

A Birder's Guide to Okinawa

by Tom Marko

(updated – 19 December 2012)

Island Overview: The mostly coral island of Okinawa is located 1,560 km (970 miles) southwest of Tokyo. It is the largest of the 72 islands that stretch for 602 km (374 miles) and make up the Ryukyu Archipelago (called the *Nansei Shoto* in Japanese). Okinawa lies on a northeast-southwest axis and is 1,256 square km (485 square miles) in size, 108 km (67 miles) in length and varies from 3.2 to 29 km (2 to 18 miles) in width. The east and west sides of the island are separated by low mountains running up the middle. The Pacific Ocean lies to the east of the island and the East China Sea to the west. Historically, the Okinawan people maintained stronger cultural and economic ties to China than to the main islands of Japan. Okinawa has its own language (*Hogen*) and customs that are distinctive from the rest of Japan. A rental car is a necessity for getting around and a minimum stay of 3 full days is recommended for birding. Buses are available but not conducive for birding. There is no rail system other than a monorail that serves downtown Naha.

- Okinawa main island -



Climate: The average temperature for July, usually the warmest month of the year, is 30° C (85° F). Average temperature for February, usually the coolest month of the year, is 15° C (60° F). Summers are very hot and humid. Rainy season normally runs from the beginning of May to the end of June, and typhoon season between the months of June and November. Insects can be bothersome during wet periods so a topical insect repellent is recommended.

Economy: Economic activities that comprise the Okinawan economy include tourism, support to the military bases, agriculture and fishing. Most goods are imported to the island. Other economic activities include consumer retail, small manufacturing enterprises, warehouses and distribution centers and local cottage industries that make handmade crafts such as pottery, glassware and woven fabrics.

Language: Although road signs are in English, other postings, brochures, menus, maps, etc. are normally printed in Japanese. English is not widely spoken by the Okinawan population. English usage (to include restaurant menus) is more predominant around the US military bases.

Money: Okinawa is predominately a cash economy. Credit cards are not widely accepted. ATMs are relatively recent phenomena and can be found at many convenience stores such as Family Mart & Lawson's.

Food: For birdwatchers on the go, the popular, tasty and inexpensive *bento* boxes are available just about everywhere. Stop at any convenience store (Family Mart, Lawson's or Coco's) or any supermarket (MaxValu, Kanehide, San A, Aeon, Union) for a wide selection. These stores also sell a large assortment of pre-packaged goods, snacks and beverages. Some of the Coco's (marked Coco's de Bake) carry an assortment of fresh baked pastries. All stores provide public restroom facilities. As in mainland Japan, hot and cold beverage vending machines are ubiquitous. Japan is one of the few places in the world where you can find a hot coffee or tea in the middle of nowhere.

Driving: Vehicles have a right-side steering wheel and are driven on the left side of the road. This may seem confusing at first for people from countries where the custom is to drive on the right side of the road, but it is not difficult and most people adjust rather quickly. Roads are narrow with no shoulders and often winding and slippery after rainfall due to coral dust. Posted speed limits are slow with a legal limit 30 to 60 km/h on most roadways and 80 km/h on the expressway. Uncovered concrete rain culverts line the sides of many roadways, so be sure not to stray from your lane when driving. Depending on the size of the population, places are listed either as a city, town or village.

Always allow plenty of time to reach your destination. Traffic density is high, especially in the southern and central parts of the island. Driving can be frustratingly slow during the morning and evening rush hours, or behind the numerous trucks and senior citizen drivers. Okinawans tend to take to the roadways recreationally on Sundays and holidays. They also tend to continue through a traffic signal after it has turned to red, so look both ways before proceeding through an intersection when your light turns green.

Japanese traffic signs follow international standards making the symbols easy to follow even if you cannot read the Japanese characters (*kanji*) written on some of them. Japan for the most part does not use street names or street signs. Navigation is often by landmark or dead reckoning. Most intersections have signs that hang near the traffic signals indicating the area location. Route number signs along roadways will have small signs appended underneath in both Japanese and English indicating the current location. GPS systems are available in rental cars but they are in Japanese. Google Maps or Diddlefinger are good sources for printable maps in English.

