Japan
Ryukyu Islands Extension
20th to 26th November 2013 (7 days)

Ryukyu Robin by Glen Valentine

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Tour Summary

Our 2013 Rockjumper birding tour of Japan’s Ryukyu Islands was an immense success and produced every single endemic on the beautiful, forested islands of Amami and Okinawa. These small islands make up the southern tip of Japan and were the focus of this pre-tour extension. Highlights were many and included such legendary species as the fairly recently discovered Okinawa Rail (only described in 1981), the impressive and extremely localized and rare Okinawa (Pryer’s) Woodpecker (listed as one of the world’s 300 rarest birds with less than 600 individuals remaining), the noisy and extremely striking Lidth’s Jay, mega Amami Woodcock, seldom-seen Amami Thrush, little-known Ryukyu Flycatcher (split from Narcissus Flycatcher by some authorities), Whistling Green Pigeon and the stunning Ryukyu Robin!

Our adventure began in the country’s capital, the bustling Tokyo and the world’s most populous city! Starting our birding the next morning at a productive site nearby (the Sakurada Moat) before our flight to Amami-Oshima, we were delighted by the numbers and great, close views of a good assortment of waterfowl. Species included Gadwall, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Common Pochard, Tufted Duck and at least 14 Falcated Duck that included 11 stunning males, as well as a single American Wigeon, a rather rare bird in Japan. In attendance were good numbers of Great Cormorant, including a single adult in fine breeding plumage. We also had a brief fly-over Northern Goshawk, a perched Eastern Buzzard, and Brown-eared Bulbul and Grey-capped Greenfinch in the surrounding woodland. Back for breakfast and a short bus trip to Haneda Airport saw us connecting with our internal flight south to the island of Amami-Oshima. We arrived in the mid-afternoon where we were greeted by clear skies and were soon on the road towards the coastal town of Naze, our base for the next two nights. En route we encountered good numbers of Grey-faced Buzzard and Blue Rock Thrush (represented here by the distinctive and
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highly attractive chestnut-bellied race). With some daylight still remaining we struck out for the nearby Kinsakubaru Forest Reserve, our main focus during our time on the island. Arriving in the late afternoon with dwindling light we managed to find two groups of Lidth’s Jay, which were rather shy and only showed briefly; and, just before dusk, a large Japanese Wood Pigeon flew past overhead. As darkness fell we boarded our bus and drove slowly along the gravel roads watching carefully for woodcocks in the road, until we reached an area where we could no longer drive any further. Exiting the bus we decided to walk slowly along a small track that meandered through an excellent patch of primary forest. Here we managed to obtain sensational views of Ryukyu Scops Owl. After walking slowly along the track for an hour we decided to head back to the bus and make our way back to town for dinner and a good night’s rest. However, on our way back we spotted a woodcock flushing off from the edge of the road and landing back in the road just around the next corner. The bus came to a grinding halt and we piled out and edged closer to where the bird landed and there it was, standing right in the middle of the road about 30m away from us. Amami Woodcock! What a great bird and one of the Ryukyu Islands’ toughest endemics to see! We were thrilled with our find and returned to base for a scrumptious and elegant dinner.

The next day saw us heading out early back to Kinsakubaru for a pre-breakfast attempt at finding the elusive and rarely-seen Amami Thrush. We searched the roads and forest edge just after dawn but no luck with the thrush…at least not today. We did however find some other excellent birds that included good scope views of several Whistling Green Pigeon, a few Ryukyu Minivets, more Lidth’s Jay, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker, Varied and Japanese Tits, Brown-eared Bulbul, Japanese Bush Warber, Japanese White-eye and the stunning and little-known Ryukyu Flycatcher (split by some authorities from Narcissus Flycatcher). After returning for a hearty breakfast we made our way to the Amami Natural Forest where we spent the remainder of the morning. En route we stopped in at an area where Lidth’s Jays were nesting and were treated to superb views of these brilliant, endemic beauties. The Natural
Forest was very quiet and after indulging in a very tasty bento (Japanese lunchbox) we made our way back to Kinsakubaru for a bit of late afternoon birding. As expected the forest was rather quiet but we were delighted to encounter an obliging White-backed Woodpecker (represented here by the endemic black-backed race, a ringer for splitting...) We also found several fast-moving Eyebrowed Thrushes on passage and two members of the group were very fortunate to see a male Izu Thrush (possibly the first record of this species for Amami) amongst the Eyebrowed Thrushes.

