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### **Introduction.**

Winter birding in East Asia is mostly associated with a trip to Japan and especially the northern island of Hokkaido. A less often visited, but equally exciting, destination is South Korea (Republic of Korea/ROK), which harbours many of the same birds as Japan but offers easier logistics.

Many of the most-wanted birds like **Stellers Sea Eagle**, **Cranes**, **Alcids** and **Gulls** occur in both countries, but ROK offers better chances of seeing species like **Scaly-sided Merganser**, **Saunders's** and **Relict Gull**, **Daurian Jackdaw**, **Naumann's Thrush**, **Siberian Accentor** and **Pallas's Reed Bunting**, without too much time spent travelling between sites.

A trip to ROK in winter could be done without using ferries or airplanes, except if visiting Jeju, and a round trip of the country can be squeezed down to 7-8 days, though more would be ideal for a thorough search of the many wetlands and small harbours along the coast.

Only few people speak any English, but a friendly smile and some sign language goes a long way.

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## Useful literature, websites and maps.

Bird identification is best covered in *Birds of East Asia* by Mark Brazil.

For general travel and background *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guide* are equally good, but not essential, as they don't really cover the usual birding areas.

The website of Birds Korea [www.birdskorea.org](http://www.birdskorea.org) is a goldmine of information when planning a trip, with a number of [trip reports](#), [identification papers](#) and an [archive](#) of monthly observations going back to 2002.

The available travelmaps of South Korea are next to useless, as they are not up-to-date on the many road- and bridge-constructions, or even the large reclamation-projects, and the scale is much too large to be of use when navigating around the country. For general planning I found the Korea Tourist Map available for free at [www.visitkorea.or.kr](http://www.visitkorea.or.kr) to be the most current, but otherwise I found Googlemap to be the best source for printing my own maps. If renting a car get a SatNav/GPS (see below).

## Getting there and around.

We flew Finnair (Copenhagen – Helsinki – Incheon) which arrived at 8.15 am., leaving a good part of the initial day for birding. Booking early we were able to purchase tickets at a reasonable 550 EUR, but airline prices usually range from 750-800 EUR from Europe.

We had booked a car online through Avis (314 EUR for 8 days), and chose a group F car (Kia K5) to have plenty of space for 4 persons incl. luggage (scopes, tripods, winter clothing). A GPS/Satnav in English was rented with the car (48000 KRW/8 days), which was essential when driving the many new roads and expressways, as there are no useful and up-to-date maps available.

Road standards in ROK are good to excellent, and road signs are both in Korean and English, and it was only around the big cities like Seoul and Busan that traffic was heavy. A network of expressways (toll, but not expensive) makes it easy and time efficient to cover longer distances. Speed cameras are common, but are both signed in advance and announced on the GPS, so won't be a problem. At the time of our visit the price of gasoline was 1900 KRW/liter.

## Money.

The currency in ROK is the Korean Won (KRW) and during our trip the exchange rate was 1USD~1000KRW.

Payments for accomodation, gasoline and food at convenience stores can usually be made with Visa or Mastercard, but highway tolls must be paid in cash. It is easiest to either exchange cash or make ATM withdrawals at Incheon Airport, as ATM's in convenience stores have a rather low limit.

## Accommodation and food.

One of the joys of travelling in South Korea is the abundance of good and relatively cheap accomodation in just about any larger town. The so-called Love Motels are not as seedy as they may sound, but provide good and clean rooms, including internet access and hot water for coffee. They can be located from a distance when arriving at a town, as they advertise with bright neon signs on the roofs, and usually cost around 50-60.000 KRW/night.

Food is also easy to find, as small convenience-stores are found by the dozen in every town and city, many open 24 hours, selling snacks, biscuits, hot coffee and soft drinks, and for dinner we usually found a local restaurant near the motel.

## Guiding.

We were guided by Nial Moores on the last 3 days of the trip, to optimize our chances of seeing some of the more localized species (**Scaly-sided Merganser**, **Relict Gull** and **Long-billed Murrelet**) in the short time we had available. He has lived and birded in the ROK since 1998 and is not only an excellent guide, but also great company with a good sense of humour. He can be contacted through [Birds Korea](http://Birds Korea).

## Weather.

Winters are usually fairly cold, and January especially so, though it is usually somewhat milder in the southern part of the contry. On our second day we had light rain turning to sleet, which made for interesting driving conditions in the far north around Cheorwon, but otherwise it was generally dry and overcast. Only on the last three days did we have bright and sunny weather. The downside to this was a bitterly cold northern wind, with night temperatures below -10°C, and just below freezing during the middle of the day, not accounting for the wind-chill!

## Sites visited.

GPS coordinates for most of the sites are taken from GoogleEarth, so might be a little off, but will provide a clue to the general area.

