

Kamchatka: A Voyage Around the Ring of Fire

Naturetrek Tour Report

24 May - 12 June 2007



Tufted Puffin



Blue Fox



Steller's Sea Eagle



Sunset over the Kamchatka Peninsula

Images and report compiled by Paul Marshall



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Day 1

Thursday 24 May

In flight and Moscow

After the short flight to Moscow we cleared Russian customs with ease and transferred to our nearby airport hotel. By late evening we were enjoying a drink in the hotel bar whilst Thrush Nightingales, River Warblers and a Corncrake could be heard outside.

Day 2

Friday 25 May

Moscow and in flight

An early afternoon flight gave us the opportunity to explore a nearby river valley, only a short walk from the hotel. Thrush Nightingales sang from numerous bushes and we eventually managed reasonable views in the same bush as a singing Blyth's Reed Warbler. More familiar species included Black-headed Gull, Common Buzzard and Common Whitethroat. Some nearby allotments produced first a very bright male Common Rosefinch and then a stunning singing male Bluethroat. On the return leg of our walk we managed to get reasonable views of a reeling River Warbler.

Despite the disorganized chaos at Moscow's internal departure terminal we all managed to check our luggage and make our way to the gate. There was only a short delay and before long we settled down for the long flight to Petropavlovsk on the Kamchatka Peninsula.

Day 3

Saturday 26 May

Petropavlovsk

The overnight flight went smoothly and we arrived at a rather grey looking Petropavlovsk to be greeted by the local ground agents. We transferred to a nearby hotel for an overnight stay.

That afternoon we met with local ornithologist Yury Gerasimov who was to take us to some local birding sites for the afternoon. Our first stop was the Avacha River and despite the now cold and drizzly weather we enjoyed a few hours stroll along the river banks. Singing male Rustic Buntings were much in evidence. A brief pair of Harlequin Ducks was unexpected by Yury but much appreciated by us. In the woodland bordering the river we had fantastic views of a drumming Three-toed Woodpecker, a pair of Brambling and a singing Taiga Flycatcher. Unfortunately the very cold wind and rain prevented further birding that afternoon so we returned to the hotel.

Day 4

Sunday 27 May

Petropavlovsk and Avacha Bay

After breakfast we were met by Sarah McElrea (Cruise Director) and the local ground agents. We had a tour of Petropavlovsk before heading to the harbour and our home for the next two weeks – The Spirit of Enderby. Everyone settled into the cabins, then to the bar for some refreshments and then on to the deck.

Departure was delayed slightly due to military maneuvers involving a submarine but by mid afternoon we had left our berth and were heading out into Avacha Bay. The bay is the second largest natural harbour in the world and even on this grey day the surrounding scenery was dramatic. Amongst the numerous Slaty-backed Gulls were small numbers of Glaucous-winged Gulls and Black-legged Kittiwakes. Everybody was excited by our first alcids of the trip; a flyby pair of Tufted Puffins. As we headed towards the narrow opening to the Pacific Ocean we added Red-faced Cormorant, Ancient Murrelet and a single Spectacled Guillemot to the already healthy seabird list.

Once clear of Avacha Bay we had an introductory talk from Rodney and the other staff and some instructions on using the lifeboats (just in case). Before dinner those out on deck enjoyed the first of many Laysan Albatross effortlessly following the boat. Most people had an early night in preparation for our first full day at sea.

Day 5

Monday 28 May

Kuril Kamchatka Trench

Today was spent crossing the Kuril Kamchatka Trench en-route to the Commander Islands. A slight swell caused the Spirit to roll gently, perfect conditions for getting our 'sea-legs'. People drifted between the upper deck, the bridge and the bar taking the opportunity to combine some first class wildlife watching with some relaxation.

Fulmars (of the attractive blue morph) were on almost constant view and were occasionally joined by a Laysan Albatross or two. Much conversation was generated over the identification of the shearwaters being seen – Sooty

or Short-tailed was the question. These two very similar species are often difficult and sometimes impossible to separate in the field. Both were identified during the day but many remained logged as shearwater sp.

Just before lunch the first cetacean of the trip came in the distinctive form of a Humpback Whale. After lunch Dr Yury Artyuhin (a research biologist travelling with us to spend three months camped on Toporkov Island studying the seabirds) gave a fascinating talk on the Commander Islands and its wildlife.

During the afternoon more Humpback Whales were seen, including a group of four surfacing close to the boat. Throughout the day birding interest continued in the form of Long-tailed Skuas, Red-legged Kittiwakes, Fork-tailed Storm-petrels, Mottled Petrels and more Laysan Albatross.

Day 6

Tuesday 29 May

Commander Islands

An early breakfast and our first zodiac ride saw us landing on Bering Island just after eight o'clock. We landed at Nikol'skoye village which judging by the looks on the locals faces didn't receive many visitors. The overcast conditions and cold wind unfortunately did nothing to improve the rather grey looking buildings. Once ashore we visited a collection of monuments to Vitus Bering who discovered the islands and who is buried at the southern end of the island. The museum was opened for us and amongst the collection was a skeleton of the extinct Steller's Sea Cow. Those choosing to explore the river mouth were rewarded with a Rock Sandpiper, Lesser Sand Plover, Lapland and Snow Buntings.

Next we transferred by zodiac to the nearby Toporkov Island. Harbour Seals and Sea Otters watched our attempts to land on seaweed covered rocks in a heavy swell. A large colony of Glaucous-winged Gulls was an obvious feature of the island. Amongst them we found Tufted Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and Pigeon Guillemots.

Unfortunately a 15 knot northerly wind made landing on the northern tip of Bering Island impossible so after a much needed and warming lunch we climbed aboard the zodiacs for a cruise around Arij Karmen Island. This proved to be one of the many highlights of the trip. Large numbers of nesting kittiwakes (both Black-legged and Red-legged), Common Guillemots and Red-faced Cormorants made an impressive sight and sound. Amongst a resting group of imposing looking Steller's Sea Lions we found at least one Northern Fur Seal.

