

## PEREGRINE BIRD TOURS

### KAMCHATKA, AND THE COMMANDER AND KIRIL ISLANDS

27 MAY – 13 JUNE 2017

#### TOUR REPORT

**LEADER:** Chris Doughty

In Russia's Far East, upwellings from deep ocean trenches, ocean currents, and a myriad of volcanic islands, combine together, to create perfect conditions for both seabirds and cetaceans. Consequently, this area is one of the richest in the world, not only for the large numbers of species of seabirds that can be observed, but also for the sheer abundance of birds, that occur here. This part of the world remains, to a very large degree, an untouched, and starkly beautiful wilderness. The alcids are without doubt, the crowning glory, in this part of the world. We saw no less than 13 different species, all of the alcids that are possible on this itinerary, including Common, Brünnich's, Pigeon and Spectacled Guillemots, Long-billed and Ancient Murrelets, Crested, Least, Parakeet and Rhinoceros Auklets and Horned and Tufted Puffins. The star of stars, Whiskered Auklet, was seen by the thousands, we even visited one of their breeding colonies, which enabled us to watch them from just a few metres away! A great supporting cast of marine birds, included Red-throated and Pacific Divers, all three species of albatrosses that occur in the North Pacific, Laysan, Black-footed, and the endangered Short-tailed Albatross, Northern Fulmar, Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwaters, Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel, Temminck's, Pelagic, and Red-faced Cormorants, Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, White-winged and Black Scoters, Red-necked and Red Phalaropes, Red-legged Kittiwake, Aleutian Tern and Arctic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Skuas. Land-birds also included some highly sought-after species, notably the extraordinary Steller's Sea-Eagle, as well as Long-tailed Duck, White-tailed Sea-Eagle, Rough-legged Buzzard, Latham's Snipe, Rock Sandpiper, Japanese Pygmy and Eurasian Three-toed Woodpeckers, Pechora Pipit, Japanese Accentor, Brown-headed Thrush, Japanese Bush-Warbler, Middendorff's and Sakhalin Warblers, Sakhalin Leaf-Warbler, Narcissus Flycatcher, Japanese and Swinhoe's Robins, the gorgeous Siberian Rubythroat, Bull-headed Shrike, Chestnut-cheeked Starling, Asian Rosy-Finch, the stunningly beautiful Long-tailed Rosefinch, and Rustic, Grey, Lapland and Snow Buntings. We recorded a total of 141 different species of birds. We also observed 16 species of mammals, of which, the two Brown Bears, were a real treat; seals and cetaceans were very well represented, the latter including Blue, Sperm, Humpback, Fin and Killer Whales.

Following a series of long and tiring flights from Australia, we arrived at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy airport, in the capital city of Kamchatka, in the Russian Far East; at 8.15 in the morning. We were met at the airport and transferred to our hotel, on the outskirts of the city. During the drive, we observed our first birds of the tour, lots of Feral Pigeons were very much in evidence, and we also saw several Carrion Crows. Once we had unpacked, we decided to do a little shopping and have some lunch. We were joined for lunch, by a party of Eurasian Tree Sparrows. In the afternoon we walked to nearby Kultuchnoya Lake, and here we very much enjoyed watching several Mallards, half a dozen or so Tufted Ducks, large flocks of Greater Scaup, a female Long-

tailed Duck in summer breeding plumage, a few Common Sandpipers, we found several immature Glaucous-winged Gulls, a single Glaucous Gull in winter plumage, very large numbers of Slaty-backed Gulls, a large flock of Black-headed Gulls, a solitary Grey Wagtail, a few White Wagtails, and a pair of Northern Ravens. Quite a nice group of birds, so close to such a large city.

We had a second full day on our own today, so we decided to do an even longer walk, once again, we walked around Kultuchnoya Lake, where we saw the same birds as yesterday. We had lunch on the edge of Avancha Bay, and following lunch, we did some birding along the edge of the bay. Here we found two new species of birds for the tour, Pelagic and Red-faced Cormorants. We also saw our first mammal today, a pair of Harbour Seals, were loafing in the sea, just offshore. On our walk back to our hotel we walked through an area known as Park Point, and here we found an Olive-backed Pipit, in full song, and we were able to enjoy very close looks, at this attractive species.

The following morning we were picked up from our hotel, in a large bus, and we were joined by a dozen or so birders, from various parts of the world, who would also be joining us on the cruise. We drove out of town, to an area of forest known as the Borosko Hills. Here we found a Northern Goshawk which circled overhead, a couple of splendid Rough-legged Buzzards, several rather shy Eyebrowed Thrushes, a few beautiful Taiga Flycatchers, a pair of Willow Tits, a few Common Magpies, and we enjoyed several encounters with rather smartly attired Spotted Nutcrackers. In the afternoon, we drove to an area known as Blue Lake, which was actually a Russian-style holiday camp. Here we added a drake Goosander, a couple of very beautiful Common Terns in full breeding plumage, we enjoyed super looks at the attractive Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker, saw a couple of Eurasian Nuthatches, several beautiful Bramblings, a pair of Oriental Greenfinch, and a stunning, adult male, Common Rosefinch, which was also in full breeding plumage. During the drive back to town, we stopped at a small marsh, close to the airport, and here we enjoyed watching several Common Snipe, performing their ariel display flights.

The following morning, the day dawned sunny and bright, and we were picked up from our hotel, once again, and driven out to the Borosko Hills. A morning birding here, produced two new birds for the tour, a solitary Grey-streaked Flycatcher, was much appreciated, and we saw our first Eurasian Bullfinches of the tour. We then drove to a large lake, on the edge of Avancha Bay, where we ate our packed lunch. At the lake, we found a pair of nesting Red-necked Grebes, and large numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes, who were taking full advantage of the freshwater, sprucing themselves up, as they splashed around and preened themselves. Following lunch, we drove to the wharf, where we boarded the Professor Khromov, to begin our 13 day cruise. Our epic voyage began amongst the stunning scenery of Avancha Bay, which many believe to be one of the best natural harbours in the world. It was here that Bering and Steller set sail on their somewhat ill-fated expedition to discover America in 1741, so it was a poignant moment, as we left the dock and heading out into the blue waters, once sailed by legends. It was with great anticipation that we set sail beneath volcano peaks, towering above the horizon, and in the bay we added both Brunnick's and Common Guillemots, and our only pair of Spectacled Guillemots for the tour. We then headed out to sea, and sailed along the Kamchatka coast. Here new birds included, a small flock of Red-necked Phalaropes, several Pigeon Guillemots and a few stunningly beautiful, Tufted Puffins.