### Seoul area:

- **New Golf Course/Songdo** (37°22'09.83"N 126°38'01.41"E) – we were not allowed to enter this site, but found a small patch of degraded forest and an adjacent reservoir, a little further to the southeast along the seawall. Good place to start out after arriving in Incheon, as it is only 20-25 minutes drive from the airport, and held a nice mix of more common waterbirds and passerines.
- **Old Golf Course/Songdo** (37°24'47.01"N 126°38'44.63"E) - accessed by entering a lorry parking lot on a right hand curve of Route 77, going north. A nice looking site with plenty of degraded forest and undergrowth, good for wintering passerines.
- **Songdo Gull roost** (37°23'02.73"N 126°41'59.89"E) - a difficult site to access, as it involves all kinds of U-turns and illegal parking. The best viewing is from grassy slope, beneath the toll booth at the Red/Japanese Bridge going south on Route 77. The most reliable site for **Relict Gull**, and also excellent for **Saunders's Gull**, but timing is essential, as the gulls are only present on the rising tide.
- **Hangang River north of the Paldang Bridge** (37°33'54.80"N 127°12'59.89"E) at Hanam – the western bank was accessed from Route 45 along a sideroad north of the Motorboat Sports Park, and the eastern side could be viewed from restaurant car parks along Route 6 north of the Paldang bridge. The best place to look for **Steller's Sea Eagle** in Seoul with at least 4 different birds around this winter, and also good for waterbirds and passerines.
- **National Arboretum/Gwangneum** (37°45'26.01"N 127°10'08.08"E) closed Sunday and Monday. The small river, where **Solitary Snipe** are present in winter, can be viewed from the busy road, or from the first turn off north of the second bridge. The Arboretum is also a good place for **Pallas's Rosefinch** (fed by photographers) and **Woodpeckers** – when open!.
- **Cheorwon** in the far north, near the DMZ, has open farmland where **Cinereous Vulture**, **White-naped** and **Red-crowned Cranes** are present in winter. The best sites are inside the DMZ, and can only be visited with a guide.
- **Ilsan Lake Park** (37°39'32.50"N 126°45'53.02"E) – an urban park, with a large (frozen) lake and good woodlots, attracting **Waxwings**, **Thrushes** and also **Chinese Nuthatch** this winter. Easily accessed from Hwy 100 north of the Hangang River at Gimpo.



*White-naped Crane family at Cheorwon and Hangang River (west side) behind the Motorboat Sports Park.*

### West Coast.

- **Seosan Lake A** (36°37'05.39"N 126°27'05.69"E) – a large reclamation area south of Seosan, where Cheonsu Bay has been barraged, creating two lakes, A to the east, and B to the west. We birded the eastern lake, especially the rice fields to the west of the lake. Good for **Geese** and **Buntings**.
- **Geum River and Estuary** near Gunsan (36°01'41.87"N 126°46'31.23"E) – a broad river, barraged just east of Gunsan. The river upstream of the barrage is one of the classic sites for huge roosting flocks of **Baikal Teal**, but only 5 birds were seen on our visit! A road runs next to the river on the southern bank, and viewing is possible from the top of the dike. Downstream from the barrage are large tidal flats with lots of shorebirds and duck, best viewed from the Gunsan side on rising tides.



- **Wolmyeong Park** (35°58'44.65"N 126°41'27.82"E) Gunsan – large urban park surrounding a reservoir, with pine forest in the northern part and more deciduous forest around the reservoir. Good for a few hours with common forest birds, but also a surprise **Grey Bunting**!

#### South Coast.

- **Kuncho Gammun/Geumho-ri** (?) (34°41'37.66"N 126°21'35.18"E) - a random stop at a sandy bay along Route 806 south of Mokpo, which turned out to be an excellent site, with **Eastern Imperial Eagle** and **Saunders's Gulls**, at least until a hunting **Peregrine Falcon** nearly emptied the place of birds.
- **Gocheonam Lake** (34°31'10.41"N 126°27'53.45"E) southwest of Haenam – large barraged lake surrounded by extensive rice fields, with many **Duck** and **Geese** and a mix of **Reed Buntings** in the reedbeds.
- **Suncheon Bay** (34°53'11.55"N 127°30'37.96"E) – an area at the northwestern end of the bay has been made into a Crane-feeding site, with visitors centre and boardwalks, but the **Hooded Cranes** are seen just as easy in fields surrounding the centre.
- **Joonam Reservoir** (35°18'39.32"N 128°40'48.62"E) – mostly frozen lake (good for **Duck**) surrounded by extensive rice fields with **White-naped Cranes** coming to night roost on the ice.
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*Gocheonam Lake rice fields and Pallas's Reed Bunting.*

