaucoides* in February and early March (approximately 3rd and 4th records), and two Pallas’s Gull *Larus ichthyaeus* in March (2nd and 3rd records after the first in December 2002).

In April, single Gull-billed *Gelochelidon nilotica* and Caspian Terns *Hydroprogne caspia* mid-month on the Nakdong estuary were probably the 3rd or 4th records, and were closely followed by a Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* (probably ca the 8th record), two Crag Martin *Hirundo rupestris* and then two more Ferruginous Flycatcher *Ficedula ferruginea* on offshore island: these were the 2nd and 2nd and 3rd records respectively after the first in 2002. In addition, single Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* and up to 6 White-shouldered Starling *Sturnus sinensis* were reported, from April into early May.

In May a swiftlet *sp* and a Himalayan Swiftlet *Collalaia brevirostris* on Eocheong, were followed by another Himalayan Swiftlet in June on Hong Island (ca 5-7th records), while a claimed Jack Snipe *Lymnocryptes minima* on Deokjek island in May was probably the first for several years. South Korea’s 4th or 5th Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* on Eocheong, the 2nd record of Spangled Drongo *Dicurus hotteniottus* (with 2 individuals on Hong Island), the second Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (on Eocheong, after the first on Gageo Island in October 2000), and Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* at Seosan, were all outstanding highlights in May, along with probably the 2nd or 3rd South Korean record of Asian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* on Socheong at month’s end.

In the mid-summer period, a presumed Ryukyu Minivet *Pericrocotus tegimae* was seen briefly at Geoje on the south coast, with a presumed White-shouldered Starling (4th record of the year, and ca 10th record in total) in September, while in September, the second Pheasant-tailed Jacana of the year was on Jeju, followed by another Ashy Drongo (4th or 5th record), and 1-2 South Polar Skua *Catharacta maccormickii* both in the far northwest: the latter the start of a series of records in 2003.

In October, the first of three Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius scach* were found (approximately the 10-12th records, most since 2000) - with singles on Gageo in October, and Jeju Island and Haenam in November. In addition, 1-2 Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* were seen by Kim Hyun-tae at Seosan mid-month (probably 3rd record, though only the first was documented with photographs), and a Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* was at Upo (ca 10th record?), while November also produced Korea’s second Verditer Flycatcher *on Socheong, and December, a White-billed Diver *Gavia adamsii* off Socheong (very few previous records).

A record-breaking year by any measure!

The Records and the year in detail...

Records have been gathered through survey work, trip reports, through direct e-mailing (largely by KIM Su-Kyung), and by trawling the growing number of Korean birding sites - with key sites being Kim Hyun-tae’s in Seosan home.megapass.co.kr/~skua, Choi Soon-Kyoo’s in Gangneung aves.birdinkorea.net, and the Megalam Parangsae Café (at http://megalam.co.kr/megalam/_skin/club/bluebird_fr.htm), offering discussion fora on birds in Korean.

Please note that: (1) we of course aim to acknowledge all records accurately and that images used retain the photographers’ full copyright; (2) inclusion of records in the report below does not indicate their ownership by Birds Korea or preclude their publication, but it does indicate that we consider the record to be accurate and supportable with the potential of being “filed” for the future; (3) that without the existence of a national rarities committee or of a method to store many records, in addition to the existing restrictions on most researchers preventing them from making their data public, there is some uncertainty about the exact number of previous records of many of the species - figures given are therefore based on Lee, Koo and Park (2000), and subsequent reports; (4) many significant records in 2003 likely remain privately held or simply still overlooked; and (5) references to a number of records for the Korean peninsula are based on Birds Korea’s own database largely in combination with Tomek (1999) and Tomek (2002).
Furthermore, all the records for the report were selected on the basis of being species unlisted by Lee, Koo & Park (2000); or listed by them and considered as vagrant or rare; or because they are species of special conservation concern; or because they were recorded in significant or unusual numbers, locations or dates.

We would greatly welcome any further information or clarification, and in advance would like to thank all those who are prepared to share their enjoyment and their knowledge (and images) - promoting awareness and understanding and in so doing, helping the conservation of birds and their habitats.

January

A fairly mild January continuing on from a mild December, with only short periods of sub-zero temperatures. Above average temperatures meant most rivers remained unfrozen, and a few species managed to winter north of their typical winter ranges, including 2 Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis* as far north as the Geum, and at least 3 Tristram’s Bunting *Emberiza tristrami* in Busan: only the second wintering record of the species known to Birds Korea. A focus on east coast gulls produced suspected American Herring Gulls and apparent adult Iceland Gull on the east coast.

Birding Highlights in January:

1st Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*, one at Seosan
12th Presumed Juvenile-first winter American Herring Gull (east coast).
18th-22nd American Herring Gull (adult claimed) and adult Iceland Gull (east coast).
22nd Flock of 9 Black Stork, Hampyeong Bay
Throughout the month: Red-crested Pochard on the Joonam reservoirs and Chinese Nuthatch *Sitta villosa* at Song Do.

The year started with the usual excellent range of wintering waterbirds. Rarities included a long-staying Red-crested Pochard at Joonam (TA) (first found in October 2002, this constitutes ca the 6th record for Korea), a very high count of 41 Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* at Hwajin Po in the north-east (CSK), and an adult Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* at Seosan (KHT). Raptors were well-represented too, with an Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius* at the Han-Imjin (CH), an Upland Buzzard and Saker Falcon at Seosan on 1st, a suspected albidus Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* photographed there also on 1st (KHT), and no less than 6 Steller’s Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* on the Namdae Stream in Yangyang (CSK). On the 2nd, 5-6 Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* were at Seosan, and 2 highly unseasonal Far Eastern Curlew were found on the Geum River (CH). On the 4th, an Oriental White Stork *Ciconia boyciana* appeared at Upo (KSK), with 4 present most of the month at Seosan, as well as a Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus* there on 5th (KHT). On 10th, 2+ personata Black-
faced Emberiza spodocephala, 3 Grey E. variabilis and up to 3 Tristram’s Bunting were found in Busan (NM): this is perhaps the second wintering record of the latter species in Korea, after the first on January 18th, 2001 at Waegwan (MSU). Between 3-5 Tristram’s Bunting remained in the area until at least February 12th (NM). 40-50 Pallas’s Rosefinch Carpodacus roseus at Seoraksan in Seoul (TA) on 11th was a very high count, while a Snow Goose Anser caerulescens found at Joonam (CJS) on 12th was still present on 17th, along with the Red-crested Pochard. On 12th, a bird photographed and identified as a first winter Vega Gull Larus vegae appeared to show several distinctive characters of a juvenile-first winter American Herring Gull(CSK). Between 18th and 22nd, a gulling trip on the east coast also produced photographs of suspected adult American Herring Gull and adult Iceland Gull(KHT, KJH, KHK). On 18th, 2 Chinese Nuthatch were still at Song Do (NM, TA) in a small clump of pine trees (first found by PH/SUN in December) - remaining through into February. On 19th a Tawny Owl Strix aluco between Paju and Munsan was an unexpected record, as was Black Kite Milvus migrans at Imjingak. A single Snow and 38 Swan Goose A. cygnoides also there were rather more expected (TA). On 22nd, after several records of Black Stork in autumn and mid-winter in recent years, a party of 9 were found at Hampyeong Bay: the largest count in the southern part of the Korean peninsula. All were still present on 27th (KSH per KHT). On 25th an Oriental White Stork was found at Ganghwa (NM, BB, TA), the latter remaining into February, while on 27th a Common Starling Sturnus vulgaris at Joonam (CJS) was an unusual mid-winter record in the south-east.

