



WildWings

“Kamchatka: Ring of Fire” 2014 Trip Report

By Chris Collins, Tour Leader

Introduction

Any expedition to the Russian Far East is a special experience and this voyage was no exception with many highly sought after species being seen. Indeed, before we had even embarked our vessel, the comfortable *Spirit of Enderby*, the expedition had begun ‘with a bang’, with many of the WildWings group seeing Black-billed Capercaillie, Northern Hawk Owl and Eyed-browed Thrush not far from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy – a spectacular start indeed !!!!!

Once we had sailed, the quality birding continued for the next eleven days, with lots of special birds being recorded, although as is often the case on trips to the Russian Far East, the Auks were one of the major attractions and we recorded fourteen species between ‘PK’ and Sakhalin. These included the critically endangered Kittlitz’s Murrelet and highly localised Spectacled Guillemot, as well as Whiskered, Least, Parakeet and Crested Auklets, Long-billed Murrelet and both Horned and Tufted Puffins.

There were plenty of other quality seabirds too with Fork-tailed Storm-petrel, Red-faced Cormorant, Red-legged Kittiwake and Glaucous-winged Gull all being seen, although another of the major highlights were the North Pacific Albatrosses; this was only the third WildWings trip to this remote region when we saw all three species, ie Short-tailed, Black-footed and Laysan.

The ‘landbirds’ recorded during the expedition were equally impressive and included Steller’s Sea-Eagle (including an adult bird on its nest at the Zhupanova River), Mongolian Plover, Long-toed Stint, Rock Sandpiper, Crested Kingfisher, Brown and Bull-headed Shrikes, Kamchatka Leaf-Warbler, Eastern Crowned Warbler, Middendorff’s Grasshopper Warbler, Brown-headed Thrush, Narcissus Flycatcher, Japanese Robin, Siberian Rubythroat, Grey-crowned and Asian Rosy Finches, Long-tailed Rosefinch and Grey Bunting.

The expedition also had considerable success with marine mammals and eight species of cetaceans were seen including Dall’s Porpoise, Baird’s Beaked, Northern Minke, Humpback, Sperm and Fin Whale, as well as Steller’s Sea-Lion, Northern Fur Seal, Larga Seal and Sea Otter. For many of the group, however, the Orcas were surely one of the highlights and zodiac cruising off Bukhta Russkaya with this apex predator surfacing only a few feet away, will surely be something none of us will ever forget.....

Kamchatka – Ring of Fire

29th May– 10th June 2014

SYSTEMATIC LIST

The taxonomy, scientific order and English names used in this checklist generally follow the recommendations of *The IOC World Bird List* with revisions made where an alternative name/taxonomy is considered more appropriate.

This systematic list was compiled by Chris Collins (based on the figures agreed at the nightly logs) and includes all species recorded between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) and the ship reaching Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk (10 June).

Accurately counting seabirds at sea is extremely difficult (eg as one can never be sure which birds are following or revisiting the ship), so the system outlined below was adopted, with this also used for the more numerous landbirds:

1-10 = actual number seen

11-100 = A

101-1,000 = B

1,001-10,000 = C

10,001-100,000 = D

BIRDS

Tundra Bean Goose *Anser serrirostris*

Three birds seen in flight at Peschanaya Bay, Medney (1 June) were of this form/species, however, two individuals encountered the following day at the Zhupanova River were not seen well enough to be ascribed to form/species, although it is more likely that they were ‘tundras’ rather than ‘taigas’.

Lesser Canada Goose *Branta hutchinsii*

Eight birds were seen whilst zodiac cruising offshore from Ekarma Island (5 June) with this being the first time this species has been recorded in the Russian Far East on a Wildwings trip.

Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*

Seen on two occasions with five birds at the Zhupanova River (2 June) and three individuals a couple of days later on Atlasova.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*

Only seen on Atlasova (4 June) where three birds were logged.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*

Recorded on two dates with six birds on the extension prior to leaving Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) and five individuals four days later at the Zhupanova River.

Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*

Recorded on three days (31 May, 2 and 4 June) with the highest count being on Atlasova where a low A was logged (4 June).

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*

The higher count of this species was at the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka where A was logged (31 May) with the only other record coming from Medney Island where three were seen.