We then enjoyed a full day at sea, as we sailed down the Kamchatka coast, heading towards the Commander Islands. A day at sea is always a thrilling experience, and it was with great excitement and anticipation, we sailed off, into the great unknown. We saw lots of new birds today, including our first Laysan Albatrosses, huge flocks of Northern Fulmars, flocks of many hundreds of Short-tailed Shearwaters, and we found a single Sooty Shearwater amongst them. We saw our first of

many Fork-tailed Storm-Petrels, our first flocks of Red Phalaropes, all in immaculate full breeding plumage, we were very pleased to see the range restricted and very uncommon Red-legged Kittiwake, we enjoyed flocks of Pomarine, Arctic and incredibly beautiful Long-tailed Skuas, and our first Horned Puffins of the tour. Mary also observed a stunning male Siberian Rubythroat, that spent a little time on the ships deck, resting. We also enjoyed some fantastic sightings of large whales, which were positively abundant, we saw more than half a dozen Humpback Whales, ten or so Fin Whales, and surprisingly, an incredible total of ten Blue Whales. We saw our first pod of beautiful Dall's Porpoise, as well as a few Northern Fur Seals.

This morning we arrived at the Commander Islands, the most easterly, in the Aleutian chain of islands. Somewhat surprisingly, the sun was shining brightly and it was rather warm, relatively speaking. We landed close to the small village of Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, and we went birding along the edge of a large bay, where the birding proved very rewarding. The shoreline was littered with Harlequin Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers, Lesser Sandpipers, in stunning full breeding plumage, large numbers of Dunlin were performing their elaborate courtship displays, we found a flock of a dozen or so uncommon and range restricted, Rock Sandpipers. Moving away from the bay we birded an area of grassy meadows and scrub. Here we found our main target species, the uncommon Pechora Pipit, but they were vastly outnumbered by Lapland Buntings, the males looking particularly magnificent, in their stunning breeding plumage. We then made a visit to the Severo – Zapadnoye Reserve, at Northwest Cape. Here we enjoyed the noisy spectacle of a huge colony of Northern Fur Seals, with smaller numbers of Steller's Sea Lions. We also enjoyed watching our first of many Arctic Foxes, and a few delightful Sea Otters, there was also the surprise sighting of a European Mink, devouring a fish. Apparently, there had been a commercial Mink breeding farm on the island, but unfortunately, it proved unprofitable, and the animals were released into the wild. The only new bird here, was an adult male Snow Bunting, still in non-breeding plumage, who was busily feeding along the tide-line. In the afternoon, we visited Ariy Kamen, a small rocky island, just off Bering Island, where many thousands of seabirds, breed on the steep cliffs. We spent a couple of hours cruising along the edge of the island, where we watched and photographed huge numbers of birds, including two new species for the tour, Parakeet and Crested Auklets.

We awoke this morning to find that there was quite a swell, making it a rather bumpy ride in the zodiac, as we headed for Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island. We had several hours onshore, to explore this beautiful bay. New birds found here included, a couple of Northern Pintail, a small flock of Eurasian Teal, several Common Eiders, a very responsive Eurasian Wren, and the surprise find of a Yellow-breasted Bunting, a bird which is not normally found on the island. We then returned to the ship for lunch, and wondered what new birds we would find on the afternoon excursion. Once again, we set off in the zodiacs, heading for Lisinskaya Bay, also on Medny Island. The zodiac cruise provided us with a great opportunity to watch a great many Sea Otters, frolicking in the kelp beds, at very close quarters, they spend a great deal of time lying on their backs and generally relaxing, on the surface of the ocean. The birding highlight was the sightings of the much-desired Whiskered Auklet, which we saw very well.

The morning was spent at sea, cruising towards the coast of mainland Kamchatka. The highlight of the morning, was our first pod of Killer Whales, which were loafing around on the surface of the ocean. As we approached the coast we could see a whole series of stunning perfectly-conical volcanoes, most of them with snowy caps, and one of them, had steam blowing out from one of the calderas. In the afternoon we launched all of the zodiacs and spent a wonderful afternoon cruising the Zhupanova River. As we entered the mouth of the river, we saw a few Larga Seals loafing around on the surface, and an Aleutian Tern flew directly over our zodiac, unfortunately, this was the only one we saw. The river itself is long, winding, and very wide, fortunately, we had enough

time to explore each bank of the river, and the land that lay beyond it. Undoubtedly, the great highlight of the afternoon, was our time spent observing up to a dozen mighty Steller's Sea-Eagles, close to the mouth of the river, who were sat around on the river banks or in large trees which flanked both sides of the river. It was a thrilling sight, and one of the great highlights of the tour. However, the best was yet to come, we saw one of these majestic eagles carrying nesting material, so we followed the bird, which led us to its nest, built in the top of a large tree, right on the edge of the river. As we approached the nest, a nestling could clearly be seen, which became quite agitated, as the adult approached. This was a very special experience, and one that none of us will ever forget. One or two photographs, or perhaps one or two hundred photographs were taken, as the adult sat fully exposed in the tree, just above the nest. Elsewhere along the river, new birds came thick and fast, they included large numbers of beautiful Red-throated Divers, which performed several fly-overs, for our entertainment. We found a small flock of Eurasian Wigeons, a pair of beautiful Northern Shovelers, several Black Scoters, and a few Common Gulls. As we cruised close to the bank of the river we were able to spot one or two small passerines, and we were able to enjoy good looks, at a couple of Rustic Buntings and an adult male Common Reed Bunting. The mammal highlight of the day, were two separate sightings of Brown Bears, feeding along the river bank, this was also a great thrill. Late in the afternoon we made a landing, at a small marsh, close to the Salmon fishing camp. This allowed us to stretch our legs, and admire the abundant and varied plant life, that was evident in and around the marsh. We also found a couple of new birds for the tour, there were good numbers of Eurasian Skylarks, performing their flight songs, and we also found a small flock of Eastern Yellow Wagtails. We also enjoyed super close looks at a Tundra Vole. It was then time to return to the ship, but the birding experience was still not complete, from our zodiac we enjoyed watching a small flock of Long-billed Murrelets, which were sitting on the sea, just ahead of us, and we managed to get a good look at them, before they flew off as our zodiac approached them. This is a particularly difficult species to see well, so we were extremely fortunate.