February

February remained largely mild, with only occasional snow in the north and temperatures on occasion climbing to ca 15C in the southeast after a short but very cold snap at the beginning of the month. Chinese Nuthatch were recorded at several locations in the northwest and northeast - with at least 8 birds involved. There was more evidence of overwintering migrants, most notable being 3 Common Rosefinch Carpodacus erythrinus at the Geum (first mid-winter record for South Korea known to Birds Korea, though noted as occasional in DPRK in winter by Will DUCKWORTH, and according to Tomek [2001] also noted as such in the south by Won Pyong-Oh [2000]), and a Common Redshank Tringa totanus on the Geum. Spring migration seemed to start in the second week of the month, after the end of the early cold spell, with increasing numbers of Japanese Waxwing Bombycilla japonica noted especially on the east coast, flocks of White-naped Cranes Grus vipio at Gumi on 11th, and Upo Ramsar site on 15th, followed soon after by an exceptionally early arrival of Pacific/Fork-tailed Swift Apus pacificus on 20th into the southeast. At the month’s end Thayer’s and American Herring Gull were photographed on the east coast.

Birding Highlights in February:

3rd An immature White-crowned Sparrow at the Nakdong estuary, Busan: the first for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.


13th Three Stock Pigeon, near Daejeon.

14th Possible Second-winter American Herring Gull, Jumunjin.

23rd Adult Thayer’s Gull, near Sokcho.

26th Adult American Herring Gull, Hupo.

On the third an immature White-crowned Sparrow was found and photographed at Eulsuk Island, in the Nakdong estuary, by two birdwatchers from Japan on a sightseeing trip (NY, MK): the first “First of the Year”! Also on 3rd, 2
The mild weather continued through much of the month, with only occasional, short cold periods, and temperatures...
rising from a typical 8°C or so in the southeast at the beginning of the month to 15°C there by month’s end. Early migrants included good counts of alba Wagtails and Rook Corvus frugilegus in the southeast, as well as several sightings of cranes moving north. The occasional passage of rain-bearing fronts produced both rain and small falls of a wider range of migrants towards the month’s end in the southwest and west, with several records of Red-billed Starling and “Chinese” Blackbird.

Birding Highlights in March:

4th and 5th Male Red-throated Thrush Turdus ruficollis ruficollis, inland at Upo.
7th Suspected barabensis Steppe Gull, Guryongpo.
8th First winter Iceland Gull, Guryongpo.
15th-29th Bar-headed Goose, Han-Imjin: First record for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.
17th-19th Pallas’s Gull, Nakdong estuary.
23rd Suspected adult Thayer’s Gull, Gangneung.
25th First winter Pallas’s Gull, Gunsan, near Eocheong island.
30th Male Red-crested Pochard, Han River, Seoul.

A suspected Willow Tit Parus montanus in central Seoul, was followed by an eastern Imperial Eagle over the city on the 2nd (TA), while in Busan there was a late Cinereous Vulture Aegypius monachus on 3rd as well as greatly increased numbers of alba wagtails and Rook, and at least 1 Grey Bunting (NM). Also on the 3rd, 2 Japanese Waxwing were at Upo (KSK), followed by the discovery of a male Red-throated Thrush there on 4th and 5th, in amongst ca 350 Naumann’s and Dusky Thrushes Turdus naumanni naumanni and T.n.eunomus (NM, KSK). On 8th, 2 adult gulls apparently showing many features of barabensis Steppe Gull were at Guryongpo, followed by a first winter Iceland Gull there on 9th (NM). On 15th, a Chinese Nuthatch was found at Seoraksan, near Seoul (TA), while the same day a Bar-headed Goose was discovered on the Han-Imjin River, feeding in amongst Bean Anser fabalis and Swan Geese (LKS). This is the first record of this species for South Korea and the Korean peninsula - following a very few records in Japan (first in 1972: Brazil, 1991), and one apparently reported at Poyang Lake in China. The bird, twitched by a small number of Korean birders, was last seen on 29th (LKS). On 16th, 2 exceptionally early male Pied Harrier Circus melanoleucos were claimed at Seosan (KJH). On 17th, a late Relict Gull was at the Nakdong estuary, along with Korea’s second Pallas’s Gull (last seen on 19th: all NM), while on 18th, 52 Hooded Crane (LHS) were seen at Seosan, along with the two male Pied Harrier again (KKS) and a further 200 Hooded Crane on 20th (LW). On 22nd a Lesser White-fronted Goose was at Ganghwa, as were 20 Japanese Reed Bunting Emberiza yessoensis: a very high count of this typically scarce species (TA). Also on 22nd, there were 2 Red-billed Starling (PJG) on Hong Do (the earliest known record of this species in Korea), while on 23rd, a suspected adult Thayer’s Gull was photographed at Gangeung (CSK) - showing at least a textbook upperwing pattern - and a Pied Avocet. 32 Hooded Crane and 2 Cinereous Vulture were at Seosan (KHK per KHT). On 23rd too, the first “Chinese”
Blackbird of the spring was found on Hong Do, followed by up to 5 other individuals there, with the last in May (PJG). There were 80 Japanese Waxwing with 10 Bohemian Waxwing at Wonju (PYU) on the 24th, with 75 also reported in Seoul (PHO). On the 25th, the third Pallas’s Gull of the winter was watched following the ferry from Gunsan to Eocheong Island, with 9 Hoopoe Upupa epops, 6 Japanese Waxwing, a Red-billed Starling, the second “Chinese” Blackbird of the year, and an apparent fronto male Pine Bunting Emberiza leucocephala (described in Mackinnon and Phillipps [2000] as a subspecies resident “in E Qaidam Basin of Qinghai and adjacent Gansu”), all on the island itself. On 27th on Eocheong, there was a male Red-billed Starling, while on 26th at Seosan there were 51 Hooded Crane (LHS), followed by ca 100 on 28th (KHT). On the 30th the month was rounded off by a male Red-crested Pochard on the Han River (TA).

April

The month started mild, with a predictable mixture of sunshine and showers, and temperatures increasing up to 28 C on 17th. The first third of the month also produced the predictable spread of early spring scarce regulars, including Greater Short-toed Lark Calandrella brachydactyla, “Chinese” Blackbird and early Brown-headed and Grey Thrushes, while in mid-month the pace of migration increased markedly, with a rush of migrants and spring overshoots including two rare terns, Black Redstart and two rare hirundines: lagopoda Northern House Martin and Crag Martin. Towards the last third of the month, rain and strong winds from 18th-20th, on 23rd -25th, and again on 29th, seemed to stall migration, producing significant falls of migrants, with several major rarities again found at the month’s end.