Eurasian Teal *Anas crecca*

A low A was logged at the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka with seven birds also seen on 2 June (Atlasova and Onekotan).

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*

Only seen on one day (2 June) with three birds on Atlasova Island.

Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*

The highest count was on 2 June (Atlasova and Onekotan Islands) with a low A logged at both localities. Small numbers were also seen on six other dates.

Common Eider *Somateria mollissima*

A reasonably common species on Medney Island with a low A logged at Peschanaya Bay on 1 June. The subspecies which is found in this part of Russia is *v-nigrum*, which unlike the birds in Northern Europe has bright orange feet and bills and has been mooted as a possible split, the Pacific Eider.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*

This handsome duck was seen in reasonable numbers (ie A) on five dates with single figure counts on three further days. The highest count was offshore from Urup Island (7 June).

White-winged (Stejneger's) Scoter *Melanitta (deglandi) stejnegeri*

This species was only recorded on 4 June (Atlasova and Onekotan) with three birds being seen. In recent years the Velvet/White-winged/Stejneger's Scoter complex has generally been split into two by most authorities with the birds in the Atlantic (ie Velvet Scoter) separated from those in the Pacific. There is, however, a view that this treatment is not entirely logical, eg given there are significant differences between the birds in Eastern Russia, *stejnegeri*, and those found off the western coasts of North America, *deglandi*, and if this treatment is followed (eg it is recommended by Birdlife International) then those seen on the trip would be Stejneger's Scoters.

Black Scoter *Melanitta nigra*

Seen on three dates with A logged on each occasion (4,5 and 7 June).

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*

The only sighting was a lone bird on Atlasova Island (4 June).

Smew *Mergellus albellus*

Three birds at the Zhupanova River on 2 June were the only sightings on the expedition.

Goosander *Mergus merganser*

Seen in small numbers on three dates with the highest count being five birds offshore from Kunashir Island on 9 June.

Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*

This species was recorded in very low numbers (one or two individuals) on six occasions with the first sightings being off Medney Island (1 June) when two were logged. The final record was off Kunashir on 9 June where a lone bird was sighted.

Black-billed Capercaillie *Tetrao urogalloides*

An unexpected bonus for many of the Wildwings group was a male bird seen in flight on the pre-voyage extension near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May).

Rock Ptarmigan *Lagopus muta*

Two birds were found at Bukhta Russkaya on 3 June.

Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata*

Seen on two dates with A recorded whilst cruising on the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka on 2 June. The only other sighting was two birds near Atlasova (4 June).

Black-throated Diver *Gavia arctica*

A confirmed 'black-throat' was seen near (9 June). Birds which were either this species or Pacific Diver were seen on three other dates but the views were insufficient for them to be positively identified.

Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*

Seen on nine consecutive days with the first sighting being on the sea day between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy and the Commander Islands (30 May). A was logged on three dates with single figure counts on all other days.

Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*

A single bird was seen between Chirpoy and Urup Islands on 7 June.

Somewhat curiously, this species is by far the rarest of the North Pacific albatrosses in the Russian Far East (seen significantly less often than Short-tailed Albatross) and this sighting was only the third time it has been recorded on this itinerary.

Short-tailed Albatross *Phoebastria albatrus*

This highly prized species was recorded on three days with singletons off Bering Island (31 May), between Ekarma and Toporkovy (5 June) and off Yankicho (6 June).

These sightings continued the established pattern, with birds being seen around the Commander Islands and near Ekarma and Yankicho. Why this particular part of the Central Kurils should be any better than elsewhere for this species is a mystery, but birds have now been seen there on at least 50% of all trips.

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*

An extremely common bird throughout the voyage with sightings on a daily basis. The minimum number recorded was A (ie between 10-100 individuals) with the highest count being around Ekarma Island where hundreds of thousands breed and the estimated total for the day was D (ie 10,000-100,000 individuals).

Almost all the birds seen were 'Blue Fulmars' with the percentage of pale birds (ie similar to those encountered in UK waters) being very small.

Short-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus tenuirostris*

This species was seen on seven dates with the highest count being whilst cruising from Kunashir towards Sakhalin where D was logged (9 June).

This species moults in large numbers in the southern part of the Sea of Okhotsk and several of the flocks numbered thousands of individuals. Many of the birds were part way through their moult and were extremely tatty; indeed, some could barely fly as they had shed so many flight feathers.