#### East Coast.

- **Gyeongju** (35°51'13.01"N 129°12'02.92"E) – an hours drive north of Busan, provided good bird at scattered sites along the Hyeongsang River both north and south of the city. The general area is good for wintering **Corvids** including **Daurian Jackdaw**.
- **Guryongpo Peninsula** (36°05'06.50"N 129°33'15.19"E) – many small fishing harbours and viewpoints all along the coast around this rocky peninsula, with large rafts of **Divers** and **Grebes**, a steady stream of **Alcids** offshore and **Gulls** and **Harlequin Ducks** in and around the harbours.
- **North River** – not strictly on the East Coast but visited while heading north. A regular wintering site for **Scaly-sided Merganser**, but as the species is sensitive to disturbance, best visited with a guide.
- **Geojin-ri** (38°26'59.70"N 128°27'53.88"E) – small fishing port north of Sokcho, with a bitterly cold headland, from where the seawatching was excellent, especially for **Alcids**. The forest on the headland also had good numbers of **Pallas's Rosefinch**.
- **Daejin-ri** (38°30'13.18"N 128°25'43.78"E) – another small fishing harbour, with good seawatching from the lighthouse. Broad sandy bays here were good for **Black Scoter** and **Cinereous Vultures** patrolled the coastline.
- **Yongnang Lake** (38°13'08.72"N 128°35'07.20"E) in Sokcho – a mostly frozen lake, but held a few **Duck**, including the first **Bufflehead** for South Korea.
- **Yangyang** (38°05'33.18"N 128°38'34.00"E) south of Sokcho – the lower reaches of the Yangyang River can be viewed from roads running parallel to the river on both sides, and the site is a good place for **Steller's Sea Eagle** and **Chinese Grey Shrike**.
- A **pelagic off the NE coast** on a chartered fishingboat had been planned, but this had to be cancelled due to the weather. Going up to 10 km offshore the main aim of this trip would have been closer looks at **Alcids**, perhaps adding **Least Auklet** furthest out.

## Itinerary.

- 20 Jan. - arrival at INC early morning, then Songdo (New Golf Course), and in late afternoon Hangang River (Hanam side). Night in Hanam.
- 21 Jan. - Hangang River (Paldang side) in morning, then National Arboretum at Gwangneum, before driving north to Cheorwon area for large part of afternoon. Night in Uijeongbu.
- 22 Jan. - morning spent at Ilsan Lake Park, before driving south. Early afternoon around Seosan Lake A, and the last couple of hours of daylight at Geum River estuary at Gunsan. Night in Gunsan.
- 23 Jan. - because of mist and drizzle in the morning, we first went to Wolmyeong Park in the center of Gunsan, before visiting the Geum estuary again. In the afternoon we travelled further south, trying unsuccessfully to find interesting habitat north of Buan. South of Mokpo we made a random stop at a sandy bay along Route 806 (Kuncho Gammun?) before going to Gocheonam Lake near Haenam. Night in Haenam.
- 24 Jan. - visited Gocheonam Lake (mainly eastern side) in the morning, before continuing to the **Hooded Crane** site at Suncheon Bay. The last hour was spent at Joonam Reservoir. Night in Myeongji near Nakdong estuary, Busan).
- 25 Jan. - met up with Nial Moores at 6 am, before going north to bird different sites along the Hyeongsang River around Gyeongju. In the afternoon we birded a number of harbours and headlands on the Goryongpo peninsula. Night in Chungju.
- 26 Jan. - birded North River for **Scaly-sided Merganser** in the morning, before driving to Songdo in time for afternoon high tide. Visited Old Golf Course briefly before heading for the gull roost. Night in Gangneung.
- 27 Jan. - all day birding NE coast, seawatching from headlands at Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri for the first half of the day, before 'persuading' Nial to twitch **Bufflehead** in Sokcho. Last stop was Yangyang, where we birded the river mouth and a few km inland along the northern bank. Night in hotel near INC airport.
- 28 Jan. - departure late morning.

## Annotated species list.

The following is a list of the birds seen during this trip. The sequence follows **Birds of East Asia**, but in some cases I use different names, that are more commonly used by birders.

**Japanese Quail** (*Coturnix japonica*) – two birds were flushed at Seosan Lake A, and a further 2-3 birds were flushed around Gocheonam Lake.

**Ring-necked Pheasant** (*Phasianus colchicus karpowi*) – singles heard/seen at several sites.

**Taiga Bean Goose** (*Anser fabalis middendorffii*) – after some searching we finally found 10+ birds in amongst Tundra's at Gocheonam Lake, and a few were also seen at Suncheon Bay.

**Tundra Bean Goose** (*Anser serrirostris*) – common (100+) at several sites along the coast, from Gimpo at Seoul, through Seosan Lake A, Gocheonam Lake and Suncheon Bay.  
Birds tended to be somewhat shy, not usually allowing approach closer than 250 meters.

**Greater White-fronted Goose** (*Anser albifrons frontalis*) – the most numerous goose, with 250+ at Seosan Lake A and 500+ at Geum Estuary and Gocheonam Lake. Two birds were also seen inland at North River.

**Black Brant** (*Branta bernicla nigricans*) – a lone bird was feeding on seaweed (?) around fishing nets off northern Guryongpo Peninsula.