Birding Highlights in April:

2nd Dowitcher Limnodromus sp at Upo.
13th-14th Citrine Wagtail, Hong Island, first in a series of records in 2003; Caspian then Gull-billed Tern, Nakdong estuary.
15th-16th Black Redstart, Hong Island.
17th Ferruginous Flycatcher, Hong Island, followed by one on Eocheong, 19th-30th.
19th Northern House Martin Eocheong Island (First record for South Korea and presumably the Korean peninsula) increasing to 2 on 20th.
20th 2 Crag Martin, Hong Island.
21st Pied Wheatear (until 27th) and Tree Pipit, Eocheong Island.
30th Red-breasted Flycatcher, Eocheong Island.

April started well with the fourth record of Red-billed Starling of the year, this time in Busan (NM) on the 1st, the first Brown-headed Thrush of the year on Daheuksan Island on the 2nd (South Korea’s earliest record?), followed quickly by another on Hong Island on the 5th (PJG), and on the 2nd, a dowitcher (MSU) at Joonam. Initially identified as a Long-billed Dowitcher, this individual nonetheless appeared to show several features more typical of Short-billed Dowitcher Limnodromus griseus, which has not yet been recorded on the Korean peninsula. Also on 2nd a Hooded Crane was at Suncheon Bay still (MSU), with 32 at Youngdong on 7th - the latter a rather late date (KSK). On 5th on Hong Island, 3 Greater Short-toed Lark (PJG), with 2 still present on 6th, while also on 6th, in Pohang 130 Japanese Waxwing, and on the Guryongpo Peninsula the same or another “Japanese” Meadow Bunting Emberiza cioides ciopsis as that found in November 2002 (NM, PE). On 7th, 2 Grey Thrush in Taegongdae, Busan were considered unusually early migrants (NM, PE). On 12th, another Pied Avocet (3rd record of the year) was at
Yeongjong, while on 13th, a very late Upland Buzzard and a rather early Common Rosefinch were at the Taean Peninsula (NM, DB), and the spring’s first Citrine Wagtail (and ca the 7th for South Korea) was found on Hong Island, along with 2 late and presumed well-out-of-range Grey Bunting, one of which was mist-netted (KDW). On 13th a Caspian and on 14th an adult Gull-billed Tern (both about the third record for South Korea and the Korean peninsula) were found at the Nakdong estuary (KEJ),

A first-year nominate Dark-throated Thrush Turdus ruficollis, or atragularis X ruficollis intergrade was photographed at Gangneung (CSK). On 15th and 16th, on Hong Island, a male Black Redstart (ca 8th record for South Korea, and the ca 9th for the Korean peninsula) was well photographed (PJG). On Eocheong Island on the 17th there were 1-2 “Chinese” Blackbird, with further singles found there on 18th, 20th - 23rd, and 27th (NM), these records being nicely matched by further “Chinese” Blackbird on Hong Island on 20th -23rd, 28th and 30th. Also on the 17th on Hong Island, Korea’s second Ferruginous Flycatcher was photographed, soon followed by another on Eocheong from the 20th (KS): the latter camera-friendly individual remaining through until the end of the month (NM, KSK). On 19th, a Whiskered Tern Chlidonias hybridus at Ganthwa was as early as 2 Chinese Nuthatch were late (TA), while also on 19th a lagopoda Northern House Martin was well photographed on Eocheong (NM), resting on wires before roosting under the roof of a shed. Although the first fully documented record of the species in South Korea and the Korean peninsula, it was preceded by several “probables” in previous years, and was soon joined by a second individual on 20th, with one remaining until 22nd, followed by at least three other records later in the spring and autumn (all NM). Also on 20th, 2 Crag Martin(Korea’s second record after the first on Eocheong on April 29th, 2002) were on Hong Island, one frustratingly escaping through a hole in a mist-net set up to catch it (PJG)! A rather elusive but long-staying female Pied Wheatear on Eocheong from 21st (NM) was also the second record for South Korea, whilst a Tree Pipit identified from an image taken by KS the same day, was at least the 8th record (with the first only in 2000). Also on 21st, a Citrine Wagtail on Eocheong was followed by a full male on 22nd - ca the 8th and 9th records for South Korea (NM). On 23rd, a peak of 3 Greater Short-toed Lark were on Eocheong (NM, KS), while on 24th, the first Pechora Pipit Anthus gustavi of the spring were reported on both Hong (KDW) and Eocheong Islands (NM). On 26-27th at Okku, Saemangeum, 2 Spoon-billed Sandpiper Calidris/Eurynorhynchus pygmeus, and a first winter Relict Gull were found on the Geum estuary (TA): the latest known record of the latter species in South Korea. On 28th, on Eocheong, a male White-shouldered Starling, the first in a series of records in 2003 was found, this individual carrying a (presumed) Hong Kong ring (KS, NM), and remaining through until May 11th. Following on from 1 at Gangneung in mid-September, and 3 in October on Gageo in 2002, this constituted probably only the sixth or seventh national record known to Birds Korea. “Towards the end of the month” (per KUM), there was a Black Drongo on Jeju (the first in a record-breaking series of the species, involving probably nearly 40 individuals at 7 localities), while on 29th, single Grey-headed Lapwing Vanellus cinereus also turned up on Jeju (KBS) and on Eocheong (NM).

On the 30th the month ended on an even higher note with a worn Red-breasted Flycatcher found (NM, KSK, KS) and photographed on 30th - the first record of this taxon (increasingly Red-breasted Ficedula parva and Red-throated/ Taiga Flycatcher Ficedula albicilla are recognized as separate species) in South Korea and on the Korean peninsula.
May

Still, hot and anticyclonic conditions (with smaller falls of commoner migrants than in 2001 and 2002) at the beginning of the month still produced some exceptional records, including Korea’s first Isabelline Wheatear on Daheuksan Island on the 1st. The good weather broke on the 6th and 7th, replaced by heavy rain, fog, and strong winds swinging round to the northwest. A significant fall of migrants took place on the 7th, peaking on the 8th with a large influx of Black Drongo and records of both Ashy and then Spangled Drongos. More settled conditions followed, with above average temperatures again becoming established until the last third of the month, when periods of heavy rain then became rather more prevalent. Heavy rain on 29th produced the last recorded bird fall of the spring, on 30th and 31st, as well as only the second record of Chinese Song Thrush outside of China.

Birding Highlights in May:

Start of the month: White-shouldered Starling on Eocheong until 8th.
1st Isabelline Wheatear, Daheuksan Island; swiftlet sp., Eocheong Island.
2nd Tree Pipit. 2, Hong Island. 3rd Black Drongo on Daheuksan Island.
3rd-4th 1 White-shouldered Starling on Ganghwa, on 3rd; 4 reported on Jeju on 4th.
4th Jack Snipe, Deokjeok Island, Gyeonggi Bay.
7th Ashy Drongo, Eocheong Island, (until 8th, with possible second also on 8th).
8th Black Bittern (until 10th) and 15 Black Drongo (with 11 on 14th), Eocheong Island.
9th Himalayan Swiftlet, Eocheong Island.
11th Two Spangled Drongo, Hong Island (until 12th), and single lagopoda Northern House Martin, Eocheong Island.
15th-16th Male Black-headed Bunting, Eocheong Island.
27th Adult Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Seosan; 2 lagopoda Northern House Martin, Socheong Island.
30th Asian Paradise Flycatcher.
31st Chinese Song Thrush, Socheong Island, the first record for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.

