



Japan Winter Wildlife Tour#1 2023 Part 3

Mar 15, 2023

Wow! OK, so it's now the middle of March, and I am just sitting down to write the manuscript for this podcast and blog post, having completed the second wildlife tour and having spent two weeks at home trying to catch my breath. The tours were all amazing and produced a bumper crop of images that still have my head spinning. Now I'll try to cast my mind back five weeks and fill you in on our antics as we completed the first of the two Japan Winter Wildlife Tours, and as usual, we'll end this final episode of this series with some comments from each of the participants.



Luckily, I selected the ten images to talk about today before I left, so I won't have to rely too much on my memory. We'll pick up the trail on February 6 as we set out to photograph the Sea Eagles from the fishing port at Rausu for the second time. The Steller's Sea Eagle is a magnificent bird with a wing span of up to 2.5 meters. It's sometimes hard to gauge the size when you see them sitting around, but with their wings spread in flight, their heads always look so small compared to their body and wings.

Steller's Sea Eagle with Wings Spread

Light is often low close to dawn, and I keep my eye on the combination of aperture, shutter speed, and ISO to get the cleanest image while freezing the motion, assuming I'm not playing with panning. By the time I shot this, I had managed to get my aperture down to f/10 for a 1/1000 of a second shutter speed, which still required my ISO to be set at 3200, but that's fine, as I expose to the right, so increasing the ISO helps me to keep grain out of my photos.



White-Tailed Eagle Kicking Up Snow

At the end of the second morning's eagle shoot, we sailed over to the quay wall and photographed the eagles on it. Here we see a White-Tailed Eagle kicking up snow as it landed. I enjoy photos when the animal is kicking up something, be it a zebra kicking up dust in Namibia or snow from the talons of these awesome sea eagles, it adds a nice additional element of interest.

Also, note how I framed this with the eagle on the far right of the frame. This is sometimes something I do out of necessity to avoid something to the side of the main subject, but in this case, if I recall, there was nothing to the right of this eagle, rather I simply wanted to give him space in front so that he had somewhere to go, visually.



Eagle with Prize

In contrast, in this next photo, see how the bird is on the right side of the frame creating drama, as the bird is positioned to quickly leave the frame. This is honestly probably just more that I wasn't quick enough to frame the bird in the middle or the left of the frame, but as the fish in the eagles talons is now pretty central in the frame, I think this works and therefore isn't something that I will beat myself up over.



Sleeping Red Fox

In the afternoon on this day, we drove down the Notsuke Peninsula again, hoping to get some fox, and were lucky on this day to see a fox that proceeded to curl up on some fishing nets for a sleep. I have another shot where he has his eyes open, looking back at us, but I prefer this one of him sleeping. I was using my 100-500mm RF lens for this with the 1.4X Extender fitted, for a focal length of 700mm.



Proud Ezo Deer

This next image is one of my favorites from the trip. As we stopped to use the facilities at the Notsuke Nature Center, there was an Ezo Deer on top of a mound of dirt beside the building, so we were looking up at him as we shot this photograph, with him looking so proud, almost regal.

As an added bonus, there was pink in the sky as the sun neared the horizon towards the end of the day, but a bank of clouds is registering as a band of gray behind the stag's antlers.



Steller's Sea Eagle Over Sea Ice

The following morning, for the first time in several years, we had sea ice in the Nemuro Strait, so we sailed a while to photograph the eagles with the ice. First, here is a shot of a Steller's Sea Eagle almost hovering over the sea ice, as though he's trying to figure out what to make of the ice. The sky also had a subtle pink tint as the sunrise faded to regular daylight.



The Eagle's Catch

In this next image, you can see a Steller's Sea Eagle swooping down to catch a fish that we'd thrown into the sea, with its talons outstretched and a pensive look. This is straight out of the camera, with no cropping. I occasionally do crop my images, but more often than not they are not cropped or only cropped very little, as I want to maintain as much resolution in my images as possible. Of course, zooming in this tightly on a bird like this in flight means that I also miss shots because I clip the wings, but I would prefer to miss some and get other shots with really tight framing, like this.

Fish Face

I found this final eagle shot for today somewhat amusing, as the fish in the mouth of the eagle seems to be looking back at us. This is also not cropped. I was at 500mm for this shot, so you can appreciate that we were probably not much more than 10 meters away from the eagle. Although I don't really miss the sea ice, because we have such fun and get great shots photographing the eagles taking their fish from the open water, I have to admit it was nice to get some at the end of this first trip.



Birch on Dark

This is the last image I wanted to share from the sea eagle shoots. After that, we headed around the base of the Shiretoko peninsula on our way to Utoro for our last night in a great hotel. Still, on the way, we stopped for our usual ICM or Intentional Camera Movement shot, and here you see the birch trees with darker trees in the background, which has become my preferred side of the road. The opposite side of the road has white on white, which is still like, but the dark background seems to work better for me now.

Because I didn't attach a neutral density filter to my 24-105mm lens, I stopped down my aperture to f/22, and my shutter speed was a 30th of a second at ISO 100. This was just right to stop the snow from becoming overexposed. I quickly move the camera down, being careful to keep it square to the scene and release the shutter just as the snow enters the frame at the bottom. It's a bit tricky at first but it doesn't take long to get something like what I've shared here.

Oshin Koshin Falls



Finally, to finish, we have a shot of the top of the Oshin Koshin waterfall. The right side of the falls was flowing, and the left side was completely frozen, so I went in tight and shot these details. I did use a neutral density filter for this shot. A six-stop ND, if I recall, gave me a half-a-second exposure at ISO 100 with an aperture of f/16.

OK, so that's all of the photos that I had to share over these three parts. As usual, we did a recording on the bus the following morning, so I'll insert that audio now for you to hear what the group said about the trip.

List to the audio using the link at the start of this document to hear what participants said.

Especially now that I've traveled with another group who were equally as awesome, it was really nice to hear the voices from the first group again. Thanks to everyone for your kind comments. I hope to travel with you again at some point.

So we'll wrap up this episode and series there. Our 2024 tours are filling quickly, so if you'd like to join us, please check out the [tour page](#) and book sooner rather than later to avoid disappointment. If you have any questions about our tours, please drop me a line with the [contact form](#).



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