**Whooper Swan** (*Cygnus cygnus*) – 25 at Hangang River/Paldang, 60 at Joonam Reservoir, 30 at North River and 10 birds at Yangyang River.

**Common Shelduck** (*Tadorna tadorna*) – 4 birds were found at both Geum and Gocheonam Lake.

**Ruddy Shelduck** (*Tadorna ferruginea*) – 4 birds inland at North River and 10+ at Songdo Lagoon.

**Gadwall** (*Anas strepera*) – a few at Geum Estuary, 500 at Gocheonam Lake and 50 on the river at Gyeongju.

**Falcated Duck** (*Anas falcata*) – not as widespread as expected, with only 3 birds at Gocheonam Lake, 10 on the river at Gyeongju and 2 at North River.

**Eurasian Wigeon** (*Anas penelope*) – seen at a few wetlands, with up to 25 at Gocheonam Lake.

**Mallard** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – the most numerous dabbling duck, with up to 500+ seen at Seosan Lake A, Geum Estuary, Gocheonam Lake and North River. A little more unusual was 300 birds roosting on the frozen surface of a reservoir at Cheorwon.

**Eastern Spot-billed Duck** (*Anas zonorhyncha*) – seen commonly at most wetlands. Most numerous at Seosan Lake A and Gocheonam Lake with 150+ birds.

**Northern Shoveler** (*Anas chlypeata*) – one bird on the reservoir at New Golf Course/Songdo and two at Geum River.

**Northern Pintail** (*Anas acuta*) – up to 35 birds at Geum River and Joonam Reservoir, with 4 birds inland at North River.

**Baikal Teal** (*Anas formosa*) – 5 birds were seen distantly at the Geum River, with another 2 found at Joonam Reservoir.

No large flocks had been found this winter in South Korea, but a few days after we left, a flock of 250,000 birds were finally found in the Saemangeum area.

**Eurasian Teal** (*Anas crecca*) – fairly common at several wetlands, with up to 75 at Geum River.

**Common Pochard** (*Aythya ferina*) – seen at most wetlands, with up to 55 on the reservoir at New Golf Course/Songdo and 75 at Geum Estuary.

**Tufted Duck** (*Aythya fuligula*) – 25 on Hangang River/Paldang and 20 at Gyeongju.

**Greater Scaup** (*Aythya marila nearctica*) – 15 birds were seen on Yongnang Lake in Sokcho.

**Harlequin Duck** (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) – 60+ were seen around the Guryongpo Peninsula and another 6 were seen off Daejin-ri.

**White-winged Scoter** (*Melanitta deglandi stejnegeri*) – seven birds were seen at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo and 12 were off Geojin-ri.



*Seawatching on Guryongpo Peninsula and the Icelandic Gull.*

**Black Scoter** (*Melanitta americana*) – only seen in the broad sandy bays around Daejin-ri in small flocks numbering around 75 birds in all.

**Bufflehead** (*Bucephala albeola*) – a beautiful drake was successfully twitched at Yongnang Lake in Sokcho, where it had been discovered the previous day. The bird accompanied **Common Goldeneyes** and was a first record for ROK.

**Common Goldeneye** (*Bucephala clangula*) – present on most wetlands with a maximum of 350 on the Hangang River/Paldang.

**Smew** (*Mergellus albellus*) – widespread in low numbers on many lakes and rivers, with most (75) on Joonam Reservoir, where many roosted half hidden amongst the reeds.

**Common Merganser** (*Mergus merganser*) – seen on most lakes and rivers, with up to 300 on Hangang River/Paldang and 50 at Geum River and North River.

**Red-breasted Merganser** (*Mergus serrator*) – a few seen at Songdo and Gunsan, but more common on the East coast, with 30 on the Guryongpo Peninsula and 100+ off Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Scaly-sided Merganser** (*Mergus squamatus*) – on North River 3♂♂ and 4♀♀ were watched for half an hour feeding undisturbed, except for the occasional hunting White-tailed Sea Eagle, and another pair was seen a little further upstream.

**Red-throated Diver** (*Gavia stellata*) – only two birds were seen at Guryongpo Peninsula, but there were large rafts of unidentified Divers further offshore.

**Black-throated Diver** (*Gavia arctica*) – large rafts of divers (250+) off the Guryongpo Peninsula were presumably mostly this species, as were 50+ off Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Pacific Diver** (*Gavia pacifica*) – only three birds positively ID'ed on the Guryongpo Peninsula, of which two were oiled birds that had sought shelter inside harbours.

**White-billed Diver** (*Gavia adamsii*) – in the Northeast one bird was seen briefly at Geojin-ri, and another gave prolonged, but distant, views at Daejin-ri.

**Little Grebe** (*Tachybaptus ruficollis poggei*) – of the pale-eyed ssp. *poggei*, 6 were on the reservoir at New Golf Course/Songdo, 2 on Gocheonam Lake and 3 at Gyeongju.