The month started excellently, with South Korea’s and the Korean peninsula’s first Isabelline Wheatear on Daheuksan on the 1st, remaining there until the 2nd, soon followed by South Korea’s seventh Black Drongo and two Tree Pipit(PJG). In addition a swiftlet sp (presumably Himalayan Swiftlet was seen briefly on Eocheong Island (KS) on the 1st, approximately the fifth swiftlet record, following the first on Gageo Island in May 2001. On the 2nd, a female-type Citrine Wagtail was found on Eocheong (BJ, BP, NM, KSK, KS) (present until the 4th) followed by a further female type there from May 8th-16th (NM) and a male on 15th (NM), along with one on Gageo island on 6th (KSH): a series constituting approximately the 10th to 13th South Korean records. On 3rd, a single Spoon-billed Sandpiper was still at Okku (KSK), and a White-shouldered Starling was reported on Ganghwa (CCY), with 4 more reported on Jeju the next day (per KUM): possibly ca 8th and 9th records. Also on 4th a Jack Snipe claimed on Deokjek Island (TA) was presumed one of the first records in recent years. On 6th and 7th, a count of 11 Little Whimbrel Numenius minutus on Gageo Island (KSH) was probably the highest count recorded nationwide of the species, while in the evening on 7th a Hume’s Leaf Warbler Phylloscopus humei (the second of the spring) and an apparent leucogenis Ashy Drongo, the third for South Korea and only the fourth for the peninsula, were on Eocheong (NM). On 8th, following overnight rain and strong winds, the last “Chinese” Blackbird of the spring was on Hong island (remaining until the 10th, and probably constituting the latest spring
record of the species in the west of the country), as well as 3 Black Drongo (PJG). Also on the 8th, at least 15 Black Drongo were counted on Eocheong island (NM) - a record high count - in addition to a male Black Bittern (NM, KS, BJ, BP) (probably the Korean peninsula’s fourth), the Ashy Drongo still (NM), and the same or another, perhaps darker-looking Ashy Drongo found later in the day at the other end of the island (BJ, BP). On the 9th, a Himalayan Swiftlet was well-watched on Eocheong, while on 10th, the Black Bittern was seen again there briefly in flight, and a new lagopoda Northern House Martin (the second record for South Korea) was found (NM). Also on the 10th, 3 more Black Drongo were found on the mainland in Gunsan (PN), while there were still at least 10 on Eocheong, with 8 there on the 12th (NM). On 11th, 2 Spangled Drongo were found and photographed on Hong Island (PJG): the latter is presumed only the second record for the Korean peninsula. Both were still present there on May 12th, as were 3 Black Drongo (LKH) still. On 13th 6 Black Drongo were also reported from Daeheuksan island (PJG), and the species increased again from 8 to 11 on Eocheong Island, with 8 again between 14th-16th, and 5 still there on the 17th (NM).

On 15th Korea’s second Black-headed Bunting was also found and photographed on Eocheong (NM): a male, it was seen on 16th, but could not be found on 17th. On 18th, 2-3 Nordmann’s/Spotted Greenshank Tringa guttifer were on the Geum estuary, but just one summer-plumaged Spoon-billed Sandpiper was at Okku (NM, CSH), while a Grey-headed Lapwing was found on the east coast at Uljin (JHJ). On 22nd, yet another Black Drongo was found on Hong Island (PJG). On 26th a Pomarine Skua was seen at sea just south of the 38th parallel near Socheong island, and the last Black Drongo of the month (but not the year!) was found on the island itself (NM). On 27th, an adult Pheasant-tailed Jacana was at Seosan (KHT), while there was another lagopoda Northern House Martin (third record) and 3 Thick-billed Warbler on Socheong - perhaps the first multiple record of the species in South Korea (NM). On 29th, a Red-billed Starling at Gangnueng (CSK) was the latest known spring record in Korea of the species. On 30th, a drongo sp was seen flying out to sea, while there were both single male Black Paradise Flycatcher Terpsiphone atrocaudata and a female-type Asian Paradise Flycatcher on Socheong Island - the latter probably the second or third record for South Korea. The month ended as spectacularly as it began, with one of the 15 Gray’s Grasshopper Warbler Locustella fasciolata present in the far southwest of Socheong Island flushing Korea’s first Chinese Song Thrush out of a ditch (NM): this is only the second record of the species outside China.

June, July and August

South Korea has several globally threatened breeding species - most well-known being Chinese Egret Egretta eulophotes, Black-faced Spoonbill Platelea minor and Saunders’s Gull Larus saundersi in the northwest, but also including Black Woodpigeon Columba janthina, Fairy Pitta Pitta nympha, Styann’s Grasshopper/Pleske’s Warbler Locustella pleskei in the southwest - in addition to a wide range of East Asian forest specials in good patches of mountain forest, including Ruddy Kingfisher Halcyon coromanda, Siberian Blue Robin Luscinia cyane, Yellow-rumped Ficedula zanthopygia and Blue-and-White Flycatchers Cyanoptila cyanomelana, White’s/Scaly Zoothera dauma and Pale Thrush Turdus pallidus. Most survey efforts by domestic researchers are focused on breeding studies (with much data rightly not being made public), and there are few visiting birders. In 2003, the summer was comparatively cool and wet, with some summer flooding, and poor nesting success of e.g. Little Tern Sterna albifrons. Nesting of Black-winged Stilt Himantopus himantopus and Greater Painted Snipe Rostrulata...
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*benghalensis* was noted again at Seosan. Returning shorebirds and gulls were noted at several sites by the end of July - beginning of August.

**Birding Highlights in June, July and August:**

Throughout the summer: Saunders’s Gull still nesting at Song Do - with some fledging achieved.

June 6th At least one Himalayan Swiftlet, Hong Island.
June 19th-21st Presumed Ryuku Minivet and White-shouldered Starling, Geoje Island.
June 30th Black Drongo, Seosan.
August 30th 1-3 Spoon-billed Sandpiper at Okku.

On June 1st there were 2 Russet Sparrow at Ganghwa (TA, JB), and on June 6th, a Himalayan Swiftlet was watched feeding in amongst a flock of 40 Pacific Swift on Hong Island (PJG): this is the latest spring record of the season, further suggesting the possibility of an isolated population of swiftlet nesting somewhere in the Yellow Sea region. Between June 6th-8th, “several” Whiskered Tern were at Seosan (KJH), while on 12th, 5+ Chinese Pond Heron Ardea bacchus were found in one small area in the Cheorwon basin (NM, DW), strongly suggesting breeding in the area. Between 13th-18th, 6+ Chestnut-cheeked Starling Sturnus philippensis were still present in Gangneung (CSK), also suggesting breeding in the central part of the Peninsula. On 20th, a minivet seen in flight in an area on Geoje Island where 4+ minivet sp had been present in June 2002, showed a dusky wash across the breast, again strongly suggesting Ryuku Minivet. Although it is not included in Lee, Koo & Park (2000) and there are no recent records of this species in South Korea, it is listed for Korea in Brazil (1991), and it is known to occur in winter in western Kyushu, well north of its mapped breeding range. In the same area a small starling showing obviously white upperwing coverts was considered a White-shouldered Starling (DB). On 30th, a Black Drongo was found and photographed at Seosan (KHT): this is probably the first mid-summer record of the species.