Back onboard the Spirit we set off on our return to the Kamchatka Peninsula and before long a pod of six Killer Whales gave fantastic views. Luke and Ralph provided another excellent evening meal and a quick check from the bridge before dark produced more Laysan Albatross, Fork-tailed Storm-petrels and two summer plumaged Red Phalaropes.

Day 7

Wednesday 30 May

Kuril Kamchatka Trench and Zhuponavo River

The morning was spent crossing the Kuril Kamchatka trench heading west back to the Kamchatka Peninsula. The rich feeding grounds were obvious by the numbers of birds and cetaceans seen. The day started well with a

male Siberian Rubythroat joining us briefly onboard. During the morning we counted over 200 Red and 150 Red-necked Phalaropes migrating in small flocks, all in breeding plumage. A Blue Whale surfaced four times and a Sperm Whale was seen 'logging' and then 'fluking'. As we neared the coast our first Dall's Porpoise were seen.

By early afternoon we were anchored off the Zhuponavo River and everybody was preparing for an afternoon zodiac cruise. Even before leaving the Spirit three Steller's Sea Eagles could be seen circling the headland. As we headed into the river we were treated to some great views of this spectacular bird but the best was still to come. A distant lump on the beach turned into a Brown Bear and her three cubs. As we approached they retreated up the hillside and watched us from a safe distance.

At the seasonal fishing camp we met our local guide and set off up the river. Noisy flocks of Common Terns, large numbers of wildfowl and over a dozen Pacific Divers were seen as we followed the river inland. It wasn't long before we found an adult Steller's Sea Eagle perched in riverside alder. This bird gave fantastic views before launching itself from its perch and disappearing from view. Over the next hour we watched several pairs of eagles (some near or on large nests) against a backdrop of snow covered volcanoes.

The return trip produced a very confiding Wood Sandpiper, Far Eastern Curlew and two Terek Sandpipers. Back at the fishing camp the locals treated us to a feast of fish (more than we could possibly eat) and tea. The camp was a hive of activity as they prepared for the fishing season which was due to start in a few days. We had the opportunity to watch two Brown Bears in the telescope before it was time to return to the boat. Whilst heading back we were lucky enough to have close views of a Long-billed Murrelet.

Day 8

Thursday 31 May

Russkaya Fiord and Vestnik Bay

Yesterday's overcast conditions had cleared to perfectly blue skies with only a slight breeze and what a day to have the best weather of the trip. We made our way slowly southwards following the coastline of the Kamchatka Peninsula. The scene was a never ending chain of snow covered mountains and volcanoes bathed in the pinky orange glow of the early morning sun.

We arrived at the entrance to Russkaya Fiord just after breakfast and as the Spirit slowly made its way up the fiord we watched a Brown Bear foraging on the shoreline and Sea Otters around the boat. Many of the latter added to the already high 'cute factor' by swimming on their backs and carrying sleeping young on their stomachs. After a peaceful hour soaking in the beauty of the area we retraced our steps and headed south a short distance before launching the zodiacs.

The distinctive shapes of many Steller's Sea Lions could be seen hauled out on the rocks and patrolling just offshore were three Killer Whales. We were treated to close views of the sea lions in perfect light and absolutely flat calm seas. Overhead Tufted Puffins flew to and from their nesting burrows and an adult Steller's Sea Eagle watched the whole scene from its perch high on the headland. We followed the coastline south in the zodiacs enjoying the scenery and the wildlife which included Horned Puffins.

Once back onboard the Spirit we continued our journey south. Wildlife watching was a little slow but nobody was complaining with such mind blowing scenery and warm sunshine to enjoy. By late afternoon we had arrived

at Vestnik Bay. Anchored in the bay we had an early dinner whilst a Grey Whale fed close to the shore and then we set off for an evening zodiac cruise around Ostrov Utashad.

It was difficult to know which way to look. As we neared the island a group of seals hauled out on the beach came to investigate. Close inspection revealed both Harbour and Larga Seals. Over 50 Sea Otters watched us from the kelp beds. A pair of Spectacled Guillemots flew past with several Pigeon Guillemots but refused to land. Cruising around the island we found nesting Black-legged Kittiwakes and Pelagic Cormorants whilst three Steller's Sea Eagles soared overhead completely unperturbed by the chaos they were causing below. Heading back to the Spirit we passed through rafts of Tufted Puffins, Common and Brunnich's Guillemots.

Day 9

Friday 1 June

Atlasova Island and Paramushir Island

The Kuril Islands are bordered by the cold waters of the Sea of Okhotsk to the north and the warmer Pacific Ocean to the south. As a result fog is a permanent feature of the islands and today proved no exception. As we made our way towards Atlasova Island an Eye-browed Thrush joined us onboard, no doubt disorientated by the weather as it migrated.

We landed the zodiacs in a sandy bay overlooked by dark volcanic cliffs. All around were signs that we were in an active volcanic region. Just behind the bay was an abandoned fish and fur farm and freshwater lagoon. We split up into smaller groups but remained together as there was the possibility of stumbling across a bear. As we were now further south the first signs of spring were evident with both plants and land birds more evident. Amongst the scrub were many Siberian Rubythroats, several Siberian Flycatchers and a lone Long-toed Stint creeping around the edge of a small marsh.

Enroute to Paramushir Island we were accompanied by hundreds of Fulmars attracted by the fish guts being discarded overboard by the crew. The misty conditions and flat calm seas produced some superb photographic opportunities for those out on deck. The sea here proved particularly productive with more phalaropes, Laysan Albatross and as we neared Paramushir a pod of six Killer Whales.