**Red-necked Grebe** (*Podiceps grisegena*) – common off the East coast, with 30 off Guryongpo Peninsula and 20+ off Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Great Crested Grebe** (*Podiceps cristatus*) – with the exception of one bird on Gocheonam Lake, only seen along the coast, with up to 25 at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo, 200+ off Guryongpo Peninsula and 25+ off Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Horned Grebe** (*Podiceps auritus*) – 16 birds were seen off Guryongpo Peninsula and two off Geojin-ri.

**Black-necked Grebe** (*Podiceps nigricollis*) – 5 birds were off the barrage at Seosan Lake A and another two were seen at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo.

**Eurasian Spoonbill** (*Platalea leucorodia*) – at the Wetland Center at Suncheon Bay two birds were feeding on the mudflats, and out of a distant, flying flock of 13, at least one (and probably all) was also this species.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – a single first-winter bird was seen at Joonam Reservoir.

**Grey Heron** (*Ardea cinerea*) – a few seen around most wetlands, with up to 15 at Geum Estuary and North River.

**Great White Egret** (*Casmerodius albus*) – despite freezing conditions still surprisingly widespread, especially in the south, with only one seen in the far north at Uijeongbu. The largest group was 80 birds on a shingle-island in North River.

**Little Egret** (*Egretta garzetta*) – one bird at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo and 9 at Suncheon Bay.

**Great Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*) – a few seen near Seoul, 50 at Geum Estuary and two on Gocheonam Lake.

**Temminck's Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) – common along the rocky east coast, with 85 on Guryongpo Peninsula and 150 around Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Pelagic Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – common along the NE coast, with 50+ at Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Eurasian Kestrel** (*Falco tinnunculus*) – only 5 scattered singles seen.

**Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*) – singles seen at Gimpo, Seosan Lake A, Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo, Gocheonam Lake, Gyeongju, Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

The bird at Kuncho Gammun gave an impressive performance hunting **Black-headed Gulls**, while the bird at Geojin-ri successfully caught a **Common Gull** offshore.

**White-tailed Sea Eagle** (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) – 5 birds at Hangang River/Paldang, 1 at Cheorwon, 1 Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo soaring with **Eastern Imperial Eagle**, 2 Gyeongju, 4-5 at North River, 1 Geojin-ri and 2 at Yangyang River.

**Steller's Sea Eagle** (*Haliaeetus pelagicus*) – at Hangang River/Paldang two adults and one immature were seen on the ice behind the Motorboat Sports Club, but up to three adults had been present here this winter. A 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird was seen in flight at Yangyang River.

**Cinereous Vulture** (*Aegypius monachus*) – at Cheorwon only two (grounded) birds were found during heavy sleet, with singles seen at Gyeongju and North River and at Daejin-ri 4 birds were soaring along the coast.

**Hen Harrier** (*Circus cyaneus*) – singles seen at Hangang River/Paldang, Seosan Lake A, Gocheonam Lake, Gyeongju and North River.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** (*Accipiter nisus*) – scattered singles seen at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo, Gyeongju, Guryongpo Peninsula and North River.

**Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*) – singles seen at Gocheonam Lake and North River.

**Eastern Buzzard** (*Butea japonicus*) – singles seen commonly throughout.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** (*Buteo lagopus*) – single birds were found at Seosan Lake A, Gyeongju and at Yangyang.



*Heuglin's Gull and Mongolian Gull, Gunsan.*

**Eastern Imperial Eagle** (*Aquila heliaca*) – during a random stop to look at Gulls at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo one adult was suddenly found soaring above the hillside behind the beach. Apparently this is a returning individual.

**Eastern Water Rail** (*Rallus indicus*) – at Gocheonam Lake one bird was seen briefly in flight over the reedbeds.

**Common Moorhen** (*Gallinula chloropus*) – a couple of birds at the Suncheon Bay visitors centre.

**Eurasian Coot** (*Fulica atra*) – seen at a few scattered sites, with 5 at Hangang River/Paldang, 15 Gocheonam Lake, 25 Gyeongju and 15 at Yongnang Lake/Sokcho.



**White-naped Crane** (*Grus vipio*) – at least 45 birds, mostly in small family groups, were found at Cheorwon, and at Joonam Reservoir 116 came in to roost for the night on the ice-covered lake. One of the birds at Cheorwon wore a green plastic ring, probably originating from a Russian ringing scheme.

**Common Crane** (*Grus grus lilfordi*) – one 1<sup>st</sup> winter bird associated loosely with **Hooded Cranes** at Suncheon bay.

**Hooded Crane** (*Grus monacha*) – at the Suncheon Bay visitors centre 150+ birds were present, and could both be viewed from blinds at the centre (distant) or in the surrounding fields.

Amongst the **Hooded Cranes** were also 1-2 hybrids of **HoodedXCommon Crane**, being the size of **Common Crane** but ghostly pale without the black markings on nape and throat.