For birding purposes, there are 4 major roadways of concern in Okinawa:

- **Route 58** runs south to north from Naha to Cape Hedo (the northern most point in Okinawa) along the west (East China Sea) side of the island. At several locations along its length, Route 58 (as well as many other roads), split into parallel bypass roads with the same route number, which can be confusing.
- **Okinawa Expressway** (toll road) runs south to north from Naha to Nago and is the fastest way north. Signs to the expressway are green in color and on/off ramps indicated with “IC” (interchange) signs. To reach the expressway, exit the airport and turn right onto Route 332 in the direction of Itoman/Tomigusuku. Continue approximately 2 km paralleling the monorail tracks and turn right onto Route 331 (south). Continue approximately 3.0 km bearing right onto the expressway ramp. (Note: At approximately 2.5 km, Route 331 splits straight and to the right - continue straight for the expressway.) When the expressway ends just below Nago, you will exit onto Route 58 (north).
- **Route 329** runs from Naha to Nago along the east (Pacific Ocean) side of the island. To continue along the east side to Cape Hedo, take Route 331 at Henoko and then Route 70 at Higashi. Although scenic, driving this long, winding route from Naha to Cape Hedo is not recommended for those with limited time.
- **Route 331** runs from Naha to Yonaburu around the southern end of the island.

Snakes: Much has been said regarding poisonous snakes on Okinawa. *Habu* is the Japanese name used to refer to several species of venomous snakes found on the island. The Okinawan Habu (*Trimeresurus flavoviridis*) grows to an average length of 122-152 cm (4-5 feet). They are found in the transition zone between forest and cultivated fields, on rock walls and in old tombs and caves. They are terrestrial and mostly nocturnal and may enter homes and other structures in search of rats and mice. They are not typically aggressive but will bite if provoked. To reduce the Habu population, the small Indian Mongoose (*Herpestes javanicus*) was introduced in 1910. The introduction proved detrimental to native bird, mammal and reptile populations and has resulted in an ongoing mongoose eradication program in the northern part of the island. I have encountered habu twice, the Hime Habu (*Trimeresurus okinavensis*), while driving at night along a Yambaru forest road, and the introduced Taiwan Habu (*Trimeresurus mucrosquamatus*), also at night on a local forest road. As with any potentially dangerous animal, caution and distance are advised.

Sights and Attractions: For those with additional time to spend in Okinawa, there are many sights and attractions worth visiting. Attached is an Okinawa information guide that I developed, which contains a synopsis of these places and information on the local culture.

Birding Overview: For the purposes of this birding guide, birds are condensed into the following broad categories:

- **Waders (aka shorebirds):** plovers, lapwings, stilts, avocets, jacanas, sandpipers and allies, and snipe.
- **Waterbirds:** ducks, geese, waterfowl, herons, egrets, bitterns, spoonbills, crakes (aka rails), gallinules, and coots.
- **Birds of Prey:** osprey, hawks, and falcons.

- **Passerines:** pigeons and doves, kingfishers, minivets, shrikes, crows, swallows, tits, bulbuls, warblers, white-eyes, flycatchers, thrushes, starlings, wagtails, pipits, buntings sparrows, etc.

Birding Seasons: Birding in Okinawa is seasonal and comprised of the following overlapping timeframes:

- **Spring (March to May)** brings passage migrants heading north and the arrival of summer visitors that breed on the island (Rudy Kingfisher, Japanese Paradise Flycatcher, etc.).
- **Summer (June to August)** is less productive because of the heat and humidity.
- **Fall (September to November)** produces returning passage migrants heading south to their wintering grounds and the arrival of birds that winter on the island.
- **Winter (December to February)** is also very productive with winter visitors such as Saunders's Gull, Black-faced Spoonbill, Grey-faced Buzzard, waders, waterbirds, wagtails, pipits, thrushes, buntings, etc. Pale Thrush invade the island through the winter but will be completely absent by spring. Fall and winter also produce vagrants or rarities that wander off course to the island. (Note: For reasons unknown, wintering passerines were not abundant during the winter of 2011-12.)

Conservation: Since I don't speak Japanese and most Okinawans don't speak English, my interactions with Okinawans are limited, so many of my observations are based on impressions developed during the four years I lived on the island. It appears that a conservation ethic is lacking. Land use is out of control with no apparent zoning restrictions. To mitigate the effects of a tsunami, much of the natural coastline is lined with concrete seawalls. To mitigate the effects of flooding, most rivers and streams have been turned into concrete culverts.