A glorious dawn broke early this morning, bathing the incredibly scenic fjord of Bukhta Russkaya, in a spectacular, warm orange glow. The zodiac ride to the beach, was positively dream-like, with mirror-calm waters, making the passage more than comfortable. Beyond us we looked upon thick snow-covered undulations in the valley as well as a curiously scenic ship wreck, on the southern shore. On land, we found a thick covering of snow that provided lots of laughs and more than a few snowball fights, we tried valiantly to walk through waist-high snow, which proved very tough going, but was not without its rewards. We found our first Brown-headed Thrushes here, several beautiful Siberian Rubythroats, and one or two small flocks of Common Redpoll. It was fun to spend time in the snow, as it was the only time, we were to encounter it, apart from on the tops of the volcanoes. The second part of today's outing involved an extended zodiac cruise, beyond the mouth of the fjord. We were flanked by towering sea cliffs on one side, and a mirror-calm, wide open sea, on the other. The coastline was punctuated by the occasional waterfall, and there was a hauntingly beautiful lighthouse, perched on the top of one of the cliffs. The birding highlight of the zodiac cruise, was a very close Eastern Osprey, which we all appreciated. Once we were all safely on board our ship, we set sail for the spectacular Kuril Islands. A short time later, we found our first small flock of Ancient Murrelets, and a pair of diminutive Least Auklets, sitting on the ocean, in front of the ship.

Unfortunately, the good weather was not to last, and the following day was marred by some unfavourable weather, we had no option but to drop anchor in a sheltered bay, of Atlasova Island, in the northern Kuril Islands, in the hope of better weather on the horizon. Unfortunately, the wind continued to blow, and our ship was dragging its anchor, and it was deemed not safe to make a landing. So it was decided that the ship would cruise between the islands, which proved to be very

fortuitous, as shortly after sailing, we enjoyed very close looks at an immature Short-tailed Albatross, a lifer for many of the birders aboard, and one of the holy grails of Far East birding.

Yesterday, due to inclement weather, we were forced to delay our landing on Onekotan Island, however, this morning we enjoyed a spectacular sunrise over the dual volcanoes of Onekotan, and we were able to do a landing on the island. Following a short zodiac trip, we arrived on the soft sand beach in the north of the island, and went for a long walk. Once we had negotiated a rather tricky walk up the side of a steep valley, we did some birding in an area of extensive Stone Pine, a type of dwarf pine, that grows no more than a metre high. Here we found a rather distant Peregrine Falcon, a few Buff-bellied Pipits, and a rather distant pair of Black-faced Buntings. On our arrival at the landing site, we found a pair of beautiful and very uncommon, Asian Rosy-Finches, which we saw very well. We also saw a new species of mammal this morning, a splendid Red Fox. In the afternoon, we cruised to the nearby small outlying island of Ekarma. During this short cruise we found two more new birds for the tour, a splendid Pacific Diver and a pair of attractive Rhinoceros Auklets. In the late afternoon, we went for a zodiac cruise along the rugged shoreline of Ekarma Island, and we were fortunate to find a few reintroduced Cackling Geese. As darkness descended we made our way back to the ship, for a well earned rest.

We awoke the following morning to find dozens of Laysan Albatrosses sitting on a flat calm sea, all around the ship. Careful inspection of these birds produced all three North Pacific albatrosses, we found a single immature Short-tailed Albatross, and then we found an adult Black-footed Albatross. This is an incredible sighting, to find these three species of albatrosses all in the same flock, would be an exceedingly unusual occurrence. As we cruised towards the shoreline in our zodiac, we found a flock of White-winged Scoters, amongst an even larger flock of Black Scoters. We spent the majority of the day, birding on Simushir Island, where an abandoned Soviet submarine base is located long the edge of a large caldera, of an extinct volcano. One of the walls of the caldera has collapsed, creating a perfect harbour, and a perfect place for a submarine base. It also enabled us to take our zodiacs directly into the flooded centre of the island, landing on the shore and exploring the ruins of a Soviet naval base, that appears to have been abandoned at very short notice. There was a huge number of buildings, depots and even anti-aircraft guns, and lots of trucks. During our walk around the submarine base, we found three new species of birds for the tour. They included a breeding pair of Long-toed Stints, several Middendorff's Warblers and a few Kamchatka Leaf-Warblers. The ship then cruised the short distance to Yankicha Island, where we boarded the zodiacs once more, and entered another flooded caldera. We cruised around the shoreline, as the sky began to darken, as flocks of literally countless thousands of Crested and Whiskered Auklets, came flooding into the caldera, flying all around us, and sitting on the sea in huge flocks. This is one of the most incredible spectacles in the avian world, which few people ever get to see.

Much of the following day was spent walking around Urup Island, we had plenty of time to explore the area. We spent much of our time birding in a large bamboo-filled valley, were new birds for the tour included no less than a dozen stunning White-tailed Sea-Eagles, a nesting pair of Latham's Snipe, a few Oriental Turtle-Doves, both Eurasian and Oriental Cuckoos, small flocks of Pacific Swifts, a rather obliging Japanese Bush-Warbler, good numbers of Large-billed Crows, a simply stunning Long-tailed Rosefinch, and best of all, prolonged close views, of an adult male Grey Bunting, which is an extremely range restricted species.

Shortly after dawn, Karen observed a Sperm Whale, from the bridge of the ship. We spent the rest of the day on Iturup Island, unlike the islands of the northern Kuril Islands, this is a very large island, and is inhabited by a small population of people, the first we had encountered in some time. There was a large convoy of 4x4 vehicles waiting for us at the landing site. Here we were surprised

to find a pair of nesting Common Starlings, a recent coloniser of the island. We boarded the vehicles, and drove deep into the heart of the island. Our first birding stop, produced stunning looks at the two main target birds for the day, Japanese Accentor and Japanese Robin, both performed incredibly well, sitting out in the open, in full song. With the two main target birds in the bag, we walked along the road, searching for anything of interest. We did find two more new birds for the tour, these included three Eastern Buzzards seen in flight, and a small flock of Eurasian Siskins, were observed perched in the top of a tall pine tree. During the return drive to the ship, we made a short birding stop at a small river, here we found a Eurasian Sparrowhawk circling overhead, a small flock of Sand Martins, flew overhead, as did a couple of Northern House Martins, and we enjoyed very close looks at an adult female Chestnut-cheeked Starling, which was drinking from the river. We then enjoyed a short break in the centre of town, where we mingled with the locals, and took full advantage of the first supermarkets we had seen for quite some time. Sales of chocolate and wine in the town, climbed disproportionately, on that particular day of the year!