*HoodedXCommon Crane hybrid behind Hooded Cranes at Suncheon Bay*

**Red-crowned Crane** (*Grus japonensis*) – two pairs were seen in the Cheorwon area.

**Eurasian Oystercatcher** (*Haematopus ostralegus osculans*) – four birds were seen on the mudflats at the Geum Estuary.

The far eastern ssp. *osculans* is sometimes split as **Eastern Oystercatcher**.

**Northern Lapwing** (*Vanellus vanellus*) – one bird at Suncheon Bay and 2 at North River.

**Grey Plover** (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – at least 1000 birds gathered on the mudflats at the Geum Estuary on the rising tide.

**Long-billed Plover** (*Charadrius placidus*) – 4 birds were observed at North River.

**Kentish Plover** (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) – 25+ birds at the Geum Estuary.

**Lesser Sand Plover** (*Charadrius mongolus*) – at Geum Estuary a single plover amongst the distant Kentish Plovers was slightly larger and showing heavier brown markings on the breast.

**Solitary Snipe** (*Gallinago solitaria*) – 5 birds were seen in the river at the National Arboretum, Gwangneum. Despite the Arboretum being closed, it was fairly easy to find the birds, by scanning the river north of the entrance from the main road.

**Eurasian Curlew** (*Numenius arquata orientalis*) – at the Geum Estuary 300 birds gathered on the rising tide, and at the Songdo mudflats another 500 were seen.

**Green Sandpiper** (*Tringa ochropus*) – a few birds were found where running water prevented ice cover, with one at National Arboretum/Gwangneum, 1 Gyeongju and 3 at North River.

**Sanderling** (*Calidris alba*) – 17 birds were roosting on an offshore rock at the Guryongpo Peninsula.

**Dunlin** (*Calidris alpina*) – 5000 birds were on the mudflats at the Geum Estuary and one bird was seen at Songdo.

**Black-tailed Gull** (*Larus crassirostris*) – a few birds were seen at the fishing harbour in Gunsan, but common on the Guryongpo Peninsula and at the NE coast.

**Common Gull** (*Larus canus*) – seen in low numbers at a number of coastal sites, but common off the NE coast. The eastern ssp *kamtschatschensis*, is sometimes split as **Kamchatka Gull**.

**Glaucous-winged Gull** (*Larus glaucescens*) – two birds were found on the Guryongpo Peninsula and 1-2 were also seen at Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Glaucous Gull** (*Larus hyperboreus*) – four birds were seen around the small harbour at Daejin-ri and another bird was at Geojin-ri.

**Iceland Gull** (*Larus glaucoides*) – one adult bird was found on the Guryongpo Peninsula.

Several birds have been recorded in ROK, but as *kumleni*-type birds would be more expected, it's probably not possible to rule out a very pale-end **Kumlien's Gull**.

A similar looking bird was observed on the Guryongpo Peninsula in [2010](#) (rather large-billed), so it might be a returning bird?

**Vega Gull** (*Larus vegae*) – fairly common at the fishing harbour in Gunsan, but more numerous at sites along the East coast.

**Mongolian Gull** (*Larus mongolicus*) – the most widespread of the large white-headed gulls, and often also seen on inland lakes and along rivers.

**Slaty-backed Gull** (*Larus schistisagus*) – a few were seen at the fishing harbour in Gunsan, but much more numerous moving north along the East coast, where it was common around Geojin-ri and Daejin-ri.

**Heuglin's Gull** (*Larus heuglini taimyrensis*) – single birds seen at Songdo, Gunsan and Gocheonam Lake but more numerous on the Guryongpo Peninsula.

**Relict Gull** (*Ichthyaeetus relictus*) – 8 birds were seen at the hightide roost at Songdo.

**Black-headed Gull** (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) – common at most coastal sites.

**Saunders's Gull** (*Saundersilarus saundersi*) – 29 birds were seen at the Geum Estuary, 48 at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo, 2 at Suncheon Bay and 3 at Songdo. At the latter site 224 were counted a few days earlier and 274 a couple of days later!

One of the birds at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo was marked with a numbered, red flag, probably originating from a Chinese ringing programme.

**Brünnich's Guillemot** (*Uria lomvia*) – off Geojin-ri at least four birds were seen.

**Common Guillemot** (*Uria aalge*) – two birds found off Geojin-ri.

**Spectacled Guillemot** (*Cepphus carbo*) – 2-3 birds seen off the headland at Geojin-ri.

**Long-billed Murrelet** (*Brachyramphus perdix*) – off Geojin-ri one distant (close to un-tickable) bird was found initially, but fortunately another, closer, bird was seen a little later.

**Ancient Murrelet** (*Synthliboramphus antiquus*) – 40+ birds were seen around the Guryongpo Peninsula and at Daejin-ri another 4 birds were found.

**Rhinoceros Auklet** (*Cerorhinca monocerata*) – fairly common off the Guryongpo Peninsual with 45+ birds seen.

**Oriental Turtle Dove** (*Streptopelia orientalis orientalis*) – fairly common throughout, often with larger flocks seen near rice fields.