Prime birding areas such as wetlands and mangrove forests are fragmented and small in size. Mongoose, wild pigs and an explosion of crows and feral cats are impacting the native fauna and flora. An inefficient and expensive trash collection system, convoluted rules regarding trash separation and recycling, and an odd love affair with wrapping and packaging, have all resulted in the eyesore of trash dumped along back roads and farm fields.

Even though international birdwatchers visit the island to see the endemic species, birdwatching is not promoted. The birdwatchers that I have met were from Australia, Europe, and the US. I have crossed paths with a handful of Japanese "birders," most armed with expensive cameras, lenses, and tripods who seemed more interested in the perfect photo than the bird. Even with these shortfalls, Okinawa does offer some very good birding opportunities.

Common Birds: Listed in no particular order are the most common birds found year-round throughout Okinawa: Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Oriental Turtle Dove, Blue Rock Thrush, Rock Pigeon, Common Moorhen, Pacific Reef Heron, Common Kingfisher, Large-billed Crow, Pacific Swallow, Eastern Great Tit, Light-vented Bulbul, Brown-eared Bulbul, Japanese White Eye, Japanese Bush Warbler, Zitting Cisticola and Scaly-breasted Munia.

Coastal Birds: Despite hundreds of kilometers/miles of coastline, gulls & terns are infrequent visitors, preferring more temperate areas with shallow coastal shelves. A handful of endangered Saunders's Gull can be found in winter, along with occasional visiting gull species that are normally found in the more northern climes. In summer, there are breeding populations of Little, Black-naped and Roseate

Terns. Osprey (fairly common), Pacific Reef Heron, waders and waterbirds are also found along the coast.

Publications: The following publications are recommended when birding Okinawa:

- ***Birds of East Asia: China, Taiwan, Korea Japan and Russia*** (2009) by Mark Brazil (the essential English language field guide for Japan and Okinawa)
- ***A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Japan and North-East Asia*** (2007) by Tadao Shimba
- ***A Guide to the Wild Birds of Okinawa*** (2010) (photo guide in Japanese available at bookstores such as the Tsutaya chain)
- ***Shorebirds of North America, Europe and Asia: A Photographic Guide*** (2009) by Richard Chandler
- ***Shorebirds of North America, Europe and Asia: A Guide to Field Identification*** (2005) by Stephen Message and Don Taylor
- ***A Birdwatcher's Guide to Japan*** (1987) by Mark Brazil (useful information on birding locations although some of it is dated)

Useful Websites:

- **Weather:** <http://www.jma.go.jp/en/yoho/353.html>
- **Tides:** <http://www.sailwx.info/tides/tidemap.phtml?location=6543>
- **Maps:** <http://www.diddlefinger.com/m/okinawaken>
- **Wild Watch Japan:** <http://wildwatchjapan.com/node/1>
- **Wildlife Japan:** <http://www.wildlifejapan.com/>
- **Kantori Listserve:** <http://kantirilode.webring.com/>
- **Okinawa Prefecture Bird Checklist:**
<http://www1.accsnet.ne.jp/~ikecho/OKINAWA/Okinawa.html>
- **Reptiles of Japan:** <http://homepage3.nifty.com/japrep/englishtop.htm>

Birding Locations:

Northern Okinawa

Yambaru Region: The Yambaru Forest, located in the Ogimi and Kunigami Village sections of Okinawa, is home to the island specialties such as Okinawa Rail (*Yambaru-Kuina*), Pryer's Woodpecker (*Noguchi-gera*), Ryukyu Robin (*Akahige*), Amami Woodcock, Ryukyu Minivet, Ryukyu Scops Owl and Japanese Wood Pigeon. Many of these birds are active at either dawn or dusk, so time your visit accordingly. In addition to birds, a variety of mammals, reptiles, insects and plants are found

in this region, with many of them endangered. It takes approximately 3 hours to reach the forest by car from Naha Airport. Departing the airport, take the expressway north to the end. Continue on Route 58 passing through Naha City and then along the coast (look for Pacific Reef Egret and Blue Rock Thrush along the coast and, in summer, Black-naped and Roseate Tern offshore). You will eventually reach a well-marked intersection in Okuma (Family Mart on the NW corner), which is a good reference point for this region.