We awoke the following morning, to find ourselves at anchor, off Kunashir Island, in the far south of the Kuril Islands. This island has a subtropical climate, and we were bathed in sunshine, summer had already arrived, and was out in force. Along the beach we found two new species of birds for the tour, half a dozen Temminck's Cormorants swam around in the shallows, and a handful of Black-tailed Gulls, were rummaging along the tide-line. We took a packed-lunch with us, and spent most of the day walking to and from a large river, on the island. A park ranger accompanied us, and he was carrying a loaded rifle, this was bear country, and we were taking no chances! We walked through grassy meadows, swathes of bamboo, broadleaved forest and pine woodlands. We very much enjoyed the walk, and we also added several new birds to our ever growing trip list. We flushed a Eurasian Woodcock from cover, Karen saw a Common Kingfisher, we watched a Japanese Pygmy-Woodpecker climbing up a tree, admired a Goldcrest at the top of a tall pine, enjoyed good close looks at a couple of Eastern Crowned Warblers, an Asian Brown Flycatcher sat out in the open for us, we found a few Stejneger's Stonechats, a Coal Tit showed well in a nearby pine tree, a pair of Marsh Tits foraged around in the undergrowth, and we saw a pair of Hawfinches in flight. However, the best sighting of the day, has to go to the incredibly beautiful Narcissus Flycatcher, which just sat right out in the open, for all to see.

The following morning we awoke to find the ship tied up at the wharf, in Yuxhno-Sakhalinsk, on Sakhalin Island. We were met by two local birding guides, and we spent the entire day, birding in a huge expanse of forest, that surrounds the city. It was an enjoyable day of birding, and we added even more new birds, to the trip list. We saw both Great Spotted and Grey-headed Woodpeckers, a Lanceolated Warbler was glimpsed, we saw a rather responsive Sakhalin Warbler, glimpsed a Black-browed Reed-Warbler, enjoyed good close looks at both Pallas's and Sakhalin Leaf-Warblers, managed to get very good looks at the often retiring Swinhoe's Robin, and saw a Bull-headed Shrike, perched on overhead power-lines. It was a fitting end, to a wonderful birding tour, of the Soviet Far East.

## SYSTEMIC LIST

### DIVERS

**Red-throated Diver** *Gavia stellata* We observed a rather flighty flock on the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Pacific Diver** *Gavia pacifica* We observed small numbers while at sea, in the northern Kuril Islands.

### GREBES

**Red-necked Grebe** *Podiceps grisegena* We observed a breeding pair attending a nest, on the edge of a small lake in Avancha Bay, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

### ALBATROSSES

**Laysan Albatross** *Phoebastria immutabilis* We enjoyed many good looks of this impressive bird; our sightings began off the Kamchatka coast and continued right through the Commander Islands and the Kuril Islands. On the 7<sup>th</sup> June, we awoke to find ourselves anchored off Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands. To our delight, all three species of albatrosses, from the northern Pacific, were sitting on a flat calm sea, surrounding the boat. This would be a very rare occurrence.

**Black-footed Albatross** *Phoebastria nigripes* A single adult was observed sitting close to the boat, at Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands. This species is classified as 'Near Threatened' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be around 300,000 individuals and stable.

**Short-tailed Albatross** *Phoebastria albatrus* Our three separate sightings of this rare species, was without doubt one of the great highlights of the tour. All of the sightings took place while cruising the Kuril Islands. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated to be 1,734 individuals and increasing. This rare albatross was almost exterminated by massive exploitation during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and indeed, it was believed to be extinct in the 1940s. A few pairs were discovered breeding on Torishima Island in the 1950s, and since then, thanks to a major conservation effort by the Japanese, the population has steadily increased. However, it still has a very small population, and only breeds on two isolated islands; Torishima Island, off southern Japan, and Minami-kojima Island, situated to the east of Taiwan. This species is susceptible to long-line fishing fleets, severe storms and human impact.

### PETRELS AND SHEARWATERS

**Northern Fulmar** *Fulmarus glacialis* An abundant bird throughout the cruise, occurring in huge numbers in the Commander Islands and the northern Kuril Islands. The vast majority of birds were of the dark morph, but there was a smattering of white phase birds, especially in the Commander Islands.

**Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus* A single individual was picked out amongst the many thousands of Short-tailed Shearwaters, that we saw throughout the cruise. The sighting occurred on the first day of the cruise, while at sea, sailing just off the Kamchatka coast.

**Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris* This species was extremely abundant throughout all areas of the tour, and particularly in the southern Kuril Islands, where we were sailing through concentration of tens of thousands of birds. The entire population of this species, which breeds in southeastern Australia and Tasmania, spends the austral winter in the northern Pacific.

## STORM-PETRELS

**Fork-tailed Storm-Petrel** *Oceanodroma furcata* This attractive species of storm-petrel, is a locally, very common species in the northern Pacific. We saw large numbers throughout the tour, and on some days, we sailed through flocks of many hundreds.

## CORMORANTS

**Temminck's Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax capillatus* Recorded only in the southern Kuril Islands, Karen saw this species off Iturup Island, and then we all saw a flock of half a dozen of so, at Kunashir Island. Coenraad Jacob **Temminck** (1778-1858) was a Dutch ornithologist, illustrator and collector. He was appointed the first Director of the Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie, in Leiden, in 1820, and held that post until his death. He was a wealthy man who had a very large collection of specimens and live birds. His first task as an ornithologist was to catalogue his father's very extensive collection. His father was Jacob Temminck, for whom Le Vaillant collected specimens.

**Pelagic Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax pelagicus* First encountered in Avancha Bay, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, and then recorded almost daily in small numbers, throughout the cruise.

**Red-faced Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax urile* This species proved to be common in Avancha Bay, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in the Commander Islands and in the northern and central Kuril Islands.

## SWANS, GEESE AND DUCKS

**Cackling Goose** *Branta hutchinsii* A race of this species, formally occurred in parts of the Kuril Islands. A closely related race from North America, has been reintroduced to the Kuril Islands, we saw a flock of four birds on Ekarma Island, in the northern Kuril Islands.