By the time we were in the zodiacs cruising off the Paramushir coastline the sun was doing it's best to disperse the fog. Just before landing it succeeded enough for us to see a smoking volcano. Once on land we were free to wander the island enjoying the singing Siberian Rubythroats, flowering *Rhododendron radula* and an unidentified orchid.

Day 10

Saturday 2 June

Onekotan Island and Ekarma Island

Very heavy fog around Onekotan made navigation from the Spirit to the shore difficult. But with a combination of GPS and directions from the captain on the bridge (using radar) the zodiacs found the landing point. We set off on a walk and followed a track up the valley sides to the plateau. Despite the poor visibility the walk was enjoyable and although we never found the lake we did find much of interest. Stunted Kamchatka Pines and alders provided some cover in a scene which otherwise looked remarkably like Dartmoor. A moulting Red Fox

took advantage of this cover to creep up on us but then decided we weren't a threat and sat posing for the cameras down to a few feet.

We returned to the Spirit late morning and set off for Ekarma Island. Visibility improved throughout the journey and as a result lots of wildlife was recorded. Amongst the now expected Laysan Albatross and Fork-tailed Storm-petrels we saw three Leach's Storm-petrels, a Horned Puffin, four Goosander and small numbers of both phalaropes. A single Sperm Whale showed well on the surface but a pod of around twenty Dall's Porpoise were less obliging. A pod of seven Killer Whales stole the show though.

By the time we arrived at Ekarma the sun was shining and patches of fog remained providing some amazing light and dramatic views. Landing on the island proved to be somewhat tricky thanks to the swell and seaweed covered rocks. About half the group made the landing whilst the others decided to remain in the safety of the zodiacs. Numbers of the rare Aleutian (Canada) Goose have been reintroduced to the island but perhaps unsurprisingly given the terrain we failed to see any. Instead we enjoyed the remoteness of the island and our first Grey-tailed Tattler. Offshore those remaining in the zodiacs found a stunning male Blue-and-white Flycatcher feeding on the seaweed covered boulders.

Getting back into the zodiacs proved even more difficult than getting out of them and the whole rather precarious event resulted in a few wet feet. But once back on the zodiacs we were about to be treated to yet another holiday highlight. We headed to the sheltered southern coast and there in glorious sunshine and calm waters we enjoyed the sight and sounds of thousands of Fulmars, intimate views of a Whiskered Auklet and many Tufted Puffins flying to and from their nesting burrows on the towering cliffs. Further out were a small number of Horned Puffins and a few flocks of Crested Auklets – something of a cross between a chicken, a starling and an auk!

After another sumptuous dinner those who headed to the bridge found large numbers of petrels around the boat. In the last hour of light we estimated that 100+ Leach's Storm-petrels were passing every minute and amongst them we counted at least 250 Fork-tailed Storm-petrels. Not to be outdone by the birds, three bow-riding Dall's Porpoise gave some great views.

Day 11

Sunday 3 June

Matau Island and Yankicho Island

Some localized fog meant that a planned cruise around Raikoke Island (an island with large numbers of nesting Fulmars) had to be missed. We continued to Matua Island where the sun was shining and headed out in the zodiacs to make a landing. Offshore were large flocks of Crested and Whiskered Auklets. Matua Island is the site of a former Soviet military base established during World War II and occupied by Japanese forces. Onshore we explored the remains of the runway and outbuildings. It was quite an experience to walk amongst the ruins, finding piles of spent ammunition and fuel, whilst imagining what the scene would have been like several decades ago. Whilst waiting to board the zodiacs a Red-necked Stint and several Grey-tailed Tattlers showed well on the beach.

Just as we were leaving the area two pods of Killer Whales (totaling a minimum of twelve animals) gave fantastic views in the bay. The journey south towards Yankicho Island will be remembered for the tens of thousands of auklets and another 25+ Killer Whales off Rasshua Island.

By the time we arrived at Yankicho Island the fog had returned but everybody climbed into the zodiacs for a trip into the caldera of the Yankicho Volcano. Cruising around the outer headlands we had fantastic views of a bustling seabird colony that consisted mostly of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Brunnich's Guillemots. Next we cautiously made our way into the narrow opening of the caldera. Once inside we landed on a sandy beach and walked to some geothermal pools. The smell of sulphur was almost overpowering and the bubbling waters reminded us that this volcano was still very much active. Elusive Grey Buntings were seen in the long grass surrounding the pools but it was the Arctic Fox that stole the show. This gorgeous creature showed no fear and walked to within feet of the group before settling down to sleep near its den. The foxes on the island have been introduced and are of the form Blue Fox which some consider a different species.

We returned to the boats and continued our exploration of the caldera. Small flocks of Crested Auklets wheeled overhead and we were fortunate enough to see several perched on boulders at the entrance to their burrows. A migrant Oriental Turtle Dove looked out of place on the treeless slopes. Amongst some Northern Shoveler we found a vagrant female American Wigeon and nearby a Pacific Diver posed beautifully. Heading back out of the caldera we were surrounded by clouds of auklets as the sun began to break through the fog. With the concentration of birds those with keen noses were able to catch hint of the citrus odour these species are known for. What an experience!

Day 12

Monday 4 June

Shimushir Island

We departed the Spirit in heavy fog and made our way towards the northern coast of Shimushir Island. As we arrived at the entrance to one of the largest calderas in the Kuril Islands we entered a completely different world. The surrounding high cliffs provided the caldera with its own micro climate; the skies cleared, the wind dropped and the temperature rose by several degrees. We entered the caldera and into the site of a former secret Russian submarine base.

Once onshore the group split up; with some opting to explore the abandoned village, others went for a longer walk to the opposite shore and others choosing to locate some of the more elusive birds. Walking through the village was an eerie experience with obvious signs that former residents had left in a hurry. Amongst the decaying roads, houses, pipelines and playground were shoes, light bulbs and children's toys.