- **Yambaru Forest:** A dizzying array of mountain roads/tracks traverses the Yambaru Forest, with the Okuni-rindo and the Terekubi-rindo being the two main birding roads. Turn right at the Okuma intersection, follow the signs to Hiji Falls, but stay to the left when the road forks. Follow the road up the mountain to the end arriving at the Okuni-rindo at a T-junction. If you turn right, you will reach two bridges. The first and longest span offers a magnificent panorama of the Yambaru Forest and is good location to listen for woodpeckers or to get a fly-by look at a pigeon. If you turn left at the T-junction, the road continues through the forest eventually coming out on Route 2, the roadway that connects the east and west sides of the island. Turn right onto Route 2 and then left to continue on the Terekubi-rindo.

These forest roads are long, winding and narrow, the shoulders covered with leaf litter (where Ryukyu Robin forage) and fallen branches and rocks sometimes lay along the way. Stop every so often and listen for birds, especially Pryer's Woodpecker or mixed flocks of Eastern Great Tit, Varied Tit, Japanese White-eye, Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker and Ryukyu Minivet. It's easy to get lost but, in my experience, all of the roads eventually work their way down the mountain. On what side sometimes turns out to be a surprise.

- **Ada Village Region:** Continue past the Okuma intersection on Route 58 for several kilometers passing through two tunnels. Turn right onto Route 2 and continue over the mountain to the east side of the island. Keep an eye out for Okinawa Rail or Ryukyu Robin foraging in the leaf litter along the sides of the road. Eventually, you will pass the Fungawa Dam on the right just before reaching the Route 70 intersection. There are restrooms and beverage vending machines in the car park, and a good chance of observing Okinawa Rail, Pryer's Woodpecker and a variety of passerines in the early morning at the dam.

When you reach Route 70 on the east side of the island, turn left in the direction of Cape Hedo. Continue for approximately 4 km passing the Ada Garden Hotel on the left and the continuation of Route 2 leading to Ada Village on the right. Eventually you will reach two wind turbines. Continue approximately ½ km past the turbines to a dirt pull off on the left and park. There's a small patch of pine trees, an unkempt vegetable garden and much trash strewn about. In May 2009, while walking this area, I counted 13 Okinawa Rail within a 2 hour timeframe. In June 2011, I counted 12 Okinawa Rail along the sides of Route 70 from the intersection of Route 2 to this location. I've visited this location at other times of the year but spring seems to produce the greatest number of rails, sometimes approaching within a few meters in distance.

The "pig farms" are another hot spot for rails. Just before reaching the wind turbines, turn left off of Route 70 up the narrow hillside roads to the farms. Let your nose lead the way. Rails are often heard calling or seen crossing or foraging along these roads in this area.

- **Hiji Falls:** Turn right at the Okuma intersection and follow the signs to Hiji Falls. The Hiji River will always be on the right. Stay to the right when the road forks passing first a bus park and then car park before reaching another small car park at the entrance to the falls (open daily at 0900 / ¥500 entrance fee). Stop at the parking areas and listen for Pryer's Woodpecker. I've observed a pair of nesting Pryer's Woodpecker in a tree over the outer car

park. A hike up to Hiji Falls before the tourists arrive almost always produces good looks a Ryukyu Robin. Keep your eyes open along the trail for an assortment of insects and reptiles to include the endangered terrestrial Okinawa Leaf Turtle.