In July no significant bird records were received - and almost all attention was shifted to the historic court decision of July 15th to suspend the Saemangeum reclamation.

In August, juvenile and first winter Mongolian Gull were already present at Seosan by 17th (KHT), with 25 also at the Geum estuary by 27th (NM, TE). On 28th, a high count of 15 Long-toed Stint Calidris subminuta at Okku, Saemangeum, where single Pectoral Sandpiper Calidris melanotos, Whiskered Tern, and 1-3 Spoon-billed Sandpiper were also present by 30th (NM, TE). On 29th, on Eocheong Island 4 Chinese Grosbeak Eophona migratoria increased to 30 by 30th, when a migrant Long-billed Plover Charadrius placidus was also logged. On 30th too, single Pomarine and Arctic Skua Stercorarius parasiticus, 6 Swinhoe’s Storm Petrel Oceanodroma monorhis and 92 Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus were seen from the ferry between Eocheong Island and Gunsan (all NM, TE). On 31st, 3 juvenile White-winged Black Tern Chlidonias leucopterus were at Gangneung (CSK).

**September**

The first half of the month continued the summer run of mild but wet weather, with migration of a few early autumn species evident, including Brown Lanius cristatus and Tiger Shrikes L. tigrinus, Thick-billed Warbler and Yellow-rumped Flycatcher.

Several periods of heavy rain, culminated on the 12th and 13th in the most powerful typhoon ever recorded in South Korea - typhoon Maemi - which caused widespread wind damage (from gusts apparently reaching 280 Km per hour) and flooding, especially in the southeast. The second half of the month saw a return to more typical conditions: largely anticyclonic and hot, with a rapid increase in interesting records towards the end of the month.

**Birding Highlights in September:**

1st Thick-billed Warbler three on the 1st increasing to 6 on the 2nd, on Socheong Island.
6th, Black Drongo, Hong Island.
21st Chuchotka leg-flagged Spoon-billed Sandpiper found in Saemangeum.
24th lagopoda Northern House Martin, Socheong Island.
25th Ashy Drongo, Socheong Island.
26th **South Polar Skua**, near 38th parallel, at sea, Gyeonggi Bay.

27th **Pheasant-tailed Jacana**, Jeju Island; **Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*, Gangneung.

28th **Long-billed Dowitcher**, Dongjin River, Saemangeum.

30th **Western Marsh Harrier** *Circus aeruginosus* or hybrid **Western x Eastern Marsh Harrier** *C. spilonotus*, Seosan.

On the 1st, the month started well with at least 3 **Thick-billed Warbler** on Socheong Island, probably the first multiple count in autumn in Korea, with 6 on 2nd, and 4 still on 3rd, when there were also 2 **Pied Harrier** there (NM). On 4th, a **Siberian Blue Robin** was on Socheong: apparently an extremely scarce migrant in autumn on the west coast of South Korea, while on 5th also on Socheong Island, single **Pied Harrier**, **Yellow-legged Buttonquail** *Turnix tanki* and **Gray's Grasshopper Warbler** (NM). On the 6th, a **Black Drongo** was on Hong Island (PJG), probably the first autumn record of the species in South Korea. An *Oriental Pratincole* *Glareola maldivarum* in Gunsan (PN, JM) on 7th (and again on 10th), and a **Little Whimbrel** at Pohang (KSK) on 11th were both very unusual autumn records, while 300 **Common Tern** *Sternula hirundo* and 60 phalarope (presumed **Red-necked**) at sea there were rather more expected, as were 3 **Arctic Skua** on the 12th (KSK). On 14th, there was clear evidence of large-scale migration of **Chinese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter soloensis* over Bongnae Mountain, Busan, with 936 south in the morning, along with 690 **Fork-tailed/Pacific Swift** - considered an exceptionally high count for so late in the autumn. Also there, were 3 **House Swift** *Apus affinis* and 1 **Black Paradise Flycatcher**. On 16th, also at Bongnae, between 1300 and 1700 **Chinese Sparrowhawk** were logged moving south in the morning (NM), while a well-photographed **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** was at Gangneung (CSK). By 20th, 3000 **Baikal Teal** were at Seosan, along with 4 **Grey-headed Lapwing** (KHT), while on 21st a banded juvenile **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** was found in Saemangeum (per KKW). On 22nd, a juvenile **Pied Harrier** and 2 **Eastern Marsh Harrier** were at Ganghwa (NM, MS, MR, AT, CK), while 10 **Common Tern** were at Gangneung (CSK) - the largest or second largest known concentration of the species recorded in South Korea. On 23rd, 2 **Pomarine** and 6 **Arctic Skua** were recorded at sea between Incheon and Socheong island, while on Socheong Island there were single *lagopoda* **Northern House Martin** on the 24th (4th record: NM, MS), and on 25th, 2 **Flesh-footed Shearwater** *Puffinus carneipes* (NM), and single **Ashy Drongo** (ca 4th for South Korea: NM, MS, MR, AT, CK). On 26th, at sea between Socheong and Incheon, 1 or more probably 2 **South Polar Skua** were observed (3rd record for Korea: NM, MS, MR, AT, CK), along with an exceptionally high count of 400 **Common Tern** and 4 more **Pomarine Skua**.

In Cheorwon, the first returning **Cinereous Vulture** was noted at Yangji (BJH). On Jeju on 27th, the second **Pheasant-tailed Jacana** of the year (KGS) was recorded, while at Gangneung a **Collared Dove** was well-photographed (CSK); this taxon had perhaps not been recorded in South Korea for several years prior to 2 records in 2002. Also on 27th, Okku held at least 7 **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** and 2 **Nordmann’s/Spootted Greenshank** (NM/SWISS). On 28th, birds logged included 3 **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** at Okku, as well as **Greater Painted Snipe** and 2 **Nordmann’s/Spootted Greenshank**; 1 **Nordmann’s/Spootted Greenshank** at the Geum; 2-4 more **Nordmann’s/Spootted Greenshank** in the inner Geum; and 17 **Black-faced Spoonbill** and a flyby **Long-billed Dowitcher** (ca 10th national record) at the inner Dongjin. On 29th, again at Okku, ca 10 **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** and 2 **Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis*, while on 30th a **Common Starling**, an adult male **Pied Harrier**, 40+ **Pechora Pipit** and 2 **Nordmann’s/Spootted Greenshank** were logged at the inner Dongjin in the morning, followed by an adult **Lesser White-fronted Goose**, 28 000 **Baikal Teal**, a single **Chinese Grey Shrike** *Lanius sphenocercus* and a suspected **Western Marsh Harrier** or hybrid **Western x Eastern Marsh Harrier** at Seosan (all NM/Swiss).

**October**

The first half of the month remained mostly warm and anticyclonic, with light northwesterly winds, and only occasional rain in the northwest (e.g. on the 12th), followed by brief periods of the dry monsoon, with strengthening winds and cooler temperatures. Towards the end of the month, force 2 south-westerlies increased on the 26th to reach force 8 on the 27th and 28th (when the wind swung back to northwesterly), producing a small arrival of Korea’s first **Scaly-breasted Munia**. By 29th, maxima reached only 12 °C in the far northwest, recovering again to a very mild 17°C by month’s end.
Birding Highlights in October:

1st South Polar Skua (also on 12th, 24th, 26th [2] & 30th [2]), between Socheong Island and Incheon.