Spring was more advanced here than we had previously seen and amongst the Ermin's Birch forests and stands of bamboo were many flowering plants. Siberian Rubythroats were plentiful with an estimated 100 present around the village. Careful exploration of the surrounding habitat revealed a pair of Spotted Nutcrackers, a singing male Pine Grosbeak, a Black-browed Reed Warbler and several Brown-headed Thrushes.

The group enjoyed the warm spring like weather for as long as possible before returning to the Spirit for a late lunch. The boat repositioned to the southern tip of the island. We took advantage of a wonderfully calm evening and the rapidly disappearing fog to make an unscheduled landing. From our landing on the black volcanic sand

beach people took the opportunity to relax in the tranquility of such a beautiful location. Back on the Spirit we were treated to the most perfect sunset.

Day 13

Tuesday 5 June

Broutuna Island and Urup Island

A fog free day and for those up early enough there was the chance to watch a sunrise as impressive as last night's sunset. We were anchored off Broutuna Island before dawn and took the opportunity for a pre-breakfast zodiac cruise and landing. In beautiful early morning light we watched nesting Red-faced Cormorants and Brunnich's Guillemots, surfing Harlequin Ducks and a resting male Steller's Sea Lion. Some of the group then landed on the island whilst others continued the exploration by zodiac. Those who stayed on the water were treated to a pair of nesting Horned Puffins and a pair of White-tailed Eagles whilst those on land found a Lesser Sand Plover and several Red-necked Stints. It was then back to the Spirit for a well deserved breakfast.

Heading south towards Urup Island we made our way along a shelf edge where the seabed dropped from 150 to over 1000 metres in a relatively short distance. First was our only Least Auklet of the trip which was seen in the company of several Whiskered Auklets. Next was four bow-riding Dall's Porpoise. These attractive pied cetaceans showed well and remained long enough for everybody on board to get a view of them. The highlight of the morning however was the number and fantastic views of Sperm Whales. A minimum of 15 were counted (with possibly over 20 individuals present) and animals were on constant view for over an hour. Many were seen 'logging' on the surface before 'fluking' as they dived to great depths in search of prey.

Mid afternoon and we arrived at Natalya Bay on Urup Island. The sheltered bay provided everybody with the opportunity to shed some layers and enjoy a leisurely few hours exploration. The slopes behind the landing provided the botanists with lilies, primulas and anemones. Those keen to stretch their legs climbed the hill for some breathtaking views of the island. Whilst the birders were made to work hard but rewarded with singing Black-faced Buntings, skulking Middendorff's Warblers and an exquisite male Long-tailed Rosefinch.

We returned to the Spirit and enjoyed a buffet dinner on deck before the breeze picked up forcing us into the bar for desert.

Day 14

Wednesday 6 June

Iturup Island

The perfect spring weather held for our exploration of Iturup Island, an experience that few of us are likely to forget! Arriving via zodiac outside the village slightly earlier than expected (we had failed to notice crossing a time zone sometime in the past few days – well it's that sort of timeless place) to be greeted by a local gentlemen handing out tulips to female members of the group.

Large-billed Crows accompanied us on our walk around the village. At the museum we were given an excellent insight to life on the island and given the opportunity to look at a collection of historic artifacts. Then 'the coach' arrived. Coach is probably too grand a word, perhaps truck or tank would be better. We climbed aboard wondering why we needed such a vehicle to tour the island. All was soon revealed as we bumped, scrambled,

grinded and slipped our way north from the village. The journey included crossing some bridges probably designed for a horse and cart. For the rest of the morning we explored the coastline which included the Black Rocks (a columnar basalt dyke running into the sea) and White Rocks (a pumice cliff face formed into amazing shapes by water). Heading back to the village we made good time by driving through the surf (using the breaks only once to avoid some submerged rocks!). A brief stop overlooking some coastal wetlands produced a Black-winged Stilt which is considered a rare visitor to the island.

Lunch was taken at a local café and provided a chance to rest our aching bones. Then it was off again – on roads thankfully. Several scenic coastal stops provided the birders chance to see Japanese Cormorant, White-tailed Eagle, Fork-tailed Swift, Latham's Snipe and Japanese Bush Warbler. It was then off to the mountains and the geothermal power station. After navigating our way through rivers, over boulders and past no entry signs we arrived. Although the power station was capable of generating power there was a problem with transporting the energy to the village. Despite this it was interesting to see the geothermal activity in the area.

Our return to the village was brought to a sudden halt by a Brown Bear and her two cubs ambling down the road. Everybody climbed out and enjoyed good views of the family and had the added bonus of a singing Red-flanked Bluetail in the nearby trees. Back at the village and there was time to watch the Iturup Special Military Band and their entourage, visit the church for a special service and find a few Russet Sparrows before returning to the Spirit. Despite the long, dusty and sometimes painful day it had been a fascinating insight into life on the Kuril Islands.

Day 15

Thursday 7 June

Kunashir Island

Today the fog had returned and the greyness reflected everybody's mood as this was our last day of landings. After breakfast we set off on the zodiacs for an exploration of the Kurilsky Zapovednik Reserve on the northern end of Kunashir Island. With the limited visibility finding the island was difficult enough but through the use of GPS, radios and radar we managed to find our local guide on the beach. Once onshore it was necessary to stay together as Kunashir has one of the highest densities of Brown Bears anywhere in the world.

We set off inland through waist high vegetation to the river flowing through the reserve. This area is home to Blakiston's Fish Owl, the largest and one of the rarest owls in the world. Unfortunately despite careful scanning of known roost trees we couldn't locate one. Instead we enjoyed the many plants and other birds present. Species seen included several varieties of flycatcher including the beautiful Narcissus, Long-billed Plover and many White-tailed Eagles. After a couple of hours walking we arrived back at the zodiacs where a picnic had been laid out. Offshore we could just about make out several Red-throated Divers and a flock over 200 Harlequin Ducks through the fog.