Our final morning on Amami had us back at Kinsakubaru for one last shot at the difficult Amami Thrush. Luck was on our side this morning and we encountered two separate birds during our morning foray that showed very well. What a superb way to end the Amami leg of our Ryukyu Island Extension! In the mid-morning we departed for Amami airport to connect with our flight further south to the island of Okinawa where we would spend the second leg of the extension. We had some time though before our flight to have a look at the nearby Ooze Beach. Scanning out into the backlit mudflats yielded a few new species for the list such as Pacific Reef Heron, Dunlin, Kentish, Grey and Little Ringed Plovers, a single Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Kingfisher and Western Osprey. Our short flight took us to the city of Naha on Okinawa’s southern coastline and from here we began our journey north towards the Yanbaru in the forested hills in extreme northern Okinawa and our focal point for the next few days. En route we stopped in at the tidal mudflats of the Manko River and this produced further new species for the list including a single Eurasian Curlew, several Whimbrel, close Pacific Golden Plover and a few Red-necked and Temminck’s Stints at a distance. We arrived at our very comfortable and hospitable hotel in the heart of the Yanbaru in the early evening and settled in by enjoying another fine Japanese meal.

One of the extension’s most prized endemics was our target the next morning – the once near-mythical Okinawa Rail! We began our search at dawn and within no time at all found one that scurried off the edge of the road before anyone could get a glimpse of it. However, soon afterwards we encountered another rail feeding at the edge of the road. We spotted this individual from quite a...
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distance, which meant we could stop before the bird become alarmed by our presence and subsequently enjoyed lengthy views of this world mega! What a cracking bird and undoubtedly one of the star birds (if not the number one bird) of the trip! Delighted with our success we turned around and returned to our hotel for breakfast, but not before yet another Okinawa Rail was seen wandering around the edge of the road! We stopped and admired this individual at close range for several minutes before a truck came past and scared it off into the forest. No doubt it would have returned into the open if we had waited but we’d had our full and were utterly satisfied with our views of this very special and highly localized endemic. After breakfast we struck out for a nearby forest road where we spent the remainder of the morning ambling along looking and listening for Okinawa’s other two endemic specialties, the very rare and localized Okinawa Woodpecker and the exquisite but rather furtive Ryukyu Robin. We found both species on several occasions, the robin showing well and at length on one occasion, with the nervous woodpecker only showing briefly on both occasions. Soon it was midday and time to head into town for a bite to eat. We also fancied a change in birding scenery and opted to bird two separate areas of flooded rice paddies and drainage ditches. These turned up a few interesting species during the quiet time of day and birds that kept us entertained included numerous Common Snipe, several Green, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Grey and White Wagtails, and Western Osprey and Peregrine Falcon overhead.

On our final day on Okinawa we returned to the forested Yanbaru area once the heavy early morning downpour had subsided somewhat. The birding was slow due to the inclement weather and we struggled to obtain further views of Ryukyu Robin, which only showed briefly on a few occasions. Other than several glimpses of the robin we did not see too much and decided to abandon the forest when the rain returned in earnest and make our way to the Kin wetlands. Kin was productive and yielded a few birds that we had not encountered at the previous wetland areas visited the day before, including Temminck’s and Long-toed Stints, two juvenile Eastern Yellow Wagtails, flocks of Scaly-breasted Munia and hordes of Buff-bellied Pipits. Returning to the forest in the afternoon yielded good views of Ryukyu Robin and further brief views of Okinawa Woodpecker just before it became too dark to see.