2nd Tree Pipit, Socheong Island.

8th Long-tailed Shrike, Gageo Island.

10th Presumed "Elisa's" Flycatcher, Daehueuskan Island.

18th-7 Canada Goose Branta canadensis minima, Cheorwon basin.

21st Last Black Drongo of the year, Hong Island.

27th-29th Arrival of Scaly-breasted Munia on Socheong and Hong Islands.

30th Massive movement of Coal Tit Parus ater, Socheong Island.

The first returning White-naped Crane were noted at Yangji, Cheorwon (BJH) on the 1st, while seabirds between Incheon and Socheong island the same day, included 1 Short-tailed Shearwater Puffinus tenuirostris, 1 South Polar, 5 Arctic and 7 Pomarine Skua, and on the 2nd from the island itself, single Flesh-footed and 2-4 Slender-billed Shearwaters, single Arctic and 8 Pomarine Skua (NM, SWISS). In addition, other migrants present included single House Swift (NM), Gray's Grasshopper Warbler (DP), Amur Falcon, Pied Harrier and Black Stork (NM, SWISS), 10-25 Chestnut-flanked White-eye Zosterops erythropleurus, 8 Red-throated Flycatcher (possibly the highest day count of the species in South Korea), and approximately the ninth Korean record of Tree Pipit (MS, PW, DB). On 3rd, another Pied Harrier and at least 5 Common Rosefinch were on Socheong, while from the ferry back to Incheon, 1 Short-tailed Shearwater and 9 Pomarine Skua (NM, SWISS) were logged. On 3rd also in Gangneung, 40 Russet Sparrow and again a single Collared Dove (CSK) were reported. On 4th, 42 Black-faced Spoonbill on Yeongjong, and 60 Swan Goose, 1 or more Lesser White-fronted Goose and 2 Black-faced Spoonbill were at the Han-Imjin, while on 5th at least 200 Swan and 5 Lesser White-fronted Geese and 3 White-naped Crane there, along with an Oriental White Stork briefly at Yeongjong (NM, MS, DP). On 5th (until at least the 10th) a Red Turtle Dove Streptopelia tranquebarica was on Daehueuskan Island (LGH, 10th PJG), while between Daehueuskan and Gageo islands, 2 more Pomarine Skua and 2000 Red-necked Phalarope (perhaps a record high count in recent years) were logged on the 6th, with 170 Grey-faced Buzzard Butastur indicus on the island itself, increasing to 600 on the 7th. Also on Gageo Island on 7th, 4 very late Pacific/Fork-tailed Swift and 3 swifts that appeared to show dark rumps were seen (there are still no confirmed records of Common Swift Apus apus in South Korea). On 8th, a single Amur Falcon and Long-tailed Shrike were found on Gageo (ca 10th record), and in the afternoon, a Yellow-legged Buttonquail was on Daehueuskan (all MR, PW, AT, CK, DB). On Daehueuskan Island on the 9th, there were 2 Baillon's Crake Porzana pusilla and a Greater Spotted Eagle Aquila clanga, while on the 10th, there was an adult male Red-throated Thrush and a presumed "Elisa's" Flycatcher (or possibly Beijing Flycatcher), the major differences from the illustration of female elisae in Robson [2000] being darker, plainer lores, stronger wingbars and fringed tertials, and more buffish-washed underparts (MR, PW, AT, CK, DB). This is the second claim known to Birds Korea of "Elisa's" Flycatcher (first being on Eocheong Island, 28th April 2002), and the best documented record though “odd” (presumed) Narcissus Flycatchers Ficedula narcissina are regularly noted. Also on 10th on Yeongjong up to 18 Chinese Egret, 7 Black-faced Spoonbill and 4 Nordmann's/Spotted Greenshank were seen (NM, WM). On 11th, there was one Nordmann's/Spotted Greenshank (NM, WM) on the Inner Dongjin, Saemangeum, 8 extremely late Pacific Swift on Daehueuskan (MR, PW, AT, CK, DB) and 180 000 Baikal Teal at Seosan (NM, SWISS). On 12th, a Bluethroat was at Seosan (KHT), and from the ferry out from Incheon to Socheong, another South Polar, 3 Arctic and 8 Pomarine Skua were observed, while on the island itself, 3 Pied Harrier, a migrant Japanese Wagtail Motacilla grandis, and on the sea.
there, 334 Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla pollicaris*, at least 25 Pomarine and 2 Arctic Skuas were counted in only an hour of sea-watching (NM, SWISS). On the 13th, 35 Grey-faced Buzzard, single Amur Falcon and eastern Imperial Eagle, and 25 Chestnut-flanked White-eye were on Socheong, while from the ferry from Socheong to Incheon there were 1 Short-tailed Shearwater, 4 Arctic and 36 Pomarine Skua. At Yeongjong on the 14th, 1-2 Greater Spotted Eagle moved west, and there were 18 Nordmann’s/Spotted Greenshank and 31 Saunders’s Gull at the southern roost, while at Ganghwa, still 55 Black-faced Spoonbill and 130 Saunders’s Gull, as well as a single Bluethroat (all NM, SWISS). On the Han-Imjin and upriver of there on the 15th, single Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, 2 Amur Falcon, 1 rather late Pied Harrier, 1 Lesser White-fronted Goose, 200+ Swan Goose and 30 White-naped Crane (with 107 there by 17th: CCY), while at Seosan on 16th, 1 Snow Goose, 2 Bluethroat and a juvenile-type Greater Spotted Eagle (NM, SWISS), the latter still present on 17th (KHT). On 17th, a single Grey-capped Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicollis* was at Gangneung, as well as a single Two-barred Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus (trockiloides) plumbeitarsus* (AT) - the latter very unusual away from island hotspots. At the Cheorwon basin on the 18th, 5-7 minima Canada Goose (adults with one first winter) were found in amongst a roost of 40 000+ Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons frontalis*, as well as 300 White-naped Crane (NM, SWISS). On the 19th at Gumi, 1 Hooded Crane were observed (LSW), while 870 Swan Goose surveyed at the Han-Imjin contained no less than 6 banded individuals (LKS). On 19th also there were both Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* and Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* logged at Seosan (KHT). On the 21st, the last Black Drongo of the year was found on Hong Island (PJG). 2 Hooded Crane were reported at Seosan on the 23rd (KSH), the same day 80 Hooded Crane and an Oriental White Stork were recorded at Gumi (LSW) and a White-naped Crane was also reported in the southeast, at Joonam (MIH). At Gumi on the 24th, 134 Hooded Crane arrived in the late afternoon (LSW), while the ferry journey from Incheon to Socheong produced an extremely high count of 600 Black-legged Kittiwake, 6 Pomarine and a single South Polar Skua, and along with significant numbers of migrant duck and geese, 2 less-than-expected Asiatic Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (a species now probably recorded annually in South Korea). On Socheong Island itself, raptors moving west in the afternoon included at least 22 Northern Goshawk, and an Amur Falcon (all NM). On the 25th, Coal Tit numbers on Socheong island had increased to an estimated 750, while there were also 39 Red-throated Flycatcher and the last Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* of the year reported. On the 26th on Socheon Island, single Pied Harrier, 1-2 Hume’s Warbler and 2 Dark-throated Thrush (NM) were logged, while at sea between Socheon and Incheon, a big concentration of seabirds included 600 Black-legged Kittiwake, 40 Pomarine (the highest day count in 2003), 2 South Polar and a single Arctic Skua (KDW, NKB). On the 27th, on Socheon Island, the Korean peninsula’s first Scaly-breasted Munia were found in gale-force south-westerlies - a group of seven moving rapidly east across the island (NM). These were followed on the 29th by 4 more Scaly-breasted Munia on Hong Island (PJG)- nearly 400 km to the south-southeast - and another sighting of 4 on Socheon island also on the 29th, along with an adult Upland Buzzard, the last reported Pied Harrier and Ashy Minivet *Pericrocotus diversicolor* of the autumn, and a first year male Red-throated Thrush. An owl seen briefly in the late evening appeared to be either a Barn *Tyto alba* or a Grass Owl *Tyto capensis* (NM) (neither of which had been recorded in Korea before the discovery of the latter species on Daeheuksan Island in December). On the 29th and 30th at Upo Ramsar site, an Oriental White Stork and the second Long-billed Dowitcher of the autumn were found, while 35 Hooded Crane passed south (KSK). On the 30th on Socheon, a huge movement of Coal Tit was recorded, with 3 200 counted moving northwest to sea in only one hour, joined by 5 Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* and up to 10 Siberian Accentor *Prunella montanella* (NM). As the movement continued unabated for several hours, probably in excess of 10 000 birds were involved. In addition, 2 more Dark-throated Thrush were also seen. On the ferry from Socheon to Incheon, again 2 South Polar and 12 Pomarine Skua were logged, along with 250 Black-legged Kittiwake (NM). On 31st, 1 Lesser White-fronted Goose was found in amongst 10 000 Greater White-fronted Goose at the Han-Imjin, while at Yeongjong in amongst 16 species of shorebird, there were still 100 Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, 50 Far Eastern Curlew and ca 10 000 Dunlin *Calidris alpinus* (NM, DB). At Seosan, a high count of 7 Common Starling were reported, along with a single Red-billed Starling (KHK).
November