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope* We observed a pair at a small wetland, close to the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Eurasian Teal** *Anas crecca* We observed half a dozen or so birds in Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands, and then we saw a pair in the small marsh, close to the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Mallard** *Anas platyrhynchos* Commonly encountered around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, and we also saw a few birds at the small wetland, close to the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Northern Pintail** *Anas acuta* A pair of birds were observed in Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands.

**Northern Shoveler** *Anas clypeata* A pair of this species were observed on the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Tufted Duck** *Aythya fuligula* More than a dozen birds were present on Kultuchnoya Lake, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. We observed a further four birds, swimming in a river on Onkotan Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Greater Scaup** *Aythya marila* Good numbers were present around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, on the Commander Islands, on the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka, and also on Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Common Eider** *Somateria mollissima* We found 20 or so birds swimming around in Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands.

**Harlequin Duck** *Histrionicus histrionicus* Pleasingly common, along the Kamchatka coast, on the Commander Islands and in the Kuril Islands. We enjoyed close encounters with this species on several occasions, while in the zodiacs.

**Long-tailed Duck** *Clangula hyemalis* A single female, in summer plumage, was observed very well on Kultuchnoya Lake, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

**Black Scoter** *Melanitta americana* A flock of ten or so birds were observed along the Zhupanova River, and half a dozen were observed at Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, both in Kamchatka. A fairly large flock was also observed just offshore from Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**White-winged Scoter** *Melanitta fusca* Karen saw a few birds just off Onkotan Island, in the Kuril Islands, and then we observed a group of ten birds, amongst the Black Scoters on Simushir Island, also in the Kuril Islands.

**Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* Small numbers were observed in the Commander Islands and also in the Kuril Islands.

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser* A drake was observed at Blue Lake, near Poratunka and a few birds were present on the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

#### OSPREYS

**Eastern Osprey** *Pandion cristatus* A single bird was observed in flight, along the coast, at the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka.

#### KITES, HAWKS AND EAGLES

**White-tailed Sea-Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* This very fine species, proved to be very common in the southern Kuril Islands, where we were seeing up to 20 birds in a single day.

**Steller's Sea-Eagle** *Haliaeetus pelagicus* Observing this very impressive species of eagle, was one of the great highlights of the tour. We had incredibly close looks at an adult bird, which was sat close to its nest along the Zhupanova River, and there were at least ten other birds observed along the river. The enormous size of these birds became apparent, as we watched one being mobbed by a seemingly tiny Carrion Crow. It was not surprising that this bird was voted 'Bird of the Tour', by tour participants. A small number were also present at the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, all the sightings occurred along the Kamchatka coast. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. The estimated population is between 3,600-3,800 individuals and unfortunately, decreasing. This species has a geographically small range, and its population continues to decline. The main threats to this species are degradation of habitat, pollution, poisoning by lead shot, and over-fishing. **Georg Wilhelm Steller** (1709- 1746) was a German naturalist and explorer in Russian service. He studied medicine at Halle, between 1731 and 1734, and was a physician in the Russian army in 1734. He became an assistant at the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg in 1734 and accompanied Vitus Bering on his second expedition (1738-1742) to Alaska and Kamchatka. Between 1742 and 1744 he worked in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy but died on the return journey to St Petersburg. Steller published a Journal of a Voyage with Bering 1741-1742, in 1743.

**Eurasian Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter nisus* A single bird was observed soaring overhead, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis* A single bird was observed in flight, in the Borosko Hills, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

**Eastern Buzzard** *Buteo japonicus* We observed a total of three birds, all in flight, while birding on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Rough-legged Buzzard** *Buteo lagopus* We enjoyed up to half a dozen sightings of this impressive bird, at the Borosko Hills and during the drive to and from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

#### CARACARAS AND FALCONS

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus* We had a very distant view of a bird in flight, while birding on Onkotan Island, in the Kuril Islands.

## LAPWINGS AND PLOVERS

**Lesser Sandplover** *Charadrius mongolus* It was terrific to observe a dozen or so of these beautiful birds, in full breeding plumage, on their nesting grounds, at a small wetland at Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands.

## SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES

**Eurasian Woodcock** *Scolopax rusticola* One bird was flushed from cover, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Latham's Snipe** *Gallinago hardwickii* We enjoyed great views of this species on both Urup and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands, however, our best sighting was on Sakhalin Island, where we enjoyed prolonged views of a bird performing its incredible display flight.

**Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago* We observed a small number of birds performing their aerial display flight, at a small marsh, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy airport. We also flushed a pair of birds from a small wetland, along the edge of the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos* We found small numbers at all the wetlands we visited around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. We also found a few birds along the coast at Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands.

**Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta* We found a displaying pair, in full breeding plumage, on Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands, at a very small wetland, close to the abandoned submarine base.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina* It was a real thrill to observe up to 20 or so birds, on their breeding grounds, along the coast at, Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands. All were in full breeding plumage, and performing fantastic courtship behaviour.

**Rock Sandpiper** *Calidris ptilocnemis* We enjoyed very close, superb views of a dozen or so birds, along the shoreline at Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands. This is a very uncommon, and range restricted species.

**Red-necked Phalarope** *Phalaropus lobatus* We observed a few small flocks on the sea, as we cruised along the Kamchatka coast. Most were in full breeding plumage.

**Red Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* We enjoyed many flocks sitting on the ocean, off the Kamchatka coast, around the Commander Islands and in the northern Kuril Islands. Some of the flocks, were made up of 60 or so birds, and all of them, were in full breeding plumage.

## GULLS

**Black-tailed Gull** *Larus crassirostris* We found a few birds on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands, then it became common along the coast of Sakhalin Island, at Yuxhno-Sakhalinsk.

**Common Gull** *Larus canus* We found a small flock, of a dozen or so birds, on a sandbank, at the mouth of the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Glaucous-winged Gull** *Larus glaucescens* This was the common gull around Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, it was common along the Kamchatka coast, and then became very common in the Commander Islands.

**Glaucous Gull** *Larus hyperboreus* This species is only a winter visitor to the areas we visited during the tour. We observed a single adult, in non-breeding plumage, sitting on Kultuchnoya Lake, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy.

**Slaty-backed Gull** *Larus schistisagus* This species proved to be common along the Kamchatka coast, and then became extremely common, throughout the Kuril Islands.