- **Yambaru Wildlife Conservation Center:** Turn right at the Okuma intersection, bear to the left and follow the signs to the center (open 1000-1630, closed Monday, free entrance). The center provides some interesting exhibits of forest fauna and flora and is the headquarters for the mongoose eradication program. There are also maps and brochures available with most printed in Japanese.
- **YuiYui Kunigami Rest Stop:** Continue past the Okuma intersection to the large wooden building on the left. Contained within are restrooms, snacks & beverages, a restaurant and local souvenirs. Try a scoop of Okinawa's Blue Seal Ice Cream – "mango tango" is my favorite flavor. The downstairs area contains a display of artifacts and mounted birds found in the region. Behind the rest stop is an agricultural area interspersed with flooded paddies. A quick drive through this area should turn up wetland birds. I have observed Water Rail here on two occasions.
- **Kijoka (or Kijyoka):** A small but productive area of rice and reed paddies is located behind the small houses that comprise the Kijoka section of Ogimi Village. Kijoka lies several kilometers south of Okuma, adjacent to Route 58, but is not readily marked. Turn into this small, sleepy, traditional Okinawan village when you see the Bashofu Weaving Workshop sign. It's a good location for wetland birds, especially during migration and in winter.
- **Taiho Dam:** A small pond at the base of the "branch" dam attracts a variety of waterbirds during the fall and winter months. I have observed a Swan Goose and Falcated Duck on the pond as well as Siberian Rubythroat in the reeds below the dam.

To get to the dam, take Route 58 north to Ogimi Village. Turn right onto Route 9 and then right onto Route 331. Continue to the Taiho Dam sign and turn left onto the entrance road. Continue straight to the "branch" stone covered, earthen dam, not left to the "main" large, concrete dam, as indicated by the signs. Turn right into the car park and park. Walk toward the small, square building with the green roof and then right along the road toward the dam. On the left is a small wetland area where the Swan Goose was initially seen in the tall grass. On the right, about 300 meters from the base of the dam, is the small pond. If you drive back to the intersection where the main/branch dam signs are, turn left to reach the small pond for closer looks. Park on the shoulder of the roadway bridge.

Nago City: There are 3 locations of birding interest in the northern part of Nago City:

- **Kouri Island:** Just west of northern Nago City and east of the Motobu peninsula lies a series of 3 interconnected islands - Oyama, Yagaji & Korui. To reach the islands, turn west off of Route 58 onto Route 110 at the "Makiya" intersection (Family Mart on the NE corner of the intersection) and follow the signs to Kourui Island. Summer populations of Little, Black-naped and Roseate Terns are easily viewed from the long causeway bridge connecting Yagaji and Kouri Islands.
- **Kawakami Paddies:** To reach the paddies, turn east off of Route 58 at the "Kawakami" intersection (stone statue of a plump boy on the NE corner of the intersection) and continue 0.4 km. Turn right (communication tower on left) into an area of rice and taro paddies. This is a

good location for waders including Greater Painted Snipe. In winter, I have observed Greater White-fronted Goose, Graylag Goose, Chinese Pond-Heron and Rook at this location.

- **Haneji Port:** To reach the port, turn east off of Route 58 at the “Makiya”/Route 505 intersection and continue 0.2km. Turn at first left (Haneji post office on left), pass under Route 58 and continue into the port. This is a good location for occasional winter gulls (Black-headed & Black Tailed Gulls) and summer terns (Little, Black-naped and Roseate Terns). A Lesser Frigate Bird spent several days here in June 2011.

Lodging Recommendations/Yambaru Region:

- **Ada:** Ada Garden Hotel (www.ada-hotel.net), room rate ¥15,000/night with breakfast. Tel. (0980) 41-7070; E-mail: info@ada-hotel.net
- **Kunigami:** Kunigami Hotel (www.kunigami-shoko.jp/?p=99), room rate ¥5,250/night with breakfast or ¥6,300/night with dinner. Tel: (0980) 41-2115
- **Kunigami:** Okuma Military Recreation Facility (<http://kadenaforcesupport.com/okuma/index.html>), offers a variety of lodging options and a restaurant that are available to US Department of Defense ID card holders. Consult the website for additional information and reservations.

Central Okinawa

Kin Town: The Kin rice & taro paddies on the Pacific side of the island is my favorite birding patch on Okinawa and very productive, especially for birds associated with water. I try to bird there at least once a week and have turned-up several vagrants and irregular visitors to include Tundra and Taiga Bean Goose, Greater White-fronted Goose, Siberian Rubythroat, a juvenile Hooded Crane, Pheasant-tailed Jacana and White-winged Tern. More recently, Japan’s first record for Eurasian Golden Plover was found at Kin. Habitats include the paddies, a mangrove lined river, agricultural fields and adjacent coastline and forests. There is a nature center with restrooms and vending machines and walkways through the mangroves. The Kin paddies are comprised of two sections, the northern “river-side” paddies and the southern “culvert-side” paddies.