**Hoopoe** (*Upupa epops*) – one unseasonal bird was found near Gyeongju.

**Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker** (*Yungipicus kizuki*) – a single bird near Gyeongju and another two at Geojin-ri.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** (*Dendrocopos major japonicus*) – single birds found at both New and Old Golf Course/Songdo, Geojin-ri and at Yangyang.

**Grey-headed Woodpecker** (*Picus canus jessoensis*) – one ♀ was seen at Ilsan Lake Park and another two were found at Gocheonam Lake.



*Saunders' Gulls, Mokpo and Oriental Turtle Dove, Suncheon Bay.*

**Bull-headed Shrike** (*Lanius bucephalus*) – singles seen almost daily at scattered sites.

**Chinese Grey Shrike** (*Lanius sphenocercus*) – one bird was seen perched and in flight at Yangyang.

**Eurasian Jay** (*Garrulus glandarius brandtii*) – singles seen at National Arboretum/Gwangneum, Cheorwon and North River.

**Azure-winged Magpie** (*Cyanopica cyanus*) – 2 birds at Cheorwon, 3 birds near Buan, 15 at Gocheonam Lake, 5+ at North River and 10+ at Old Golf Course/Songdo.

**Eurasian Magpie** (*Pica pica sericea*) – common throughout.

**Daurian Jackdaw** (*Coloeus dauuricus*) – only found around Gyeongju where 15+ were seen amongst Rooks.

**Rook** (*Corvus frugilegus pastinator*) – 150+ seen around Gyeongju.  
Another one of those potential splits - **Eastern Rook**.

**Carion Crow** (*Corvus corone orientalis*) – four birds at Han River/Paldang.  
The ssp. *orientalis* is sometimes split at **Oriental Crow**.

**Large-billed Crow** (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) – common at Han River/Paldang and Cheorwon with 35+ birds and a few were also seen at Gyeongju and on the Guryongpo Peninsula.

**Bohemian Waxwing** (*Bombycilla garrulus*) – 20-25 birds were seen at Ilsan Lake Park, where they had unfortunately replaced the Japanese Waxwings, that were found here the previous week.

**Eastern Great Tit** (*Parus minor*) – common at most wooded sites, though also seen in bushes far out in the rice fields of Seosan lake A.

**Coal Tit** (*Periparus ater*) – four birds seen at both Ilsan Lake Park and Geojin-ri.

**Marsh Tit** (*Poecile palustris jeholicus*) – common at Cheorwon, with a few seen at Ilsan Lake Park, North River and Geojin-ri.

The calls of these eastern birds can sound remarkably like Willow Tit. Sometimes split as **Eastern Marsh Tit** *Poecile brevirostris*.

**Eurasian Skylark** (*Alauda arvensis*) – two birds seen in stubble fields at Seosan Lake A and 5 flushed at Gocheonam Lake, sounded like this species.

**Japanese Skylark** (*Alauda arvensis japonica*) – around Gyeongju 5+ birds were primarily heard-only, as they flew overhead.

**Zitting Cisticola** (*Cisticola juncidis*) – 3 birds seen at Gocheonam Lake.

**Brown-eared Bulbul** (*Microscelis amaurotis*) – fairly common, and noisy, around towns and forested sites.

**Vinous-throated Parrotbill** (*Paradoxornis webbianus*) – lively feeding flocks, sometimes large, were often found around reedbeds and areas with heavy undergrowth. Most numerous at Gocheonam Lake (75+), Suncheon Bay (50+) and North River (50).

**Goldcrest** (*Regulus regulus japonensis*) – a few seen at Ilsan Lake Park and Wolmeyong Park, Gunsan.

**Eurasian Nuthatch** (*Sitta europaea amurensis*) – four birds at Cheorwon, and singles at Ilsan Lake Park and Geojin-ri.



*Chinese Nuthatch, Ilsan Lake Park.*

**Chinese Nuthatch** (*Sitta villosa*) – at Ilsan Lake Park one bird was seen in an area of pine trees, feeding both on the ground and on the trees alongside Coal Tits.

Birds have been recorded throughout the country after a large irruption during autumn.

**White-cheeked Starling** (*Sturnus cineraceus*) – pairs were seen near Seosan and Suncheon Bay.

**Naumann's Thrush** (*Turdus naumanni*) – seen regularly in low numbers at sites throughout the country, with most (8) at Ilsan Lake Park feeding on berries with **Waxwings**. A few possible hybrids with **Dusky Thrush** were also seen.



**Dusky Thrush** (*Turdus eunomus*) – not as common as **Naumann's Thrush**, but seen almost daily, sometimes alongside **Naumann's's**. Most were seen around Gocheonam Lake, with 10+ birds.

**Daurian Redstart** (*Phoenicurus aureus*) – seen regularly and throughout, though mostly in low numbers, except 4 birds at Ilsan Lake Park.