Leach's Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma leucorhoa*

Seen on six dates during the voyage, with the highest count being on 7 June (whilst cruising between Chirpoy and Urup) when A was logged. All other counts were of either one or two individuals.

Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel *Oceanodroma furcata*

This species was seen in variable numbers on ten dates. The highest count was whilst cruising between Atlasova and Onkotan (4 June) when a high B was logged (ie approaching 1,000 birds).

Good numbers (ie A or B) were also recorded on four other days with single figure counts on all other occasions.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*

The commonest of the three species of cormorants with sightings on seven dates during the expedition and A or B logged on five occasions.

Red-faced Cormorant *Phalacrocorax urile*

The most range-restricted of the cormorant species recorded on the voyage with sightings on seven dates. The highest concentration was around Medney Island where a low B (ie more than 100 individuals) was logged on 1 June, although most day counts were in low single figures.

Japanese Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*

Seen in small numbers towards the end of the expedition (7-8 June) with six birds off Urup and two individuals the following day off Iturup.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

A total of three birds were seen with a lone bird at Bukhta Russkaya (3 June) and two birds a couple of days later at Matua/Toporkovy.

European Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*

A single individual was seen on the birding extension around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May).

Black-eared Kite *Milvus lineatus*

Two birds were seen on Iturup on 8 June.

White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*

Seen on three dates in the latter stages of the expedition with two individuals on Urup (7 June), three the following day on Iturup and the same number on the last landing of the expedition on Kunashir (9 June).

Steller's Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*

A total of sixteen Steller's Sea-Eagles were recorded with nine at the Zhupanova River (2 June), six the following day at Bukhta Russkaya and the final sighting being a lone bird on Matua (5 June).

Rough-legged Buzzard *Buteo lagopus*

Two individuals were seen during the pre-voyage birding around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) with the only other sighting being a single bird on Atlasova Island (4 June).

Eastern Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) japonicus*

Two birds were seen on Iturup (8 June).

Mongolian Plover (Lesser Sandplover) *Charadrius mongolus*

This species breeds at Nikol'skoye on Bering Island in the Commander Islands and two birds were seen there on 31 May.

Latham's Snipe *Gallinago hardwickii*

Three individuals were seen on Iturup Island (8 June) with the same number of birds recorded the following day on Kunashir.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Five birds at the Zhupanova River (2 June) were the only sightings on the expedition.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Seven birds were seen during the shore excursion at Nikol'skoye (31 May).

Rather frustratingly, subsequent examination of photos showed that one of the birds was ringed, however, it proved to be impossible to read the details.

Far Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*

Two individuals at the Zhupanova River (2 June) were the only records during the expedition.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

The only sighting was a lone individual at the Zhupanova River on 2 June.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

A single individual was seen during the zodiac cruise on the Zhupanova River (2 June) with three birds a couple of days later on Onekotan.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

The only sighting was a lone bird on Kunashir (9 June).

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

A flock of migrating birds was seen flying north on 3 June as the ship sailed south down the Kamchatka coastline. The only other sighting was a lone bird the following day on Atlasova.

Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta*

Two birds were found in wet grasslands near the mouth of the Zhupanova River (2 June) at the conclusion of the zodiac cruise.

Rock Sandpiper *Calidris ptilocnemis*

One of the speciality waders of the voyage, with some nice views along the shoreline at Nikol'skoye on Bering Island (31 May) where approximately 20 individuals were logged.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

A reasonable number of summer plumage birds were found during the shore excursion on Bering Island (31 May) with a low A logged at Nikol'skoye.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

A total of thirteen Red-necked Phalaropes were recorded during the expedition with the highest count being seven individuals which were seen whilst cruising southwards down the Kamchatka coastline (3 June).

Grey [Red] Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*

Birds were seen on a daily basis for the first week of the expedition with either A or B logged each day.

Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*

This species was seen on a daily basis throughout the expedition. The numbers logged varied markedly with the largest concentrations being around Medney Island (1 June) when C was recorded.

Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris*

This North Pacific endemic was only seen during the early stages of the voyage with records (A) on both days around the Commander Islands (31 May-1 June).

Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*

Seen on four dates with the highest count being at the Zhupanova River (2 June) where a high A was logged.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*

Six birds were seen on Iturup (8 June) with a low A logged the following day at Kunashir.

Kamchatka Gull (Common/Mew Gull) *Larus (canus) kamtschatschensis*

The only sightings of this putative split from Common/Mew Gull were on the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka (2 June) where three individuals were seen.

Glaucous-winged Gull *Larus glaucescens*

This is the commonest gull species around the Commander Islands and A was logged on both days (31 May-1 June). Four other individuals were also seen during the first half of the expedition.

Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*

The only record on the expedition was a lone bird at Onekotan (4 June).

Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*

By far the commonest gull which was recorded on almost every day of the voyage with A or B logged on all but two dates. The only blank day was at Medney Island (1 June) with a lone bird the previous day on Bering Island.

Aleutian Tern *Sterna aleutica*

The only sighting of this much-wanted bird was a lone bird which was seen by some of the group at the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka (2 June).

It is worth noting that some populations of this species are believed to have declined significantly in recent years and it has certainly become less regular at Zhupanova River since the first Wildwings trip to this site in 2007.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

A low B (ie over 100 individuals) was logged during the zodiac cruise on the Zhupanova River, Kamchatka (2 June) with two birds also seen during the crossing to the Commander Islands (30 May). All the birds in this part of Eastern Russia are of the black-billed subspecies *longipennis*.

Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*

One individual was seen at sea whilst crossing to the Commander Islands on 30 May.

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

Birds were recorded on four dates during the first half of the voyage with the highest count being on the sea day between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy and the Commander Islands when three individuals were recorded. On all other occasions only a single individual was seen.

Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

A total of eight individuals were recorded around Matua/Toporkovy (5 June) with the only other sighting being a single bird whilst cruising from Chirpoy to Urup a couple of days later.

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Four birds were seen at sea on the way to the Commander Islands (30 May) with two more on Bering Island (31 May).

Brunnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*

This species was seen on a daily basis during the expedition with the highest numbers being around Bering Island (31 May) when C was logged. On most other days A was recorded.

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*

Seen on a daily basis between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) and Onekotan (4 June). The numbers recorded varied markedly with C logged around Medney Island (1 June) and A or B on six other dates.

Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba*

Recorded on nine dates with the largest counts (A) being around Ekarma and Matua/Toporkovy (5 June).

Of the three subspecies which were seen during the voyage, probably the most interesting was *snowi* which is only found in the Kuril Islands and was seen on four dates. This generally lacks the prominent white wing panel of the other subspecies and also seems to have a slightly browner background colour. It is interesting to note that in *Birds of East Asia*, Mark Brazil suggests there is an argument for splitting *snowi* and our experiences of this rarely seen taxa certainly confirmed that in some respects, it seems more distinct from other Pigeon Guillemots than, for example, Pigeon Guillemot is from Black Guillemot.

Spectacled Guillemot *Cepphus carbo*

A total of sixteen individuals of this localised alcid were seen on the expedition with sightings on a daily basis on the last three days of the expedition (ie offshore from Urup, Iturup and Kunashir).

Long-billed Murrelet *Brachyramphus perdix*

Another comparatively range-restricted alcid which was only seen in small numbers, with four offshore from the Zhupanova River (2 June) and three the following day at Bukhta Russkaya.

Kittlitz's Murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris*

This endangered alcid has now been seen on a number of occasions during visits to Bukhta Russkaya and 2014 did not disappoint with five birds on 3 June.

Interestingly this species is not considered to breed any further south than northern Kamchatka but given that it has now been found repeatedly at Bukhta Russkaya, it seems highly probable that birds are breeding especially as two apparent pairs were seen.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*

This species was recorded on six days during the voyage, with the highest count being on 5 June (Ekarma and Matua/Toporkovy) when a low B was logged.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula*

This alcid was seen on five dates with daily low single figure counts between 3-6 June inclusive (Bukhta Russkaya-Yankicho). The only day when there was a higher count was 1 June (off Medney Island) when A was logged.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*

On most trips which follow this itinerary, only the occasional Least Auklet is sighted, however, in 2014 there were sightings on four days with a total of eleven birds recorded.