After lunch we split into two groups. One group retraced part of the route we had taken in the morning whilst the other walked along the beach. Those who chose the latter were fortunate enough to watch a pair of copulating Brown Bears. It was interesting to note the local guide's reaction as he reached for his camera and not his rifle. A slow return zodiac cruise to the Spirit gave us the opportunity to watch Ancient Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets and a Spectacled Guillemot.

Once back onboard, the Spirit headed north along the east side of Kunashir Island and the start of our journey to Sakhalin Island. Those out on deck or on the bridge had brief views of two Harbour Porpoise and two Pomarine Skuas.

Day 16

Friday 8 June

La Perouse Strait, Sea of Okhotsk

We made steady progress heading north over the La Perouse Strait towards Sakhalin Island. Most people took the opportunity to relax and catch up on reading or some notes whilst reflecting on the holiday. The mist came and went throughout the day giving those that wanted the chance to scan the ocean. Vast flocks of moulting shearwaters (predominantly Sooty) were the most obvious feature of a relatively quiet day. There were also small numbers of Fork-tailed Storm-petrels, a Minke Whale and two Dall's Porpoise.

Day 17

Saturday 9 June

Sakhalin Island

Following an early breakfast we emerged from the fog and docked at Korsakov port on the southern edge of Sakhalin Island. We were greeted by warm sunshine, screaming flocks of Fork-tailed Swifts and enough workers to dock the QE2! We departed the Spirit of Enderby for the last time, said our goodbyes to the crew and thanked them all for such a fantastic experience.

We transferred to the city of Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk by coach, arriving at our hotel late morning. The return to the hustle and bustle of civilization was a shock to the system and took some adjusting. In the afternoon some of the group walked around the city whilst the keen birders visited the city park and wooded slopes of the surrounding hills. Avian highlights included Narcissus Flycatcher, Pygmy Woodpecker, Rufous-tailed Robin and several frustratingly elusive Gray's Warblers.

Day 18

Sunday 10 June

Sakhalin Island

After breakfast we met Vladimir Sykov, our local guide and boarded a coach for a day's exploration of the east coast of Sakhalin Island. Yesterday's warm sunshine had given way to overcast conditions and as we headed north towards Starodubskoye it began to rain.

North of Starodubskoye we followed the coast road northwards. To our east beyond the sand dunes was the cold Sea of Okhotsk and to our west vast marshes and forest. Our first stop produced an Intermediate Egret amongst some Grey Herons. Further on several White-throated Needletails showed well and offshore we passed large numbers of moulting Common and White-winged Scoters. We arrived at Tikhaya Bay in time for a picnic lunch which was enjoyed whilst watching displaying Latham's Snipe. A walk along the bay gave us our last opportunity to take pleasure in watching Tufted Puffins and also gave us our best views yet of Spectacled Guillemots.

Mid afternoon and we started our return to Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk. Passing close to the shores of the Sea of Okhotsk we could see just how cold the ocean really was by the presence of sea ice. An amazing sight considering yesterday's daytime temperatures of nearly 30 degrees. Stopping to photograph the scene produced a singing Black-browed Reed Warbler and a little further on a flock of Aleutian Terns.

Day 19

Monday 11 June

In flight and Moscow

With our flight to Moscow not scheduled to depart until mid afternoon we had the opportunity for one last outing. We met with Vladimir after breakfast and drove the short distance to Chekhov Peak. The conditions of the track meant we couldn't get as close to the peak as we liked so instead we walked along the river at the foot of the hill. Butterflies were conspicuous and included many Camberwell Beauties and Swallowtails. Amongst the birds highlights included the endemic Sakhalin Leaf-warbler and several singing Radde's Warblers.

After collecting our luggage from the hotel we transferred to the airport and after negotiating our way through the chaos that is Russian departure procedures we boarded the plane for our flight to Moscow. We arrived mid evening (although our body clocks told us otherwise) in time for a drink in the hotel bar.

Day 20

Tuesday 12 June

In flight

We departed Moscow Sheremetyevo mid morning and arrived without any problems in London early afternoon after what had been a truly successful and highlight filled adventure.

For more images visit the tour gallery at:

<http://www.naturetrek.co.uk/wildlife-holidays-in-asia/detailsdb.asp?ID=346>

Birds

Taxonomy and nomenclature follows *The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*.

Moscow Sheremetyevo

Friday 25 May

- Eurasian Buzzard** *Buteo buteo*
2 over woodland south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Eurasian Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*
1 over wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Northern Lapwing** *Vanellus vanellus*
6 in roadside fields near Moscow Sheremetyevo Hotel.
- Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus*
10+ over wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Common Swift** *Apus apus*
5 over wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Bank Swallow** *Riparia riparia*
4 over wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba*
Pair along roadside near Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Eurasian River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis*
2 reeling (one seen well) in wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Blyth's Reed-warbler** *Acrocephalus dumetorum*
4 in wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis*
2 south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Thrush Nightingale** *Luscinia luscinia*
8+ around Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica*
Singing male (red spotted form) near wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Great Tit** *Parus major*
1 south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Eurasian Magpie** *Pica pica*
1 south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Hooded Crow** *Corvus cornix*
5+ around Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- European Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris*
Small numbers around Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*
2 singing males wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- European Greenfinch** *Carduelis chloris*
Several around Sheremetyevo II Hotel.
- Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus*
2 in wetlands south of Sheremetyevo II Hotel.

Kamchatka, Commander and Kuril Islands

Saturday 26 May – Friday 8 June

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*

12 off Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Pacific Loon *Gavia pacifica*

c20 seen between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula and 18 at Zhuponanvo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 4 June, 6 between Russkaya Fiord and Vestnik Bay on 5 June and a single at Yankicho Island on 3 June.