**Red-bellied Rock Thrush** (*Monticola philippensis*) – one 2cy. ♂ was found at Daejin-ri.

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** (*Passer montanus*) – common at many sites.

**Siberian Accentor** (*Prunella montanella*) – one bird at New Golf Course /Songdo, 3 at Gyeongju, 2 at North River and 2 at Daejin-ri. Probably more numerous than this, but because of cold, windy weather, birds tended to keep low.

**White Wagtail** (*Motacilla alba*) – 1-2 heard/flight only at Hangang River/Paldang, Seosan Lake A, Guryongpo Peninsula, North River and NE coast.

**East Siberian Wagtail** (*M. a. ocularis*) – 2 birds at both Suncheon Bay and at Gyeongju.

**Black-backed Wagtail** (*M. a. lugens*) – 2 birds at Kuncho Gammun/Mokpo, 3 at Gyeongju, 1 on Guryongpo Peninsula and 1 at Daejin-ri.

**Amur Wagtail** (*M. a. leucopsis*) – one bird at Gocheonam Lake and 2 at Gyeongju.

**Japanese Wagtail** (*Motacilla grandis*) – 4 birds at Hangang River/Paldang, 1 at Gyeongju and 4 at North River.

**Olive-backed Pipit** (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – 2 seen at Gocheonam Lake, 2 at Gyeongju and 1 at North River.

**Buff-bellied Pipit** (*Anthus rubescens*) – found regularly at freshwater wetlands, with 2 birds at Seosan Lake A, 13 Gocheonam Lake, 9 Joonam Reservoir, 4 Gyeongju and 4 at North River.

**Brambling** (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – common wintering bird in woodlands and forest, especially in the north, with up to 50 at Cheorwon and 100 at North River.

**Oriental Greenfinch** (*Carduelis sinica*) – small groups found regularly at scattered sites throughout, with up to 15 birds at Gyeongju and North River.



*Common Bullfinch ssp rosacea(?), Gocheonam Lake and Long-tailed Rosefinch, Yangyang.*

**Long-tailed Rosefinch** (*Uragus sibiricus*) – a very good winter for this species, with 1 bird seen at Hangang River/Paldang, 15+ Cheorwon, 5 at North River, 4 Old Golf Course/Songdo, 4 Daejin-ri and 6 at Yangyang.

**Pallas's Rosefinch** (*Carpodacus roseus*) – one pair was seen briefly at New Golf Course/Songdo, 4 birds at North River and 8+ at Geojin-ri. The best place to see this bird was apparently at the National Arboretum/Gwangneum, where birds were fed by photographers, but this place was closed when we visited.

**Eurasian Bullfinch** (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) – 2-3 different subspecies had been recorded this winter in ROK, but all birds seen, were of the *rosacea*-ssp/type, which is usually included in *ssp griseiventris* (**Grey-bellied Bullfinch**). At Cheorwon 20 birds were found, and 6 were at Gocheonam Lake and another 5 at Geojin-ri. The males seen at Cheorwon were all deep pinkish on the breast and upper belly, whereas the males at Gocheonam Lake merely showed a pinkish wash – variation within *rosacea*?

**Hawfinch** (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – regularly found in the northern part of the country, with up to 35 at Cheorwon.

**Chinese Grosbeak** (*Eophona migratoria*) – two birds were found in a mixed flock of Brambling and Hawfinch on the way to Cheorwon, and another 4 were present in Ilsan Lake Park.

**Meadow Bunting** (*Emberiza cioides*) – a flock of 13 at Seosan Lake A, 1 at Gyeongju and 2 singing birds at North River.

**Chestnut-eared Bunting** (*Emberiza fucata*) – 3 birds found at the edge of a rice paddy at Gocheonam Lake.

**Rustic Bunting** (*Emberiza rustica*) – widespread and fairly common, often at the same sites as the next species.

**Yellow-throated Bunting** (*Emberiza elegans*) – the most widespread Bunting in a wide range of habitats, with up to 50 birds around Cheorwon.

**Grey Bunting** (*Emberiza variabilis*) – one 1<sup>st</sup> winter ♂ was an unexpected find at Wolmyeong Park in Gunsan. This might be the first record for Jeollabuk province.

**Pallas's Reed Bunting** (*Emberiza pallasi*) – found at several sites with reeds/tall grass near wetlands, with up to 15 at Seosan Lake A and 100+ at Gocheonam Lake.

**Japanese Reed Bunting** (*Emberiza yessoensis*) – a single bird was found amongst the abundant **Pallas's Reed Buntings** at Gocheonam Lake.

**Common Reed Bunting** (*Emberiza schoeniclus*) – one bird seen at Gunsan and 10+ were recorded in the reedbeds at Gocheonam Lake.

**Lapland Bunting** (*Calcarius lapponicus*) – one overflying bird was heard at Gocheonam Lake.