The month started largely calm and anticyclonic, with fog along the west coast (perhaps helping to produce Korea’s second Verditer Flycatcher and its first White-capped Water Redstart) and clear conditions inland, but the weather deteriorated from the 7th, with overcast conditions and periods of heavy rain, until ca the 20th. The last third of the month was largely sunny with still above average temperatures, and little evidence of the arrival of mid-winter specials, but instead possibly new record high numbers of Baikal Teal.

Birding Highlights in November:

- **2nd** Verditer Flycatcher, Socheong Island.
- **3rd** White-capped Water Redstart, Hong Island. First for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.
- **22nd/23rd** Water Pipit, Jeju Island. First for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.
- **27th** Water Pipit, three, Daeheuksan Island.

On 1st, 6 Pomarine Skua were logged from the Incheon to Socheong ferry (NM, DB), with 6 also logged on 2nd, along with 1 or more probably 2 South Polar Skua (NM, DB, NKB, CYS). On Socheong Island, Korea’s second Verditer Flycatcher was found, along with an extremely late Blue-and-White Flycatcher (DB, NM), but these were overshadowed on the 3rd by the discovery of Korea’s first White-capped Water Redstart on Hong island (PJG): generally considered the most attractive addition to the Korean list in 2003! Also on 3rd, the last reported Brown Hawk Owl/Northern Boobook Ninox (scutulata) japonica of the autumn was at Seosan, along with single Rough-legged Buzzard, Snow Goose, Chinese Grey Shrike, and 81 White Spoonbill Platelea leucorodia (NM, DB), and an Oriental White Stork remained at Upo (KSK). On 7th the last Red-billed Starling of the autumn was on Hong island (PJG), while on 6th and 7th at Seosan, there were 2 Snow Goose, 42 Hooded Crane (NM) and 3 Oriental White Stork(KHT), along with 200 000 Baikal Teal, increasing to 270 000 - 330 000 by 12th. On 14th there, an adult Lesser White-fronted Goose and between 46 and 85 Hooded Crane (NM). On 16th a high count of 8 Oriental White Stork was made at Seosan (KHT), while on the Mangyeong, Saemangeum, there were 20 White Spoonbill and 3 Hooded Crane (JM, PN, ODP, BKJ), the latter considered very unusual in that area. At Gocheonnam Lake, Haenam, on 16th, a single Black Stork and Chinese Grey Shrike were found (NM), while Baikal Teal numbers exceeded 350 000 and probably reached 400 000 at Gocheonnam on 17th, when there were also 2 Hooded Crane, single Chinese Grey (remaining until at least the 22nd) and Long-tailed Shrike (ca 11th record only the third on the mainland). In addition there were Upland Buzzard on the 18th, and an eastern Imperial Eagle on the 19th (NM, BB, ER, MT). By the 19th too, 4 Black Stork had returned to Hampyong Bay (per KHT), increasing to 5 by the 21st (KSH), while at Seosan 3 were present between 19th and 21st (KYS per KHT), and one was also seen at Gocheonnam in the morning of the 21st (NM, ER) - this constitutes the first series of same-day sightings of this species in South Korea. Also at Gocheonnam, the Long-tailed Shrike remained until the 20th, closely followed by one on Jeju (at least between 22nd and 23rd: per PL), while on 21st an adult and on 22nd a juvenile-type Greater Spotted Eagle were at Gocheonnam (NM).
On 22nd-23rd (details still awaited), a **Water Pipit** was seen briefly at Seongsan Po, Jeju (likely constituting the first record of this species for the Korean peninsula: PL), and soon after this was followed by three together, on November 26th, on Daeheuksan island (PJG). Photographs and presumed distribution suggests the subspecies involved is most likely *blakistoni*. Also at Seongsan Po on 22nd or 23rd, there were 18 wintering **Black-faced Spoonbill**, and a **Pied Avocet** (at least the 4th record of the year), while elsewhere on Jeju, there was also a **Cinereous Vulture** (per PL). On 23rd, there were 7 **White-naped Crane** back at Joonam (NM, KSK), while 4 **Black-winged Stilt** remained at Upo until at least the 27th (KSK) - a very late date for this species.

**December**

Like most of the year, the month continued mild, with temperatures reaching above freezing throughout the country for most of the month. From mid-month, overnight temperatures gradually fell, with a low of ca -15°C recorded in central areas. Above average temperatures were matched by generally sunny conditions, with only occasional dry winter monsoon winds, allowing **Barn Swallows Hirundo rustica** to remain into December at Seosan, the Geum, and Haenam in the far southwest. There were several reports of **Chinese Grey Shrike**, but no reports received of **Chinese Nuthatch** and very few reports of **Relict Gull** and **Scaly-sided Merganser Mergus squamatus**.

**Birding Highlights in December**

- From 6th - 18th Claimed **Barrow's Goldeneye Bucephala islandica**, Danyang.
- 8th Presumed **American Herring Gull**, Guryongpo Peninsula.
- 16th **White-billed Diver Gavia adamsii**, at sea near Socheong Island.
- 25th **Grass Owl**, found dead on Daeheuksan Island. A first for South Korea and the Korean peninsula.