We departed the Yanbaru in the early morning for the drive back south to Naha to connect with our flight back to Tokyo, where the extension ended. However, we did have some time to bird the small pond at Sankaku near the airport and this proved most productive as we found two Black-faced Spoonbills there as well as numerous other waders and waterfowl at close range, and enjoyed intimate encounters with Long-toed Stint, Dunlin, Kentish Plover, Common Redshank, a single Grey-tailed Tattler, Eurasian Teal and Northern Shoveler, as well as good views of Blue Rock Thrush. Our flight
went smoothly on a massive Boeing 747 that was only about a quarter full so we could spread out and get some rest before the start of our exciting main Japan – Dancing Cranes and Winter Birding tour.

Annotated Checklists of Birds & Mammals

ANNOTATED LIST OF BIRDS (89 species seen)

Note: Names and taxonomical order of the bird species list follows that of IOC (International Ornithological congress), Gill, F. and M. Wright. 2013; Birds of the World: Recommended English Names. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press (version 3.5). Names in square brackets represent names given by IOC and omitted by Clements whereas names in round brackets represent names given by Clements and omitted by IOC. Names without square or round brackets represent the name given by both IOC and Clements. A notes section can be found where notably distinctive subspecies or races are concerned and where the taxonomy of a species differs between Clements and IOC. Clements names and taxonomy is derived from version 6.8.

Key to abbreviations:
E: an endemic species
NE: a near-endemic species
BE: a breeding endemic species
I: an introduced species

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

Gadwall Anas strepera
At least a dozen were seen at the Sakurada Moat on the first morning in Tokyo.
Falcated Duck Anas falcate
Superb scope views were had of 11 extremely handsome drakes and 3 hens at the Sakurada Moat in Tokyo.
Eurasian Wigeon Anas penelope
Good numbers were seen at the Sakurada Moat.
American Wigeon Anas americana
One male was spotted and scoped at the Sakurada Moat.
Mallard Anas platyrhynchos
Four birds were seen in flight at the Kin wetlands, Okinawa with another four en route to the Yanbaru.
Eastern Spot-billed Duck Anas zonorhyncha
Small numbers seen at Ooze Beach, Amami and at wetlands on Okinawa.
Northern Shoveler Anas clypeata
Good numbers at Sakurada Moat and smaller numbers on both Amami and Okinawa.
Northern Pintail Anas acuta
A single male seen en route from Naze to Amami Airport and another young male seen at Kin, Okinawa.

[Eurasian] (Green-winged) Teal Anas crecca
A few females at Ooze Beach, Amami and small numbers at wetlands on Okinawa.

NOTE: IOC splits the above species into Eurasian Teal A. crecca and Green-winged Teal A. carolinensis whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Green-winged Teal A. crecca.

Common Pochard Aythya farina
Many seen at Sakurada Moat in Tokyo.
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Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*
Good numbers seen at Sakurada Moat.

Grebes *Podicipedidae*

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*
At least ten seen at Sakurada Moat, Tokyo.
NOTE: IOC splits Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* into two species: Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* and Tricolored Grebe *Tachybaptus tricolor*, whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*.

Ibises & Spoonbills *Threskiornithidae*

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*
We were thrilled to find two of these rare and threatened ibis at Sankaku Pond on our final morning on Okinawa.

Bitterns & Herons *Ardeidae*

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*
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Cormorants, Shags *Phalacrocoracidae*

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
About a dozen seen at Sakurada Moat in Tokyo, which included one bird in breeding plumage and another 20 seen at Ooze Beach, Amami.
NOTE: IOC splits this species into Great Cormorant *P. carbo* and White-breasted Cormorant *P. lucidus*, whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Great Cormorant *P. carbo*.

Ospreys *Pandionidae*

[Western] Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
Good views of several individuals daily on Amami and Okinawa Islands.
NOTE: IOC recognizes two species: *P. haliaetus* Western Osprey and *P. cristatus* Eastern Osprey, whereas Clements only recognizes one species, *P. haliaetus* Osprey.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles *Accipitridae*

Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis*
A juvenile bird flew overhead while birding at Sakurada Moat, Tokyo.