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* We found large numbers along the Kamchatka coast, at the mouth of the Zhupanova River, and a few birds on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Red-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa brevirostris* This very attractive species, proved to be very common in the Commander Islands, where we found large numbers breeding amongst even larger numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes. This species is classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International. It is estimated that the population is approximately 170,000, and unfortunately, declining. This species has undergone a rapid population reduction in the last three generations, approximately 40 years. The main threat to this species, is a reduction in the food supply, as a result of excessive commercial fishing.

**Black-legged Kittiwake** *Rissa tridactyla* A close relative of the previous species, it proved to be common throughout the whole cruise, where we recorded it every day. There were huge breeding colonies in the northern Kuril Islands.

#### TERNs

**Aleutian Tern** *Onychoprion aleuticus* Unfortunately, we only glimpsed a single bird in flight, along the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo* We very much enjoyed watching this species, which in the Soviet Far East, are of the race *longipennis*. They look very different from the nominate race, and they are very beautiful. It is the same race that winters in Australia, however, they never come into breeding plumage, while wintering in Australia. We watched a pair at Blue Lake, close to Poratunka, we saw a few in Avancha Bay at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, and we saw good numbers along the Zhupanova River, where there must have been a breeding colony, nearby.

#### SKUAS

**Pomarine Skua** *Stercorarius pomarinus* We enjoyed very good looks at several of these attractive birds, while at sea, off the Kamchatka coast.

**Arctic Skua** *Stercorarius parasiticus* A few birds were observed, while at sea, off the Kamchatka coast.

**Long-tailed Skua** *Stercorarius longicaudus* We enjoyed several close sightings of this very attractive skua, at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, and along the Zhupanova River.

#### AUKS, GUILLEMOTS AND PUFFINS

**Common Guillemot** *Uria aalge* This species proved to be very common in the Commander Islands, and we found small numbers in the northern Kuril Islands. It was tremendous to see them at their breeding colonies.

**Brunnich's Guillemot** *Uria lomvia* We observed small numbers off the Kamchatka coast, we found good numbers breeding in the Commander Islands, although they were vastly outnumbered by Common Guillemots, and then they became an extremely common breeding species, in the northern Kuril Islands, where they outnumbered Common Guillemots. **Morten Thrane Brunnich** (1737-1827) was bird curator in Copenhagen and worked on Guillemots. He is described by the Danish bibliographer Jean Anker as the 'founder of Danish faunistic zoology' and was a highly praised systematist. He wrote *Ornithologia borealis* in 1764, which was a description of a private collection of birds from Denmark, Iceland and other parts of northern Europe.

**Pigeon Guillemot** *Cephus columba* This species proved to be common at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, in the Commander Islands, and in the northern Kuril Islands.

**Spectacled Guillemot** *Cephus carbo* A single pair was observed at very close quarters, right next to the ship, while cruising at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, on the first day of the cruise.

**Long-billed Murrelet** *Brachyramphus perdix* We observed small numbers at sea, just off the mouth of the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Ancient Murrelet** *Synthliboramphus antiquus* We enjoyed super looks as small numbers of these birds, at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, and at sea, while sailing through the northern and southern Kuril Islands.

**Parakeet Auklet** *Aethia psittacula* We first observed small numbers at Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands, with larger numbers observed at sea, in the northern Kuril Islands.

**Crested Auklet** *Aethia cristatella* We first encountered this species at Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands, it became more common in the northern Kuril Islands and we also observed small numbers in the southern Kuril Islands. By far our best looks at this species were while cruising in zodiacs in a caldera on Yankicha Island, late in the afternoon, as the birds were returning to their nesting colonies. It is estimated that there are in excess of 600,000 pairs breeding on this small island, it was quite a spectacle.

**Whiskered Auklet** *Aethia pygmaea* We observed small numbers in the Commander Islands, then we found larger numbers in the northern Kuril Islands. Once again we enjoyed the magnificent spectacle of these birds returning to their nesting colonies, with Crested Auklets, on Yankicha Island, as we cruised the caldera in our zodiacs.

**Least Auklet** *Aethia pusilla* Sadly, we only had very brief views, of a pair of these minuscule auklets, which took off from the side of the ship, and hurtled off into the distance, as we were cruising off the Kamchatka coast.

**Rhinoceros Auklet** *Cerorhinca monocerata* This attractive species was observed on many occasions, but only in small numbers, throughout both the northern and southern Kuril Islands.

**Horned Puffin** *Fratercula corniculata* First encountered at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, and then observed in small numbers almost daily, throughout the Commander and Kuril Islands.

**Tufted Puffin** *Fratercula cirrhata* A common but very attractive alcid, which we recorded on almost every day of the cruise, we often found them a long-way from land. We observed particularly large numbers, while in the Commander Islands.

#### PIGEONS AND DOVES

**Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia* Commonly encountered in Kamchatka and on Sakhalin Island.

**Oriental Turtle-Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis* Small numbers seen well in the southern Kuril Islands of Urup, Iturup and Kunashir, as well as on Sakhalin Island.

#### CUCKOOS

**Eurasian Cuckoo** *Cuculus canorus* First observed along the beach at Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka, then we saw it again at Urup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus optatus* We observed this bird very well on one occasion, on Urup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### SWIFTS

**Pacific Swift** *Apus pacificus* We observed large flocks of this species on Urup and Iturup Islands, in the southern Kuril Islands, and also on Sakhalin Island.

#### KINGFISHERS

**Common Kingfisher** *Alcedo atthis* Karen observed one of these birds flying along a river, on Kunashir Island.

#### WOODPECKERS

**Japanese Pygmy-Woodpecker** *Yungipicus kizuki* A single bird, was observed very well, on one occasion, on Kunashir Island, in the southern Kuril Islands.

**Great Spotted Woodpecker** *Dendrocopos major* A single bird was observed very well, on the last day of the tour, on Sakhalin Island.

**Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker** *Picoides tridactylus* A single bird, was observed extremely well at Blue Lake, near Poratunka, in Kamchatka.

**Grey-headed Woodpecker** *Picus canus* A single bird, was observed at very close quarters, on Sakhalin Island.

#### LARKS

**Eurasian Skylark** *Alauda arvensis* We found this species to be fairly common in open areas at the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka, and on Onkotan and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

#### SWALLOWS

**Sand Martin** *Riparia riparia* We observed a small flock of half a dozen or so birds, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Northern House Martin** *Delichon urbicum* A pair of this species, were also observed, during our time on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### PIPITS AND WAGTAILS

**Olive-backed Pipit** *Anthus hodgsoni* This species proved to be common in open areas, throughout Kamchatka. Many of the birds we saw were in full song, and were on their nesting territories.