Whiskered Auklet *Aethia pygmaea*

This species was seen on five dates with the largest concentrations being around Yankicho Island (6 June) where big numbers were seen just offshore from the island and C was logged. Good numbers were also seen the previous day (primarily off Ekarma Island) with B recorded.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*

This species was recorded on nine dates during the voyage with the first individuals observed during the sea crossing to the Commander Islands (30 May). The largest numbers were, however, at Yankicho Island (6 June) where the swarms of birds passing the ship were truly breath-taking. In practice, it was impossible to accurately estimate the numbers, although E was logged (ie hundreds of thousands of individuals).

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*

This species was seen on four dates during the second half of the voyage with B logged around Kunashir Island (9 June). The only other occasion when the count was above single figures was on 5 June (Ekarma) where a low A was recorded.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*

Recorded on an almost daily basis between 29 May – 5 June (Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy – Ekarma/Matua). It was, however, only ever seen in relatively modest numbers (single figure count or A) with the highest numbers being around Medney Island where a high A was logged on 1 June.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*

Undoubtedly one of the ‘classic’ alcids of the Russian Far East and seen in good numbers on almost every day of the expedition with B or C logged on seven dates.

Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

Only encountered during the late stages of the trip. Two individuals were seen on Urup (7 June) but there was a steady passage of apparently migrating birds on Kunashir a couple of days later with A logged.

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus (saturatus) optatus*

This species closely resembles Common Cuckoo but the song is quite different and Oriental Cuckoos were seen in small numbers (one or two individuals) on Shimushir, Urup and Iturup (6-8 June) with a further bird heard on Kunashir.

Common (Eurasian) Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*

This migrant was heard more frequently than it was seen, although there were confirmed sightings on each of the last three days of the voyage.

Northern Hawk Owl *Surnia ulula*

Seen well on the birding excursion prior to joining the ship in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May).

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*

This species was seen on both Urup and Iturup (7-8 June), with the count on Iturup being marginally higher (A).

Crested Kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris*

A single bird was seen briefly by some of the group on Kunashir (9 June).

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*

A single bird was seen at the Zhupanova River on 2 June.

Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

Two individuals of this widespread species were logged on Iturup (8 June) with a further bird the following day on Kunashir.

Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker *Picoides tridactylus*

One was seen on the birding extension prior to joining the ship at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May).

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

A single bird was seen on Urup (7 June).

Bull-headed Shrike *Lanius bucephalus*

Two birds were seen on Urup (7 June) with a further sighting of a single individual two days later on Kunashir.

It is worth noting that these were the first sightings of this species on a Wildwings trip to this region.

Magpie *Pica pica*

A single bird was seen on the pre-voyage extension (29 May), with another lone individual four days later at the Zhupanova River (2 June).

It is worth noting that some studies have suggested the Magpies in Eastern Russia should be split in which case the likely name is Kamchatka Magpie.

Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Four birds were seen on Shimushir (6 June) with others heard the following day on Urup.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

This species was recorded on four dates with the first sightings on the pre-voyage birding excursion around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May).

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

This species was the common corvid during the last three days of landings (ie Urup, Iturup and Kunashir) with the highest count being on Iturup (8 June) where A was recorded.

Common Raven *Corvus corax*

There were single figure counts of this species on nine dates between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) and Urup (7 June) with a total of seventeen birds seen.

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

The subspecies which occurs in the Kuril Islands is a lot greyer than the birds found in the UK and was only found on Kunashir (9 June) where four individuals were seen.

Willow Tit *Poecile montana*

According to 'Birds of East Asia' (Brazil 2009), Marsh and Willow Tits are far closer in appearance in Eastern Russia than in Europe with colouration and calls not considered entirely reliable ways of separating them. Indeed, to complicate matters still further, whilst some birds in this region resemble the birds in Europe, others seem quite different having frostier plumage, darker wings and a short crest.

Several Willow Tits were seen on the pre-voyage extension around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) with the only other sighting being a lone bird on Kunashir (9 June).

Eastern Great (Japanese) Tit *Parus minor*

This species was only recorded on Kunashir (9 June) with two individuals logged.

Eurasian Skylark *Alauda arvensis*

This species was recorded in small to moderate numbers (single figure count to low A) on six dates during the voyage with the first sightings on Bering Island (31 May) and the final bird on Iturup (8 June).