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[Grey] (Gray)-faced Buzzard  
*Butastur indicus*
Fair numbers were seen daily on both Amami and Okinawa Islands.

[Eastern] (Common) Buzzard  
*Buteo japonicus*
A single bird was perched in a rather concealed spot at the Sakurada Moat on our first morning in Tokyo.

*NOTE:* IOC splits Common Buzzard *B. buteo* into 5 separate species: Common Buzzard *B. buteo*, Eastern Buzzard *B. japonicus*, Himalayan Buzzard *B. burmanicus*, Cape Verde Buzzard *B. bannermani* and Socotra Buzzard *B. socotraensis*, whereas Clements only recognizes one species: Common Buzzard *B. buteo*.

**Falcons** *Falconidae*

[Common] (Eurasian) Kestrel  
*Falco tinnunculus*
A singleton was seen well in flight near the Amami Natural Forest Reserve.

Peregrine Falcon  
*Falco peregrinus*
Singletons of this widespread raptor were seen on consecutive days on Okinawa Island.

**Rails, Crakes & Coots** *Rallidae*

Okinawa Rail (E)  
*Gallirallus okinawae*
We were thrilled to obtain excellent views of this mega endemic on two occasions in the Yanbaru in northern Okinawa.

Common Moorhen  
*Gallinula chloropus*
Small numbers were encountered at wetlands on Okinawa.

Eurasian Coot  
*Fulica atra*
Good numbers at Sakurada and a further 6 at Ooze Beach, Amami.

**Plovers** *Charadriidae*

Pacific Golden Plover  
*Pluvialis fulva*
At least a dozen at the Manko with a further individual at Sankaku.

[Grey] (Black-bellied) Plover  
*Pluvialis squatarola*
Several birds were seen at Ooze Beach.

Little Ringed Plover  
*Charadrius dubius*
Small numbers were encountered at Ooze Beach, Manko, Kin wetlands and Sankaku.

Kentish Plover  
*Charadrius alexandrinus*
A handful was seen at Ooze Beach and at wetlands on Okinawa.

**Snipes & Sandpipers** *Scolopacidae*

Eurasian Woodcock  
*Scolopax rusticola*
A single bird was flushed from the road-edge at the edge of farmland and secondary growth while driving back from Kinsakubaru Forest after dark.

Amami Woodcock (E)  
*Scolopax mira*
A single bird flushed up from the edge of a road-side bank and subsequently alighted in the road where it was spot-lighted during a night drive in Kinsakubaru Forest. A further two birds were seen in flight as they flushed off the road-edge while walking along the road through Kinsakubaru Forest at dawn.

Common Snipe  
*Gallinago gallinago*
Good numbers were seen perched and in flight at wetlands on Okinawa.

Bar-tailed Godwit  
*Limosa lapponica*
A single bird was seen at Ooze Beach, Amami.

Whimbrel  
*Numenius phaeopus*
Half a dozen seen at Ooze Beach and a few more at the Manko River.

**Eurasian Curlew** *Numenius arquata*
A singleton was scoped at the Manko River, Okinawa.

**Common Redshank** *Tringa tetanus*
Fair numbers were seen at the Manko River with a few more at Sankaku.

**Marsh Sandpiper** *Tringa stagnatilis*
A singleton seen at Kin with a further bird at Sankaku.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
Several seen at Ooze Beach, Manko and other wetlands on Okinawa.

**Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*
A few birds seen at wetlands on Okinawa.

**Wood Sandpiper** *Tringa glareola*
A few were encountered at wetlands on Okinawa.

**[Grey] (Gray)-tailed Tattler** *Tringa brevipes*
A single bird was encountered at Sankaku.

**Common Sandpiper** *Tringa hypoleucos*
Small numbers were seen on both Amami and Okinawa Islands.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*
Small numbers seen at Ooze Beach, Amami.

**Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis*
Two birds were found at the Manko River, Okinawa.

**Temminck’s Stint** *Calidris temminckii*
A single bird was spotted at the Manko River and another 4 were seen at Kin.

**Long-toed Stint** *Calidris subminuta*
Three were seen at Kin with at least 30 being found later on at Sankaku.

**Dunlin** *Calidris alpina*
Two were seen at Ooze Beach, one at Kin and a further dozen at Sankaku.

**Gulls & Terns** *Laridae*

**Black-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*
Several were seen on our first morning in Tokyo.

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*
A juvenile bird was seen at Ooze Beach, Amami.

**Pigeons & Doves** *Columbidae*

**Rock [Dove] (Pigeon) (I)** *Columba livia*
Widespread in urban areas throughout.

**Japanese Wood Pigeon (NE)** *Columba janthina*
A single bird was seen briefly in flight in the late afternoon over Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami.

**Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis*
Common and seen daily in all habitats.

**Whistling Green Pigeon** *Treron formosae*
Pairs and small groups were seen daily in Kinsakubaru Forest on Amami Island.

**Owls** *Strigidae*

**Ryukyu Scops Owl** *Otus elegans*
Sensational views were had of this species at night in Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami.
Brown Hawk-Owl  
*Ninox scutulata*
Hannes heard and saw this species on our final night of the tour at our hotel in the Yanbaru, Okinawa.

**Swifts  Apodidae**

*House Swift*  
*Apus nipalensis*
At least ten birds were seen in flight during our first morning at the Sakurada Moat in Tokyo.

**Kingfishers  Alcedinidae**

*Common Kingfisher*  
*Alcedo atthis*
Two birds were seen at Ooze Beach and singletons were later encountered at wetlands on Okinawa.

**Woodpeckers  Picidae**

*Japanese [Pygmy] Woodpecker*  
*Dendrocopos kizuki*
Singletons and pairs were encountered daily in Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami.

*White-backed Woodpecker*  
*Dendrocopos leucotos*
After intensive searching we finally encountered a single bird feeding in Kinsakubaru Forest in the late afternoon.

*Okinawa Woodpecker (E)*  
*Sapheopipo noguchii*
Three separate sightings were had of this scarce and shy endemic. Every encounter was rather brief however.

**Cuckooshrikes  Campephagidae**

*Ryukyu Minivet (E)*  
*Pericrocotus tegimae*
A total of four birds were found during our time in Kinsakubaru Forest.

**Crows & Jays  Corvidae**

*Lidth’s Jay (E)*  
*Garrulus lidthi*
Small groups of this striking endemic were encountered daily on Amami Island. First seen at Kinsakubaru Forest, while our best views were at the Tsumagi Village.

*Large-billed Crow*  
*Corvus macrorhynchos*
Seen in reasonable numbers on every day of the trip.

*NOTE: Clements lumps this species with Indian Jungle Crow C. culminatus and Eastern Jungle Crow C. levantii as Large-billed Crow C. macrorhynchos, whereas IOC splits all three of these species into distinct species.*

**Tits, Chickadees  Paridae**

*Varied Tit*  
*Poecile varius*
Small numbers were seen in forest habitat on both Amami and Okinawa islands.

*Japanese Tit*  
*Parus minor*
Seen in fair numbers on both Amami and Okinawa islands.

**Bulbuls  Pycnonotidae**

*Light-vented Bulbul*  
*Pycnonotus sinensis*
Good numbers were seen at the Manko River with a few singletons thereafter.

*Brown-eared Bulbul*  
*Hypsipetes amaurotis*
Good numbers were seen daily during the extension.
Swallows & Martins  *Hirundinidae*
Pacific Swallow  *Hirundo tahitica*
Seen on every day of the extension.

**Cettia Bush Warblers & Allies  *Cettiidae***

Japanese Bush Warbler  *Horornis diphone*
Good views were had of singletons on both Amami and Okinawa Islands.

**Cisticolas & Allies  *Cisticolidae***

Zitting Cisticola  *Cisticola juncidis*
A few birds were seen at the edge of wetlands on Okinawa.

**White-eyes  *Zosteropidae***

Japanese White-eye  *Zosterops japonicus*
Small groups were seen on most days of the extension.