Yellow-billed Loon *Gavia adamsii*

1 at sea northwest of Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*

2 in breeding plumage off Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*

1 in breeding plumage off Paramushir Island on 1 June.

Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*

Recorded daily from 27 May to 5 June with peak counts of 18+ whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May, 15+ between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 4 June and 20+ between Shimushir and Broutuna Islands on 4 June.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

Common to abundant species with minimum of 50-100 recorded daily. Notable numbers occurred around Atlasova, Paramushir, Onekotan and Ekarma Islands on 1 and 2 June with thousands nesting on Ekarma Island.

Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*

12+ over the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May.

Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

Both Sooty and Short-tailed Shearwaters were confidently identified during the trip but the difficulty of separating this species meant many were recorded left unidentified. c300 Sooty/Short-tailed Shearwaters were recorded whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May and c200 between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 4 June. Between 50 and 100 were then recorded most days until 8 June when tens of thousands birds were seen in the Sea of Okhotsk between Kunashir Island and Sakhalin.

Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*

See Sooty Shearwater.

Leach's Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

100+ per minute passing the Spirit of Enderby south of Ekarma island in an hour before dusk on 2 June.

Fork-tailed Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma furcata*

Between 1 and 20 recorded on 28-30 May, 1-5 June and on 8 June when away from land. On 2 June c250 were seen from the Spirit of Enderby south of Ekarma island in an hour before dusk with Leach's Storm-petrels.

Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

c10 on Iturup Island on 6 June and c40 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

Recorded daily from the Commander Islands on 29 June in varying numbers.

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*

c20 in Avacha Bay, Petropavlovsk on 27 May, then recorded daily in small numbers until 2 June and again on 5 June at Broutuna Island. Nesting noted at Arij Karmen Island (Commander Islands) and Broutuna Island.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

1 in Natalyia Bay, Urup Island on 5 June.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Up to 20 recorded at Zhuponanvo River (Kamchatka Peninsula), Atlasova Island, Ekarma Island, Matau Island, Shimushir Island, Urup Island and Iturup Island.

American Wigeon *Anas americana*

Female with Northern Shoveler on Yankicho Island on 3 June.

Gadwall *Anas strepera*

4 at Zhuponanvo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Common Teal *Anas crecca*

8 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 10 Atlasova Island on 1 June and 4 Ekarma Island on 2 June.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

6+ at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May and 4 off on Atlasova Island on 1 June.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

Up to 6 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, Atlasova Island on 1 June, Yankicho Island on 3 June, Shimushir Island on 4 June and Iturup Island on 6 June.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Up to 4 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, Ekarma Island on 2 June and Yankicho Island on 3 June.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

2 on Atlasova Island on 1 June and 8 off Iturup Island on 6 June.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

Recorded daily from 28 May – 1 June with peak counts of c200 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May and c70 on Atlasova Island on 1 June.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

10 off Toporkov Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May. Then recorded daily in the Kuril Islands from 1 June to 7 June. Notable counts included c50 off Paramushir Island on 1 June, c80 off Shimushir Island on 4 June, c100 off Iturup Island on 6 June and 220 off Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

c30 off Paramushir Island on 1 June, 5 off Yankicho Island on 3 June, 2 off Shimushir Island on 4 June and c15 off Iturup Island on 6 June.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

2 (of the race *Melanitta fusca stejnegeri*) off Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

2 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 2 off Atlasova Island on 1 June and a single off Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

Female in flight at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

3 off Toporkov Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May and 3 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*

2 whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May, 12 at Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 4 between Onkotan and Ekarma Island on 2 June and 2 in Natalya Bay (Urup Island) on 5 June.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

1 over Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

2 on Iturup Island on 6 June and 1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

White-tailed Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Singles on Broutuna Island and over Urup Island on 5 June, 3 on Iturup Island on 6 June and c15 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Steller's Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*

12+ at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 3+ over Vestnik Bay on 31 May and singles at Ekarma Island on 2 June and on 3 June.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

Singles around the Spirit of Enderby in the mist off Onkotan Island on 2 June and on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

3 outside Petropavlosk on 26 May.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Pairs on Ekarma Island on 2 June and Matau Island on 3 June. A single over Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

One in wetlands north of Kurlisk on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

One on Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Long-billed Plover *Charadrius placidus*

One (displaying) on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus*

Singles near Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May and on Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*

3 (inc. a displaying bird) on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

1 on Toporkov Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Single on Onekotan Island on 2 June and 4 on Matau Island on 3 June.

Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*

3 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May and 1 over Atlasova Island on 1 June

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

2 in flight at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

A single at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

2 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Grey-tailed Tattler *Heteroscelus brevipes*

2 on Onekotan Island on 2 June and 4 on Matau Island on 3 June.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

2 near Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May, c15 past the Spirit of Enderby whilst at sea on 4 June and 4 on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

1 on Matau Island on 3 June and 6 on Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

1 on Atlasova Island 1 June.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

c20 near Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis*

5+ near Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

c200 migrating birds seen between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May, c20 between Atlasova and Paramushir Islands on 1 June and 4 south of Ekarma Island on 2 June. All in breeding plumage.

Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

c150 migrating birds seen between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May, c150 between Atlasova and Paramushir Islands on 1 June, c30 south of Ekarma Island on 2 June, 1 between Matau and Yankicho on 3 June and 2 north of Shimushir Island on 4 June. All in breeding plumage.

Pomarine Jaeger *Stercorarius pomarinus*

A single whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May, 2 between Broutuna and Urup Islands on 5 June and 3 north of Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*

4 between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May and a single between Matau and Yankicho Island on 3 June.

Long-tailed Jaeger *Stercorarius longicaudus*

5 whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May, a single on 4 June and 2 on 3 June.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

6 on Iturup Island on 6 June and 8 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Mew Gull *Larus canus*

8 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 2 on Atlasova Island on 1 June, 2 on Onekotan Island on 2 June and a single on Broutuna Island on 5 June. All considered to be *Larus canus kamtschatschensis* (Kamchatka Gull).