**Pechora Pipit** *Anthus gustavi* We observed this range restricted species, on both Bering and Medny Islands, in the Commander Islands, and at Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Buff-bellied Pipit** *Anthus rubescens* We observed a few birds, while birding on Onkotan Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba* This species was observed very well throughout the whole tour.

**Eastern Yellow Wagtail** *Motacilla tschutschensis* We found a flock of half a dozen birds, in the small marsh, along the edge of the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* We observed a single bird, on the first day of the tour, along the edge of Kultuchnoya Lake, at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy. We then observed a second bird, along a large river on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### KINGLETS

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus* We enjoyed super close looks at an individual, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### WRENS

**Eurasian Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes* We heard far more birds than we saw; in fact, we only observed this species on one occasion. Fortunately, we observed it very well in Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands.

#### ACCENTORS

**Japanese Accentor** *Prunella rubida* We were extremely fortunate to enjoy very close looks at this uncommon and range restricted species, on one occasion, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### THRUSHES AND ALLIES

**Eyebrowed Thrush** *Turdus obscurus* This attractive species proved to be common in Kamchatka and we also observed it on Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Brown-headed Thrush** *Turdus chrysolaus* We observed small numbers of this species at the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka and then in greater numbers on Simushir, Urup and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

#### OLD WORLD WARBLERS

**Japanese Bush-Warbler** *Cettia diphone* The explosive song of this species was heard on many occasions, and we saw it very well on both Urup and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

**Lanceolated Warbler** *Locustella lanceolata* This species was glimpsed on one occasion, at a small marsh close to Yuxhno-Sakhalinsk airport, on Sakhalin Island.

**Middendorff's Warbler** *Locustella ochotensis* We observed good numbers of this species on Simushir and Urup Islands, in the Kuril Islands. **Alexander Theodor von Middendorff** (1815-1894) was a German-Russian traveller and naturalist, who was a member of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences. From 1842 to 1845 Middendorff journeyed throughout Siberia and the surrounding regions.

**Sakhalin Warbler** *Locustella amnicola* This bird proved very responsive to tape playback, on Sakhalin Island, but even so, was difficult to see well.

**Black-browed Reed-Warbler** *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* Glimpsed by myself on one occasion, at the small marsh close to Yuxhno-Sakhalinski airport, on Sakhalin Island.

**Pallas's Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus proregulus* A single individual was observed very well, in woodland, on Sakhalin Island. **Peter Simon Pallas** (1741-1811) was a German zoologist and one of the greatest of the 18th Century naturalists. He led numerous expeditions throughout much of Russia between 1768-1774. He described many new species of mammals, birds, fish and insects.

**Kamchatka Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus examinandus* Seen well on a few occasions, on both Simushir and Urup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

**Sakhalin Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus borealoides* We observed a single bird very well, in the forests on Sakhalin Island. This species has recently been split from Pale-legged Warbler, and only breeds on Sakhalin Island, the southern Kuril Islands and northern Japan.

**Eastern Crowned Warbler** *Phylloscopus coronatus* We observed very good looks at a few birds, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

#### OLD WORLD FLYCATCHERS

**Grey-streaked Flycatcher** *Muscicapa griseisticta* We enjoyed super looks, at an individual, in the Borosko Hills, near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in Kamchatka.

**Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa dauurica* We enjoyed a good sighting of this species, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Narcissus Flycatcher** *Ficedula narcissina* We very much enjoyed a very close sighting of one of these spectacularly plumaged birds, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Taiga Flycatcher** *Ficedula albicilla* We had several good looks at this attractive species, during the two days we were birding in the Borosko Hills, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in Kamchatka.

**Japanese Robin** *Erithacus akahige* We were very fortunate to have very close looks at an unusually obliging individual, on Rubeytsky Volcano, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Swinhoe's Robin** *Luscinia sibilans* We found a very responsive and obliging male, in the forests of Sakhalin Island. **Robert Swinhoe** (1836-1877) was born in Calcutta, India, and was sent to England to be educated. He worked in China as a diplomat, and during this time he explored vast areas of China, which had not been visited previously, by any other collector. As a result, he discovered new species at the rate of about one per month, throughout the 19 years he was there. He discovered in excess of 200 new species of birds.

**Siberian Rubythroat** *Luscinia calliope* We greatly enjoyed, many excellent sightings, of this particularly striking species; beginning with a male bird on the boat, observed by Mary, off the Kamchatka coast. We then saw birds at Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka, and then it became quite common on most of the Kuril Islands.

**Stejneger's Stonechat** *Saxicola stejnegeri* A recent split from Siberian Stonechat. We saw it first on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands, and then it proved to be fairly common on Sakhalin Island. **Dr. Leonhard Hess Stejneger** (1851-1943) was a Norwegian ornithologist and herpetologist who settled in the USA, where he became the USNM's vertebrate expert. He was the first full-time Curator of the Herpetology Division and held the position of Curator of the Department of Reptiles and Batrachians (1889-1943). He wrote the Aves volume in the series Standard Natural History (1885) and the Birds of the Commander Islands and Kamchatka. He had a lifelong fascination with **Steller**, writing a biography of him (1936) and retracing many of his journeys. Two mammals, sixteen reptiles, and ten amphibians are named after him.

#### TITS AND CHICKADEES

**Marsh Tit** *Poecile palustris* First observed on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands, and then on Sakhalin Island.

**Willow Tit** *Poecile montanus* We observed a pair in the Borosko Hills, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in Kamchatka.

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater* Proved to be common on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

#### NUTHATCHES

**Eurasian Nuthatch** *Sitta europaea* Seen well on a few occasions, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, on Iturup and Kunashir Islands, in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

#### SHRIKES

**Bull-headed Shrike** *Lanius bucephalus* A single bird, was observed on power lines, on Sakhalin Island.

#### JAYS, MAGPIES AND CROWS

**Common Magpie** *Pica pica* Several birds observed in and around, Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in Kamchatka.