To reach Kin, take the expressway to exit 7. Turn left onto Route 329 and proceed through the town of Kin. Just past the turnoff to Route 4 on the left and before crossing the bridge, turn left, proceed down the hill past the dam, cross the small bridge and make the first right. Crisscross the paddies on the north side of the river and then proceed across the bridge (the nature center is to the left) to the south side of the river exploring the other paddies. On the far side of the paddies, turn at the T-intersection bordered by white, steel barriers and proceed up the hill through the farm fields to explore the larger, spring-fed culvert-side of the Kin paddies. (Note: A new dam and a Route 329 bypass over the paddies is under construction. Expect building activity and detours until completion.)

Yomitan Village: Birding in the Zakimi (*Zakimi-jo*) Castle Park & around the Nagahama Dam, located just below the castle, can be productive. A pair of nesting Japanese Sparrowhawk have frequented the pine grove adjacent to the castle entrance. Great Cormorant, ducks and grebes winter on the reservoir above the dam. I have encountered Ring-necked Pheasant and Barred Buttonquail in the farm fields situated between the castle and the dam.

To reach the castle, turn west off of Route 58 onto Route 6 at the “Iramina” intersection. Continue 6.0 km past the US Army Tori Station military installation and through the commercial district of Yomitan, continuing past Route 12 and the first Zakimi Castle Park sign. Turn right at the second, small Zakimi Misaki Park sign (Suzuki repair shop on far right corner) and continue 1.0 km into the lower park lot behind the castle. Park and proceed up the steps to the castle park.

To reach the dam, exit the park lot and make the first right at the Nagahama Dam sign (large green water tower on far left). Continue 1.6 km downhill through the farm fields and residential area to the end of the road. Turn right and proceed into the park lot below the dam. Both a stairway and roadway lead to the top of the dam with open hours marked as 0830-1700, however, I have found open times to be variable. When departing the dam park lot, continue straight until the road ends at Route 6. Either direction will lead back to Route 58.

Ouyama Paddies: A large expanse of mixed-use paddies lies just northwest of the Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma in the Ouyama area of Ginowan City. The paddies are situated between Route 58 and the Route 58 bypass that leads to the Okinawa Convention Center. Park along the perimeter of the paddies and walk in on the narrow berms (very slippery when wet) separating the flooded paddies. This area is productive for waders, waterbirds and passerines.

Uruma City (Yonashiro area): This area, which is located on the eastern (Pacific) side of the island, contains several locations of birding interest:

- **Teruma Beach:** The coastal area located along Route 37 is productive for waders foraging along the shoreline, especially at low tide. A spotting scope is recommended.
- **Yonashiro Paddies:** Also along Route 37 and opposite Teruma Beach is a small area of rice, taro and reed paddies that is productive for wetland birds.
- **Sea Road Causeway:** Continuing further along Route 37, turn left onto Route 10 and the long land causeway that leads to a series of interconnected islands - Hamahiga, Henza, Miyagi & Ikei. The exposed reefs and sandbars on both sides of the causeway are productive for waders at low tide. There is a rest area, restaurant and gift shop complex along the causeway. A spotting scope is recommended.

Southern Okinawa

Naha City:

- **Manko Waterbird & Wetland Center:** The Manko WWC (open daily 0900-1700 except Mondays / entrance free) contains Okinawa’s largest remaining stand of mangroves. It is located in the heart of the island’s most densely populated urban area, about a 15 minute ride from Naha Airport. In winter, waterbirds and waders can be found on the mudflats, especially at low tide. Several Saunders’s Gull occur here annually during the November to February timeframe as well as Black-faced Spoonbill. Be sure to walk past the left side of the visitor center and under the roadway to reach the open area of the estuary. A spotting scope is recommended.

To reach the Manko WWC, exit the airport and turn left onto Route 331 (north) in the direction of Naha, staying in the right lane. Continue across the bridge (Naha Port on left/ treehouse restaurant on right) and bear to the right turning lane. Turn right onto Route 329, which parallels

the river and monorail. Stay to the right, continue up the ramp and then turn right at the Manko WWC sign. Continue across the water and make a sharp left at the next Manko WWC sign (look overhead). The Manko WWC is just a short distance on the left. If staying in Naha, the Manko WWC is readily accessible by taxi.