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

c150 around Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May. Small numbers seen daily between 30 May and 6 June.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

Common species recorded daily on all islands and whilst at sea.

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Up to 10 recorded at the Avacha River and in Avacha Bay (Petropavlosk), Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula), Onekotan Island, Yankicho Island, Shimushir Island and Iturup Island. All of the subspecies *Larus ridibundus sibiricus*.

Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris*

10+ immatures seen whilst crossing the Kuril – Kamchatka trench on 28 May and c50 around the Toporkov and Arij Karmen Islands (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

Common species recorded daily between 28 May and 8 June, including hundreds of breeding pairs on Arij Karmen Islands (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

c50 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May. All of the race *Sterna hirundo longipennis*.

Aleutian Tern *Sterna aleutica*

2 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Common Murre *Uria aalge*

Recorded daily between 29 May and 1 June with hundreds noted as nesting on Arij Karmen Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May. Up to 6 recorded around Kunashir Island on 7 June and in the Sea of Okhotsk en route to Sakhalin on 8 June.

Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*

Recorded on nine dates from 28 May to 7 June (from the Commander Islands to Kunashir Island) with the largest concentrations (between 100 and 300) noted at Vestnik Bay on 31 May, Yankicho Island on 3 June and Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cephus columba*

Between 10 and 30 individuals recorded daily from 29 May to 5 June (except for 30 May). Always seen close to rocky shores on islands. In the Kuril Islands majority all of the subspecies *Cephus columba snowi*.

Spectacled Guillemot *Cephus carbo*

Single in Avacha Bay (Kamchatka) on 27 May, 3 in Vestnik Bay on 31 May and another single off Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix*

Singles seen off the Zhuponavo River mouth on 30 May and off Kunashir Island on 7 June. Eight murrelet species probably this species were seen distantly from the Spirit of Enderby near Russkaya Fiord on 31 May.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*

Recorded on nine days with peak counts of c50 in Vestnik Bay on 31 May, c30 between Atlasova and Paramushir Islands on 1 June and c30 off Kunashir Islands on 7 June.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula*

Singles off Matau Island on 3 June and between Broutuna and Urup Islands on 5 June.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*

c30 off Ekarma Island on 2 June then thousands seen (in mixed flocks with Whiskered Auklets) around Matau, Yankicho, Shimushir and Broutuna Islands.

Whiskered Auklet *Aethia pygmaea*

Following a single off Ekarma Island on 2 June hundreds seen (in mixed flocks with Crested Auklets) around Matau, Yankicho, Shimushir and Broutuna Islands.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*

A single seen off Urup Island on 5 June.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*

c30 recorded off Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*

2 off the Kamchatka coast south of Zhuponavo River on 30 May, 8 near Russkaya Fiord on 31 May, 2 between Atlasova and Paramushir Islands on 1 June, 3 off Ekarma Island on 2 June, 1 on 3 June and 2 off Broutuna Island on 5 June.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*

Relatively common species, seen daily from the Avacha Bay and the Commander Islands south to Kunashir Island. Notable concentrations at nesting sites in Vestnik Bay on 31 May and Ekarma Island 2 June.

Oriental Turtle-dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

A single on Yankicho Island on 3 June and 3 on Iturup on 6 June.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

Up to 4 present on Urup, Iturup and Kunashir Islands.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*

c70 north of north of Kurlisk on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

1 along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Pair on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

1 drumming along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May and a probable heard on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

Small numbers (up to 10) recorded at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula), Matau Island, Shimushir Island and Urup Island.

Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*

3 over Shimushir Island on 4 June and c30 on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Singles recorded on Shimushir Island on 4 June, Broutuna Island on 5 June and Iturup Island on 6 June.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Between 2 and 10 individuals recorded on all islands from Commander Island south to Sakhalin. All considered to be *Motacilla alba lugens* (Black-backed Wagtail) treated as a distinct species by some authorities.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

4 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 2+ on Atlasova Island on 1 June and flyover individuals recorded on Shimushir Island on 4 June and Urup Island on 5 June. All considered to be *Motacilla flava sillima* (Siberian Yellow Wagtail). Some authorities consider *M. f. sillima* to be a conspecific with *Motacilla flava tschutschensis* (Eastern Yellow Wagtail).

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

1 in Petropavlosk on 27 May.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

Up to 6 recorded on all islands from Commander Island south to Sakhalin.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

Seen or hear on Onkotan Island, Shimushir Island, Urup Island, Iturup Island and Kunashir Island.

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

1 on board the Spirit of Enderby north of Atlasova Island on 1 June.

Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus*

1 on Onkotan Island on 2 June, 10+ on Shimushir Island on 4 June, 3 on Urup Island on 5 June and 1 on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Japanese Bush-warbler *Cettia diphone*

5+ on Iturup Island on 6 June and 6+ on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Middendorff's Warbler *Locustella ochotensis*

5+ on Urup Island on 5 June, 3+ on Iturup Island on 6 June and 1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Black-browed Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*

A single on Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Grey-spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Siberian Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*

3 on Atlasova Island on 1 June.

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

4 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina*

2 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

2+ singing males along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May.

Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*

1 male on Onkotan Island on 2 June.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

1 on board the Spirit of Enderby between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May. Then seen daily on all islands from Atlasova south, with a peak count of c100 on Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*

2 on Iturup Island on 6 June and 1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Common Stonechat *Saxicola maura*

1 on Iturup Island on 6 June and 3 on Kunashir Island on 7 June. All considered to be of the race *Saxicola maura stejnegeri* (Siberian Stonechat).