**Spotted Nutcracker** *Nucifraga caryocatactes* First observed in the Borosko Hills, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, where it proved to be fairly common. We then saw small numbers on Simushir, Urup and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

**Carrion Crow** *Corvus corone* Commonly encountered, in Kamchatka, and on most of the Kuril Islands.

**Large-billed Crow** *Corvus macrorhynchos* By far the commonest crow in the southern Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

**Northern Raven** *Corvus corax* We observed small numbers in Kamchatka, on the Commander Islands, where it is the only crow, and in the northern Kuril Islands.

#### STARLINGS

**Chestnut-cheeked Starling** *Sturnia philippensis* An adult female, of this range restricted species, was observed very well indeed, as she drank from a small stream, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* Observed nesting, on the docks, in Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands. It is a very recent coloniser of this island.

## OLD WORLD SPARROWS

**Eurasian Tree Sparrow** *Passer montanus* Common around towns and villages in the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy area, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands, on Iturup Island in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

## SISKINS, CROSSBILLS AND ALLIES

**Brambling** *Fringilla montifringilla* This very attractive species, proved to be plentiful in the Borosko Hills, close to Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, in Kamchatka.

**Asian Rosy-Finch** *Leucosticte arctoa* We were very fortunate, to observe a pair of these difficult to find birds, on Onkotan Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus* Small numbers present at Blue Lake, near Poratunka, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands, along the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka, and on Sakhalin Island.

**Common Redpoll** *Acanthis flammea* We found small flocks at Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka.

**Eurasian Siskin** *Spinus spinus* Small flocks were present on Iturup and Kunashir Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

**Oriental Greenfinch** *Chloris sinica* Proved to be common in Kamchatka, on Iturup Island, in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

**Eurasian Bullfinch** *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* We enjoyed good sightings, in the Borosko Hills, near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy, on Simushir and Urup Islands, in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

**Hawfinch** *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* We observed a pair in flight, on Kunashir Island, in the Kuril Islands.

**Long-tailed Rosefinch** *Uragus sibiricus* We enjoyed great looks, at this very attractive species of rosefinch, on Urup and Iturup Islands, in the Kuril Islands.

## BUNTINGS, SPARROWS, SEEDEATERS AND ALLIES

**Rustic Bunting** *Emberiza rustica* Observed very well, along the Zhupanova River, and at the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka.

**Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* An immature male was observed in Peschannaya Bay, on Medny Island, in the Commander Islands.

**Black-faced Bunting** *Emberiza spodocephala* Seen well on Onkotan, Urup and Kunashir Islands, in the Kuril Islands, and on Sakhalin Island.

**Grey Bunting** *Emberiza variabilis* We were extremely fortunate, to enjoy good, close looks, at an adult male, for an extended period of time, in the forest, on Urup Island, in the Kuril Islands. This is an uncommon, and range restricted species.

**Common Reed Bunting** *Emberiza schoeniclus* Observed well, from our zodiac, along the bank of the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka.

**Lapland Bunting** *Calcarius lapponicus* This very attractive species, proved to be abundant, and in full song, in the meadows and scrub around Nikolskoye, on Bering Island, in the Commander Islands. It was wonderful to see the males, in spectacular full breeding plumage.

**Snow Bunting** *Plectrophenax nivalis* Our first sighting was of an adult male, which was still in non breeding plumage, in the Severo-Zapadnoye Reserve, on Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands. The following day, we found a pair of birds, this time in full breeding plumage, in Peschannaya Bay, on nearby Medny Island, also in the Commander Islands.

## MAMMALS

- Tundra Vole** *Microtus oeconomus* We found a single animal, in the small marsh, along the Zhupanova River, in Kamchatka, and then we saw a great many, on Simushir Island, on the Kuril Islands, were their burrows and tunnels, honeycombed the island.
- Arctic Fox** *Vulpes lagopus* Proved to be both tame and confiding, on both Bering and Medny Islands, in the Commander Islands, were they are native. We also observed an incredibly tame individual, on Yankicha Island, in the Kuril Islands, were they are an introduced species.
- Red Fox** *Vulpes vulpes* We enjoyed great looks at this attractive animal, on Onekotan, Simushir and Kunashir Islands, in the Kuril Islands.
- Brown Bear** *Ursus arctos* We saw two different animals, while cruising along the Zhupanova River, in our zodiac, on the mainland, in Kamchatka. Unfortunately, both were very wary, for good reason, many hundreds are shot for sport every year in Kamchatka, and they shuffled away, when they saw us approaching.
- Northern Fur Seal** *Callorhinus ursinus* First encountered at sea, off the Kamchatka coast, and then we found large numbers at their breeding colony, in the Severo- Zapadnoye Reserve, on Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands.
- Steller's Sea Lion** *Eumetopias jubatus* A small number were present amongst the far more numerous Northern Fur Seals, at the Severo- Zapadnoye Reserve, on Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands. A very large male, surrounded by his harem, were also observed at the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, in Kamchatka.
- Largha Seal** *Phoca largha* Small numbers were observed at the mouth of the Zhupanova River, on the coast of Kamchatka, more were observed at the mouth of the Bukhta Russkaya Fiord, also in Kamchatka, and finally, we saw a few more, off Simushir Island, in the Kuril Islands.
- Harbour Seal** *Phoca vitulina* This species proved to be relatively common, throughout the tour; with observations along the Kamchatka coast, in the Commander Islands, and the Kuril Islands.
- Sea Otter** *Enhydra lutris* We found good numbers in the Commander Islands, and along the Kamchatka coast.
- European Mink** *Mustela lutreola* We observed a single individual, feeding on a fish, in the Severo- Zapadnoye Reserve, on Ariy Kamen Island, in the Commander Islands. This species was introduced to the island, when a captive breeding program on the island, proved not to be viable.
- Blue Whale** *Balaenoptera musculus* We enjoyed a wonderful encounter with a small pod of Blue Whales, off the Kamchatka coast.
- Fin Whale** *Balaenoptera physalus* We enjoyed close views of this species, when one surfaced, close to the ship, off the Kamchatka coast.
- Sperm Whale** *Physeter catodon* Observed off Iturup Island, on one occasion.
- Humpback Whale** *Megaptera novaeangliae* A small group showed well, off the Kamchatka coast.
- Dall's Porpoise** *Phocoenoides dalli* We enjoyed many sightings of this strikingly marked species of porpoise, throughout the cruise. We even watched one pod, riding the bow-wave of the ship.
- Killer Whale** *Orcinus orca* We enjoyed a great many sightings of these very impressive beasts, firstly, off the Kamchatka coast, and then frequently, in the waters of the Kuril Islands.