To reach the following locations, exit the airport and turn right onto Route 332 in the direction of Itoman/Tomigusuku. Continue approximately 2 km paralleling the monorail tracks and turn right onto Route 331 (south). At approximately 2.5 km, Route 331 splits straight and to the right.

Tomigusuku City:

- **Senaga Island Tidal Lagoon:** Senaga Island lies just south of Naha Airport runway. During low tide, the lagoon often holds a variety of waders and waterbirds. Saunders's Gull sometimes visit the mudflats to feed. A spotting scope is recommended.

To reach the tidal lagoon, follow the directions above from the airport onto Route 331 (south) for approximately 2.5 km. Turn right at the Route 331 split ("Senaga" intersection) and immediately bear to the right turning lane ("Senaga West" intersection). Turn right onto the roadway leading to the island. At the end of the roadway, turn left travelling clockwise around the small island checking for birds along the way. Continue back along the roadway and park on the shoulder at the far end near the mangroves to look for birds in the lagoon.

- **Sankaku-Ike (Triangle Pond):** This small man-made tidal pond fringed with reed beds never ceases to amaze me. Smelly and full of debris and plastic bottles, one wonders why birds find this location so attractive. Nevertheless, waterbirds, waders and the more uncommon species frequent the pond. Some of the uncommon birds observed here include: Common Shelduck, Garganey, Tufted Duck, Eurasian Spoonbill, Black-faced Spoonbill, Ruddy-breasted Crake, Pied Avocet, Long-billed Dowitcher, Ruff, Chinese Penduline-Tit and Black-headed (Chestnut) Munia.

To reach the pond, follow the directions above from the airport onto Route 331 (south) for approximately 2.7 km (continue straight on Route 331 at the split). When you see a Family Mart convenience store on the far right, turn right at the intersection and continue 100 meters to the dirt park lot on the right. Cross the road to the pond.

A tidal estuary and a golf course are situated just across the road from Sankaku-Ike. I once observed a Far Eastern Curlew in the estuary, and starlings and thrushes frequent the golf course during the winter months. To reach this area, continue just past the park lot and turn right. Make the first right, follow the road around the golf course and seawall stopping periodically to look for birds on both sides.

- **Toyosaki Tidal Estuary:** This tidal estuary is located behind the Ashibina Outlet Mall. The entire Toyosaki area is comprised of reclaimed land. At low tide, the exposed mudflats hold a wide variety of waders and waterbirds. Black-faced Spoonbill and Saunders's Gull also frequent this area. A spotting scope is recommended.

To reach the estuary, follow the directions above from the airport onto Route 331 (south) for approximately 2.5 km. Turn right at the Route 331 split ("Senaga" intersection) and continue straight across the causeway (don't turn right toward Senaga Island). At the end of the causeway, exit left down the ramp and turn left at the next intersection. Continue under the causeway and turn left between the outlet stores and the multi-level park garage. Turn right and park along the shoulder of the road with the estuary on the left.

Itoman City:

- **Odokomesu Beach:** A freshwater spring empties into the beach, which makes it a hotspot for waders and waterfowl during migration and winter, especially when the tidal pools are exposed at low tide. Peregrine Falcon have been observed here on several occasions. A spotting scope is recommended.

To reach the beach, follow the directions above from the airport onto Route 331 (south) continuing straight on Route 331. Continue for approximately 20-30 minutes passing through Itoman City. Eventually the road will pass through a rural area. Just past the left turn for Route 7, look for a Family Mart convenience store on the left. Immediately past the store, turn right onto a narrow street. Continue a short distance past several houses and make the first right onto a road bordered by farm fields. Continue to the end where the road will split. Stay to the left of the split and continue through some trees to the spring and the beach.

Lodging Recommendations/Naha City:

There are a wide variety of accommodations in Naha from basic to first class. Suggested websites to check for lodging include:

- Agoda: <http://www.agoda.com>
- Booking.com: <http://www.booking.com>
- Jalan: <http://www.jalan.net>
- Japan Lifestyle: http://www.japaneselifestyle.com.au/Okinawa_hotels

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