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*

The highest count was on Iturup (8 June) where A was logged, with the only other sightings being on Onekotan (4 June: 5 birds) and Matua (5 June: 1 bird).

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

The only sightings were on Onekotan (4 June) where five birds were seen. Two different subspecies appeared to be present as there were both red-bellied and white-bellied birds.

Japanese Bush Warbler *Cettia diphone*

This species is fairly elusive and was seen in small numbers (2-3 individuals) on Urup, Iturup and Kunashir (7-9 June) and was also heard on Shimushir.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

The only sighting of this species was a single bird on Atlasova on 4 June.

Kamchatka Leaf-warbler/Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus examinandus/borealis*

Arctic Warbler has recently been split into three species and the birds recorded singing (and on territory) were Kamchatka Leaf-warblers. It is possible, however, that some Arctic Warblers could also have been present since these breed to the north of Kamchatka Leaf-warbler and the passage of migrants was clearly ongoing.

Birds were recorded on four dates during the voyage with records on Shimushir, Urup, Iturup and Kunashir Islands (6-9 June) with the highest numbers (A) on Shimushir.

Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus*

The only sightings were two birds on Kunashir (9 June).

Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella ochotensis*

This species was only seen during the latter stages of the voyage with a total of eight individuals being recorded across five islands between Atlasova (4 June) and Kunashir (9 June).

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

This species was seen in small numbers on Toporkovy, Urup and Iturup (5,7 and 8 June) although it was reasonably common by voice on most of these islands.

Pacific Wren *Troglodytes pacificus*

The wrens on the western side of North America, in Alaska and on the Aleutian Islands have recently been split (from Winter Wren) as Pacific Wren. It would appear logical that the birds on the Commander Islands are the same species, since these islands are the western end of the Aleutian chain. Despite this, Russian ornithologists have confirmed that no work seems to have been done to establish if this is indeed the case.

One individual was, however, seen at Peschanaya Bay, Medney Island (1 June) which responded to recordings of Pacific Wren.

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

This species was seen on the pre-voyage excursion from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) and subsequently on Urup, Iturup and Kunashir (7-9 June).

Like the Coal tits, the nuthatches in Eastern Russia are a much "colder" colour than their counterparts in Western Europe and also have a somewhat different call. Some authorities (including the IOC) now treat the birds which occur north of Kamchatka as a different species, Siberian Nuthatch *Sitta arctica*, and there would seem to be some logic in treating the Kamchatka birds as part of this species rather than as Eurasian Nuthatches.

Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Agropsar philippensis*

Two birds were seen on Iturup (8 June).

Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

The only records were on the pre-voyage extension (29 May) with an A logged.

Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolais*

This species was recorded on five dates with the first records being at Bukhta Russkaya, Kamchatka (3 June). Birds were then seen on a daily basis with the final sightings being on Urup Island (7 June) with the highest count being on Shimushir where A was logged.

Grey-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

One bird was seen on Onekotan (4 June).

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*

A total of four birds were seen on 4 June with three on Atlasova and one on the afternoon landing on Onekotan.

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica*

The only record was a lone individual on Kunashir (9 June).

Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina*

Unquestionably one of the most colourful forest birds of the expedition and the group enjoyed some nice looks at two birds during the landing on Kunashir (9 June).

Taiga (Red-throated) Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

This species is only usually seen in small numbers and this proved to also be the case in 2014 with the only sightings coming on the pre-voyage extension out of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (29 May) when five birds were seen.

Japanese Robin *Erithacus akahige*

Unlike its British counterpart, this species is often extremely difficult to locate as it typically creeps around in the understory. This year, however, one bird performed exceptionally well on Urup, with another individual also seen by some of the group. The following day, other individuals were heard on the excursion to the mountains on Iturup (8 June) but none were seen.

Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope*

This stunning species was seen on a daily basis between the Zhupanova River and Iturup (2-8 June) with A being logged on three dates and single figure counts on all other occasions. On many landings, males were seen singing from bare branches.