**Starlings  *Sturnidae***

White-cheeked Starling  *Spodiopsar cineraceus*
One bird was seen by some of the group just before returning to our hotel in Tokyo after birding the Sakurada Moat on the first morning of the trip.

**Thrushes  *Turdidae***

[Amami] (Scaly) Thrush (E)  *Zoothera major*
After intensive searching for this rare and elusive endemic we were rewarded with good views of this species on two separate occasions on our final morning in Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami.

*NOTE: NOTE: IOC splits Scaly Thrush Zoothera dauma into five species: Scaly Thrush Zoothera dauma, White’s Thrush Zoothera aurea, Amami Thrush Zoothera major, Nilgiri Thrush Zoothera neilgherriensis and Sri Lanka Thrush Zoothera imbricata, whereas Clements only recognizes one species, Scaly Thrush Zoothera dauma.*

Eyebrowed Thrush  *Turdus obscurus*
Huge numbers were seen each morning, mostly in flight, in Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami. A real surprise!

Pale Thrush  *Turdus pallidus*
A single bird was seen briefly amongst a flock of Eye-browed Thrushes during our final visit to Kinsakubaru Forest.

Izu Thrush (E)  *Turdus celaenops*
This was a major surprise! Two members of the group saw and described perfectly a male Izu Thrush while birding a mixed flock that consisted of several Eyebrowed Thrushes in the Kinsakubaru Forest. This may represent the first record of this species for Amami.

**Chats, Old World Flycatchers  *Muscicapidae***

Ryukyu Robin (E)  *Erithacus komadori*
A single bird was seen briefly on the road in the early morning in Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami. Further sightings, including a few very good one, were had in the Yanbaru area on Okinawa. Although this endemic beauty is common it is rather shy and furtive and can be tricky to see well.

*NOTE: An article in a recent Oriental Bird Club Bulletin suggests that both subspecies of Ryukyu Robin (Komadori on Amami Island and namiyei on Okinawa Island) should be classified as distinct species. However, neither Clements nor IOC recognize this split.*
Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*
Small numbers were seen daily on both Amami and Okinawa Islands.

Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina*
A sublime male of this handsome flycatcher was seen extremely well at close range in the Kinsakubaru Forest, Amami.

**NOTE:** Birds of East Asia by Mark Brazil splits this species into two species: Narcissus Flycatcher *Ficedula narcissina* and Ryukyu Flycatcher *Ficedula owstoni*, which is the subspecies that we saw and is endemic to the Ryukyu Islands. However, neither Clements nor IOC recognize this split.

**Old World Sparrows** *Passeridae*

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*
Seen around Tokyo and again on Okinawa.

**Waxbills & Allies** *Estrildidae*

Scaly-breasted Munia (I) *Lonchura punctulata*
Two flocks of these munias were encountered at the Kin wetlands on Okinawa.

**Wagtails** *Motacillidae*

Eastern Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla Tschutschensis*
Two juvenile birds were seen well in the scope at the Kin Wetlands, Okinawa.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*
Small numbers were seen daily on both Amami and Okinawa Islands.

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Commonly seen on every day of the trip.

[Buff-bellied] (American) Pipit *Anthus rubescens*
Around 40 birds were seen feeding in the fields at Kin.

**Finches** *Fringillidae*

[Grey-capped] (Oriental) Greenfinch *Chloris sinica*
A single bird was seen during our first morning at the Sakurada Moat in Tokyo.

**ANNOTATED LIST OF MAMMALS** (2 Species seen)


**Old World Rats and Mice** *Muridae*

Rat sp. 
An unidentified species of rat was seen on Okinawa Island.

**Mongooses** *Herpestidae*

Small Indian Mongoose (I) *Herpestes auropunctatus*
This introduced species was seen at the Kin Wetlands.

**ANNOTATED LIST OF REPTILES** (1 Species seen)
Fire-bellied Newt

*Cynops cyanurus*

Our driver on Okinawa found one of these interesting reptiles for us while we were birding the Yanbaru Forest for the endemics. Good views were had!

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