Willow Tit *Poecile montana*

2 along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May 1 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Coal Tit *Parus ater*

A single on Shimushir Island on 4 June and 8 on Kunashir Island 7 June.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

1 along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May and 2 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

4+ on Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

10+ at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Common around Kunashir and outlying villages on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

Between 2 and a dozen recorded on all islands from Commander Islands south to Kunashir with c30 on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Russet Sparrow *Passer rutilans*

2 in Kunashir on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common in Petropavlosk on 27 May, 6 around Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) and common on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

Pair along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

Pair on Shimushir Island on 4 June.

Oriental Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*

Up to 10 recorded at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula), Atlasova Island, Shimushir Island, Urup Island, Iturup Island and Kunashir Island

Eurasian Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

A single on Shimushir Island on 4 June and 4 on Iturup Island on 6 June.

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus*

2 recorded on Urup Island on 5 June, Iturup Island on 6 June and Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

c20 along the Avacha River (near Petropavlosk) on 26 May.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

1 on Urup Island on 5 June, 3 on Iturup Island on 6 June and c20 on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Grey Bunting *Emberiza variabilis*

8+ on Yankicho Island on 3 June. On 4 June 2 were found dead onboard the Spirit of Enderby and another was taken into captivity and released on Shimushir Island. 10+ on Shimushir Island on 4 June and 2 on Urup Island on 5 June.

Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

One or two recorded at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula), Yankicho Island, Shimushir Island, Urup Island and Iturup Island.

Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*

c20 recorded just outside Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

1 over Nikol'skoye village (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Sakhalin Island

Saturday 9 – Monday 11 June

Red-throated Loon *Gavia stellata*

Of c20 offshore north of Starodubskoye amongst c100 unidentified divers on 10 June.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

12 on wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

1 on wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas Penelope*

c40 wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

6 wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*

2 wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

24 wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Large (totaling hundreds of birds) mixed flocks of Common (of the race *Melanitta nigra americana*) and White-winged Scoter (of the race *Melanitta fusca stejnegeri*) offshore between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*

See Common Scoter.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

1 in Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

1 over wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

2 between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

White-tailed Sea-eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

8+ between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Eurasian Buzzard *Buteo buteo*

2 south of Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*

Several roadside birds between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay and 6+ displaying at Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

20+ between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

Common between Starodubskoye and Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Aleutian Tern *Sterna aleutica*

c40 over wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Spectacled Guillemot *Cephus carbo*

8 in Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*

10+ in Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*

4 over wetlands north Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*

Common in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and at Chekhov Peak.

Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos kizuki*

1 seen in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk on 9 June and heard at Chekhov Peak on 11 June.

Black-backed Wagtail *Motacilla lugens*

Pair at Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Gray's Warbler *Locustella fasciolata*

Common in and around Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk park. All considered to be *Locustella fasciolata amnicola* (Sakhalin Warbler).

Black-browed Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*

1 in roadside wetlands south of Tikhaya Bay on 10 June.

Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*

3+ at Chekhov Peak on 11 June.

Sakhalin Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus borealoides*

2+ singing (and one seen briefly) at Chekhov Peak on 11 June.

Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina*

2 in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Park on 9 June.

Rufous-tailed Robin *Luscinia sibilans*

1 in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Park on 9 June.

Willow Tit *Poecile Montana*

4 in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Park on 9 June.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

Common in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Park on 9 June and at Chekhov Peak on 11 June.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Common in small numbers around Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and other towns.

Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Sturnia philippensis*

1 north of Starodubskoye on 10 June.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

Common in small numbers around Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk and other towns.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

Up to 12 recorded in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk Park on 9 June, around Tikhaya Bay on 10 June and at Chekhov Peak on 11 June.

Mammals

Kamchatka, Commander and Kuril Islands

Saturday 26 May – Friday 8 June

Grey Whale *Eschrichtius robustus*

1 off the Commander Island on 29 May and 2 in Vestnik Bay on 31 May.

Blue Whale *Balaenoptera musculus*

2 between 10 and 70 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May.

Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

Singles northwest of Kunashir Island on 7 June and enroute to Sakhalin Island on 8 June.

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*

12+ recorded whilst crossing the Kuril Kamchatka trench on 28 May.

Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

1 between 70-10 miles east of the Kamchatka Peninsula on 30 May, 1 between Onekotan and Ekarma Islands on 2 June and a minimum of 15 between Broutuna and Urup Islands on 5 June.

Killer Whale *Orcinus orca*

5 off the Commander Islands on 29 May, 3 near Russkaya Fjord on 31 May, 6 off Paramushir Island on 1 June, 7 between Onekotan and Ekarma Islands on 2 June, 12+ off Matau Island and 25+ between Matau and Yankicho Islands on 3 June, 18+ between Broutuna and Urup Islands on 5 June.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

2 northwest of Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli*

Up to 6 recorded on seven dates and a maximum of c20 between Broutuna and Ekarma Islands on 2 June.

Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*

Singles recorded on Onekotan Island on 2 June and Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Arctic Fox *Alopex lagopus*

3+ (including 1 very tame individual) on Yankicho Island on 3 June.

Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*

7 at the Zhuponavo River (Kamchatka Peninsula) on 30 May, 1 in Russkaya Fjord on 31 May, 3 on Iturup Island on 6 June and a copulating pair on Kunashir Island on 7 June.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*

Recorded daily between 29 May and 5 June with peak counts of 30+ around Toporkov Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May and 50+ in Vestnik Bay on 31 May.

Northern Fur Seal *Callorhinus ursinus*

1 with Steller's Sea Lions on Arij Karmen Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Steller Sea Lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

c20 on Arij Karmen Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May, c150 near Russkaya Fjord on 31 May and up to three seen at sea on 3 and 4 June.

Harbour Seal *Phoca vitulina*

Up to 12 recorded daily between 29 May and 7 June with peak counts of 30+ around Toporkov Island (Commander Islands) on 29 May.

Largha Seal *Phoca largha*

Of c30 seals seen at Vestnik Bay on 31 May a minimum of 20 were considered to be this species.