Stejneger's Stonechat *Saxicola stejnegeri*

The taxonomy of the 'stonechat complex' has been revised significantly in recent years and if the current recommendations of the IOC are followed, the birds in the Russian Far East should now be treated as Stejneger's Stonechats, with one seen on Iturup (8 June) and two birds the following day on Kunashir.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Two birds were noted in with the Tree Sparrows on Bering Island (31 May) with the only other sighting being during the pre-voyage extension.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

This species was only encountered on two islands during the trip with records on Bering Island (31 May: A) and Iturup (8 June: A) with similar numbers also logged on the pre-voyage extension.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] tschutschensis*

The taxonomy of the Yellow Wagtail group remains controversial, although most authorities now split the complex into two, with the birds in this part of Eastern Russia all being Eastern Yellow Wagtails, *Motacilla tschutschensis*.

This 'species' was recorded at the Zhupanova River (3 June: 6 birds) and Bukhta Russkaya (4 June: 2 birds).

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

Two birds were seen at the Zhupanova River (3 June) with the only other record being a lone bird on Onekotan Island (4 June).

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Like the Yellow Wagtails, the taxonomy of the 'black-and-white' wagtails which occur in this part of Eastern Asia is somewhat controversial with 'Black-backed Wagtail' previously treated as a full species, *Motacilla lugens*. In recent years, however, most authorities have lumped it as a subspecies of the more widely distributed White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*.

Black-backed Wagtails were seen on the majority of landings with records on nine dates (plus the pre-voyage birding excursion), although most counts were in single figures.

Reasonable numbers of the grey-backed subspecies *ocularis* were also seen with records on a daily dates between Bukhta Russkaya and Iturup (3-8 June).

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

This species was seen in reasonable numbers on the pre-voyage extension (29 May) when A was logged. The only other sighting was five days later at Bukhta Russkaya where a single bird was seen.

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*

Only seen in the Commander Islands with three birds at Nikol'skoye, Bering Island (31 May) and six the following day at Peschanaya Bay on Medney Island.

Buff-bellied [American] Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

This species was only seen on Atlasova and Onekotan (4 June) with a total of nine birds being recorded.

Pine Grosbeak *Pinicola enucleator*

Three birds were seen in the stone pines on Onekotan (4 June) with a couple of birds then seen two days later on Shimushir.

Eurasian (Grey-bellied) Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*

Only seen in the latter stages of the trip with records on Shimushir and Urup with the higher count being on the former island where a low A was logged.

The subspecies which occurs in the Kuril Islands is very different from the birds in Western Europe as the males only have a pink throat, rather than this colour also extending down onto the breast and some treat this as a separate species, Grey-bellied Bullfinch.

Asian Rosy Finch *Leucosticte arctoa*

One of the biggest surprises of the 2013 expedition was finding a pair of these smart finches not far from the landing site on Onekotan and two individuals were found at almost exactly the same place this year.

Grey-crowned Rosy Finch *Leucosticte tephrocotis*

This species is one of the main targets on Medney Island and although the buildings where they had previously nested have now been demolished, at least six individuals were found during the landing at Peschanaya Bay on 1 June.

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erthrinus*

This species was first seen on the pre-voyage extension (29 May: 2 birds) with single individuals subsequently recorded at the Zhupanova River and Bukhta Russkaya (2-3 June).

Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus*

This handsome species was recorded on two dates during the latter stages of the voyage, with four birds on Urup (7 June) and two a couple of days later on Kunashir.

Grey-capped (Oriental) Greenfinch *Carduelis sinica*

A reasonably regularly recorded species with sightings on each of the last eight dates of the expedition, although all counts were in low single figures.

Eurasian Siskin *Carduelis spinus*

This species was only seen during the mountain excursion on Iturup (8 June) and the following day on Kunashir with three individuals being seen on both islands.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*

This handsome bunting was first recorded on the pre-voyage extension (29 May) with four individuals being seen. Two birds were then seen four days later at the Zhupanova River, with two the following day at Bukhta Russkaya.

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

Seen in reasonable numbers on Urup (7 June) where a low A was logged. A single bird was then found the following day on Iturup, with the final sightings being on the last landing, Kunashir, where five were recorded.

Grey Bunting *Emberiza variabilis*

This species is usually only seen in small numbers with three birds found on Shimushir (6 June) and four the next day on Urup.

Common Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus*

This widespread species was recorded in low numbers on four dates with the highest count being on Onekotan where six were seen (4 June).

Lapland Bunting *Calcarius lapponicus*

This species is reasonably numerous at Nikol'skoye (the main settlement in the Commander Islands) and at Peschanaya Bay on Medney Island with A logged on both dates (31 May-1 June).

Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*

Another species which was only seen in the Commander Islands with four birds at Peschanaya Bay on Medney Island (1 June) and one the previous day at Nikol'skoye.

MAMMALS

Tundra Vole *Microtus oeconomus*

Good numbers were seen on Shimushir (6 June) with A logged.

Muskrat *Ondatra zibethicus*

Two individuals at the Zhupanova River (2 June) were the only records on the expedition.

Red Fox *Vulpus vulpus*

A total of nine Red Foxes were seen during the second half of the expedition with the species recorded on Onekotan, Matua and Urup.

Blue [Arctic] Fox *Alopex lagopus*

Arctic Foxes were seen on Bering (31 May: 1 animal) and Medney Island (1 June: 2 animals).

The foxes on Medney Island are an endemic subspecies, *Alopex lagopus semenovi*, which became highly endangered in the early 1990s, with the population falling to less than 100 individuals as a result of an introduced mite which caused mange. In 1994 a programme of inoculating cubs was introduced and since then the population has increased considerably.

Sea Otter *Enhydra lutris*

Sea Otters were recorded on seven dates with the highest counts being at the Zhupanova River and Bukhta Russkaya (2-3 June) where A was logged.

Common [Harbour] Seal *Phoca vitulina*

This widespread species was seen on four days, with 5 logged at Bering Island (31 May) and A on both 5 and 6 June (Ekarma/Toporkovy and Shimushir/Yankicho). The only other sighting was a lone animal at Urup on 7 June.

Largha [Spotted] Seal *Phoca larga*

This North Pacific endemic was seen on three dates with the highest count being at the Zhupanova River (2 June) where A was logged. Four animals were then seen the following day at Bukhta Russkaya with the only other record being a single individual at Kunashir (9 June).

Steller's [Northern] Sea-lion *Eumetopias jubatus*

Another species with a fairly restricted range which was seen on four dates with two days when B was logged (Bukhta Russkaya and Ekarma/Toporkovy).

Bukhta Russkaya (3 June) is a regular haul-out and the presence of good numbers of sea-lions seems to attract Orcas, as this species is often found patrolling directly in front of the sea-lions' favoured rocks.

Northern Fur Seal *Callorhinus ursinus*

Northern Fur Seals were recorded on five dates with low single figure counts on all days with the highest count being four individuals on the sea day between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy and the Commander Islands (30 May).

Orca [Killer Whale] *Orcinus orca*

The Russian Far East and especially the Kuril archipelago are undoubtedly one of the best places in the world for finding Orca and during the expedition there were sightings on eight dates with at least 150 animals recorded.

The highest count was between Atlasova and Onekotan (4 June) when a minimum of seventy animals were seen but there were five other days when there were double figure counts.

Whilst most of these sightings were 'at sea', we enjoyed some phenomenal views whilst zodiac-cruising off Bukhta Russkaya (3 June) with the animals seen a matter of metres from the zodiacs; unquestionably one of the highlights of the expedition.

Harbour Porpoise *Phocoena phocoena*

Only seen on the last two full days of the expedition with two offshore from Iturup (8 June) and two whilst cruising towards Sakhalin from Kunashir.

Dall's Porpoise *Phocoenoides dalli*

Like Orca, this handsome cetacean was recorded on a regular basis with sightings on eight days. Whilst the typical day count was in single figures, there were three occasions when A was recorded.

Baird's Beaked Whale *Berardius bairdii*

Five of these large beaked whales were seen during the sea crossing between Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy and the Commander Islands (30 May).

Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

This extremely widespread and deep-diving species was recorded on four dates with a total of fifteen animals being seen. The highest count was whilst cruising towards Urup (7 June) when eight animals were noted.

Fin Whale *Balaenoptera physalus*

The only record of Fin Whale on the expedition was a single animal seen whilst cruising from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy to the Commander Islands (30 May).

Northern Minke Whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*

The only sighting was a single animal found whilst sailing from Kunashir to Sakhalin (9 June).

Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaengliae*

This species was seen in reasonable numbers during the first half of the trip with at least 13 animals recorded across four dates.

The highest count was whilst cruising along the southern coast of Bering Island (31 May) when eight individuals were seen.