On 2nd at Seosan, 2 **Oriental White Stork** (increasing to 3 by 3rd), at least 1 and possibly as many as 10 **Lesser White-fronted Goose**, 2 **Black-faced Spoonbill** (at least one remaining until 9th: KHT) in with 25 **White Spoonbill**, and at least 1 000 **Lapland Bunting Calcarius lapponicus**. In addition, there was 1 **Barn Swallow** seen on the 2nd, followed by 2 on the 3rd - an extremely late date for this species (NM, CM, HU, AB), and a **Black Brant Branta bernicla nigricans** - the first in the area for about 6 years. A **Black Brant** found on the Han River in Seoul and remaining there for much of the month (WCJ) was even more exceptional. On 4th at Seosan, a new **Chinese Grey Shrike** (KHT) while on 4th and 5th at Gangneung, at least 1 **Solitary Snipe Gallinago solitaria**, a very late **White's Thrush** (unusual in mid-winter so far north), and 2 **Japanese Waxwing**(the first reported of the winter), while at Cheorwon Basin on 6th, 15 **Red-crowned** and 50 **White-naped Crane**, at least 435 **Cinereous Vulture**, 1 **Steller's** and 3 **White-tailed Eagles**, and a single **Chinese Grey Shrike** (all NM, CM, HU, AB). From 6th until 18th, a suspected **Barrow's Goldeneye** was at Danyang (DB), though unsupported by photographs and showing unexpected bill coloration. On 8th at Pohang, the regular wintering **Black Brant** flock contained only 5 individuals, while a brief check of gulls on the Guryongpo revealed one **Glaucous-winged** *Larus glaucescens* (NM, CM, HU, AB), and one presumed juvenile **American Herring Gull** (NM). On 9th, a **Lesser White-fronted Goose** was back
at the Joonam reservoirs (and photographed on 19th, when 2 were likely present: PJG), along with 2 Swan Goose, and a Siberian Rubythroat Luscinia calliope heard: the latter presumably the first December record of this migrant species (NM, CM). On the 10th at Daejeon, a single Scaly-sided Merganser was found with Common Merganser Mergus merganser (NM), followed by another on the Imjin River on the 12th (NM, HU, AB). On 11th, 415 Saunders’s Gull and 10 “Yellow Sea Gull” were at Song Do, and at least 4 Red-crowned Crane at Ganghwado (NM, HU, AB). At Hwasalpo, eastern DMZ, there were 2 adult Steller’s Sea Eagle (CSK), while on the Han-Imjin ca 400 Swan Goose were still present, along with 100 Cinereous Vulture and another Upland Buzzard (NM, HU, AB). On 12th, an eastern Imperial Eagle and ca 100 000 Baikal Teal were in the Haenam area (LJS). On 13th, from the ferry between Incheon and Baekryong Island, 3 probable Rhinoceros Auklet Cerorhinca monocerata were noted, while on the island itself on 13th there were 3 White-tailed Eagle, and a single Saunders’s Gull, and on 14th an immature Mute Swan (NM), the same date on which 18 Mute Swan were counted at Hwajin Po in the north-east (CSK). On 14th, at the Geum river, an estimated 300 000 Baikal Teal were present, along with 2 extremely late Black-tailed Godwit Limosa limosa (likely the first mid-winter record of this species) (JM, PN). On the 15th on Socheong Island, 3 Rhinoceros Auklet and an Upland Buzzard, while on 16th a Treecreeper Certhia familiaris was recorded on the island, and a juvenile-type White-billed Diver was seen from the ferry returning to Incheon (NM). Rarely recorded in Korea, tracking by satellite proves that at least some of the Alaskan-nesting population of White-billed Diver migrates across the peninsula to winter in the Yellow Sea. On 19th, there were 12 White-naped and 1 Hooded Crane at Joonam (MIH), 2 Snow Goose at the Han River (SHY), and on 23rd, 7 Oriental White Stork and 20 White Spoonbill at Gumho Lake (LJS). An estimated 200 000 Baikal Teal were also at Gocheonnam from the 19th (LJS) but with only 50 000 on 25th (LJS), while on 28th, more than 300 000 Baikal Teal were still estimated at the Geum (JM, PN).

On 25th, the twelfth and final “first” of the year was found - a Grass Owl, which was discovered freshly dead after very strong winds on Daeheuksan Island (PJG). Also on 25th an eastern Imperial Eagle was in the Haenam area, as were 8 overwintering Barn Swallow (LJS). On the 28th, 70 White Spoonbill were at Kumho Lake as was a single Oriental White Stork (LJS). On 29th, 12 Swan Goose were at the Nakdong estuary, along with 4 Relict Gull (NM, BH), 2 of which were also seen at Song Do (TE).
Observers referred to in the accounts in order of their listed records.

TA: Tim ALLISON
CSK: CHOI Soon Kyoo
KHT: KIM Hyun-tae
CH: Charles HESSE
KSK: KIM Su-Kyung
NM: Nial MOORES
MSU: Martin SUTHERLAND
CJS: CHOI Jong Soo
KJH: KIM Ju-Heon
KH: KWAK Ho-Kyeong
Ph/SUN: Paul HOLT and Sunbird tour group of December 2002
BB: Bill BOYLE
NY: NAKANO Yasunori
MK: MATSUOKA Keizo
YBR: YOON Byeong-Ryol
BW: Bob WALTON
PJY: PARK Jin-Young
PYW: PARK Yong Woo
KWS: KIM Woo-Soo
PC: Pete COMBRIDGE
SC: Susan COMBRIDGE
AR/BWB: Adam ROWLANDS/Birdwatching Breaks - tour company, with group members Ian DEARING, Keith and Ann POWRIE and BW.
JM: Jake MACLENNAN
GB: Gary BABIC
MB: Marlene BABIC
KDW: KIM Dong-Won
GC: Geoff CAREY
JK: Jon KIng
LKS: LEE Ki-Sup
LHS: LEE Hae-Soon
KKS: KWN Kyeong-Sook
LW: Lim Wantho
PJG: PARK Jong-Gil
PYU: PARK Yong-Uk
PHO: PARK Hyoung-Ock
PE: Philip EDWARDS
DB: Dennis BUSS
KEJ: KIM Eon Jung
KS: KAWAGUCHI Sentaro
KUM: KIM Un-Mi
KBS: KIM Byeong Su
BJ: Bjorn JOHANSSON
BP: Bo PETERSSON
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KSH: KIM Sung-Hyun
LKH: LEE Kyung Ho
PN: Peter NEBEL
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JB: Jo BIEKSZA
DW: David WHITELEY
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TE: Tim EDELSTEN
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LSW: LEE Sang Won
MIH: MO In Ho
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CYS: CHOI Yu-Seong
ODP: OH Dong-Pil
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BB: Barrie BRITTON
ER: Emma ROLFE
MT: MUTA Toshihiro
KYS: KIM Yeon-Soo
PL: Paul LEADER
CM: Charlie MOORES
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AB: Andre BROSSET
WCJ: WOO Jong Cheol
LJS: LEE Jong-Sik
SHY: SHIN Hwa Yong
BH: Barry HEINRICH

Again, many thanks to those who so willingly share their knowledge and their images - promoting awareness and helping the conservation of the birds and their highly threatened habitats.

References