

Japan

16 – 27 April 2024

This is a short report from a trip to Japan that I made with my family in April last year. While it was not exactly a mammal watching trip, I was able to see a few species. Notably, during my time in Hokkaido I had more freedom to go after some of the region's mammals (courtesy of having a hire car) and even convinced my dad to take me on a night drive. In this report, species are listed in ***bold italics*** for the first mention of each, and thereafter interesting observations are mentioned in **bold**.

Kyoto 17/04 - 20/04

We arrived in Haneda airport late at night and boarded the shinkansen to Kyoto the next morning, arriving at Kyoto station at midday. Soon after checking in to our hotel, we caught the train to Arashiyama where I hoped to see my first mammals, but despite my efforts we failed to see any Japanese Macaques or Nutria in either species' sites.

The next day we visited Osaka, where I saw several new birds in the grounds of the castle but no mammals. Later, in the temples east of Kyoto, I tried again for Japanese Macaques but once again dipped, seeing only the ubiquitous Japanese bush warblers and an ashy minivet in the forest. My total lack of mammal sightings was finally rectified that afternoon with a ***Nutria*** in the Kamo River completely oblivious to the many pedestrians nearby, soon followed by a second in the canal bordering the footpath.



Above (left to right): *Nutria*, Sika Deer

We rose early the next morning, catching the first train to Hiroshima in time for the ferry to Miyajima Island. Despite its' popularity with tourists, the island is still heavily forested, and I was optimistic of being able to find a few mammals. Walking the trails,

we were quickly greeted by at least a dozen of the famous resident **Sika Deer**, individuals of which we saw everywhere we went. Afterwards, we caught the chairlift to Mt Misen in a last-ditch attempt to see macaques. Despite walking along the ridgeline and scanning the trees below, I failed to locate them and had to depart without seeing this species, leaving Kyoto on the Shinkansen at noon the following day.

Tokyo 20/04 - 24/04

Our stay in Tokyo was largely without mammal watching, and we spent most of the time in the city. However, I did manage to fit in a few excursions to more interesting habitats. Walking around the Sankeien Gardens, I glimpsed a **Pallas' Squirrel** darting through the canopy, and after staking out its' tree I was rewarded with good views.

The other site that we planned to visit was Hakone, a mountain town southeast of Mt Fuji. Getting there proved to be something of a logistical challenge, and by our third change of train we were all considering giving up and returning to Tokyo. Nonetheless, this effort was well and truly worthwhile. With the rest of my family going on a boat trip around the crater lake, I was free to explore the forest tracks behind the visitors centre and found green pheasant, red-billed leiothrix, Chinese bamboo-partridge and Chinese hwamei. Returning to the centre, I saw something moving between the trees. Looking through the camera, it proved to be a **Japanese Raccoon Dog**, a species that I was virtually certain I would miss on this trip due to my inability to go out at night. Sadly, the animal seemed to be heavily infected with mange, explaining its' diurnal behaviour. Returning to the station, we took a cable car over the crater, enjoying fantastic views but no more mammal sightings.



Hokkaido 24/04 - 27/04

My last destination in Japan, Hokkaido was by far the wildest one, and with my mum and siblings staying behind in Tokyo I could finally do some more serious mammal watching. Driving to Rausu, the difference between here and the rest of Japan was immediately obvious through the incredible amounts of wildlife, with hen harriers, white-tailed eagles and black kites abundant along the road and hundreds of sea ducks (mostly black scoters) on the ocean. On the mammal front, we saw many **sika deer** grazing by the roadside. That night, we stayed at the Washi-No-Yado homestay, famous in the birding world for Blakiston's Fish Owls. Sitting by the window until 3 am, I watched as animals came down to the river to drink and feed. As well as the owl, herds of **sika** moved through, and the Hokkaido **Red Fox** was ubiquitous here, coming to steal fish from the feeder.

We woke up early and made our way to several sites around the Shiretoko peninsula in search of birds. The mountains in this area were still heavily snowed in and many roads were closed, so we were somewhat limited in where we could go, but still saw many red-crowned cranes and a juvenile Steller's Sea Eagle. While mammal watching wasn't my primary purpose, I still saw plenty of **sika** and a few **red foxes**.

On the last full day I finally had the chance to look for mammals in their own right. Driving to Cape Nosappu, we stopped at Kiritappu to look for marine mammals and seabirds but saw nothing other than a few cormorants and **sika**. At Nosappu itself there was more activity, and we saw flocks of auklets streaming offshore. Despite recent sightings, I couldn't spot any of the sea otters that are occasionally reported here, though I did see a distant shape that may have been a cetacean. Our next destination was the Shunkunitai Nature Reserve just west of Nemuro. Apart from an immense variety of birds, we only saw a few sika and a very tame **red fox**, which sauntered past us on the road with a crab in its' mouth. With the sun setting rapidly, we drove to Ochiishi, successfully finding both a **Sea Otter** and a **Harbour Seal**



Above (left to right): Sika Deer, Red Fox, Sea Otter

More by coincidence than design, we then found ourselves with a night drive, being stuck 2 hours from the hotel. Slowly driving along with the headlights on full beam, we saw at least 200 **sika deer**, as well as 6 **red foxes**. However, the highlight was a **Brown Bear** walking through the forest south of Nemuro. Frustratingly, in the shock of seeing it

by the road I didn't get my camera out, and by the time we had turned around the bear was nowhere to be seen. Nonetheless, it was the undoubtable star of the trip and a remarkable conclusion to my time in Japan.

E = Endemic

L = Lifer

Count	Species	Location
300	Sika Deer (L)	Miyajima, Washi No Yado, Notsuke, Shunkunitai, Nemuro, Nemuro forest roads, roadsides
1	Japanese Raccoon Dog (L, E)	Hakone
12	Red Fox	Washi No Yado, Nemuro forest roads, roadsides
1	Sea Otter (L)	Ochiishi
1	Brown Bear (L)	Nemuro forest roads
1	Harbour Seal	Ochiishi
1	Pallas' Squirrel (L)	Yokohama
2	Nutria	Kyoto
1	Cetacean sp.	Nemuro