



## Japan Winter Wildlife 2019 Tour 2 Travelogue 2

We conclude my 2019 Japan Winter Wildlife Tour travelogues this week with the clumsily beautiful Whooper Swans, the majestic Sea Eagles, and Northern Red Fox.

March 26, 2019

For advice on the best viewing settings visit <https://mbp.ac/pdf>

This document is made available for paying members of the Martin Bailey Photography website. Thank you for being a part of the journey!

If you came by this document in any way other than downloading as a paying member, please [click here](#) and subscribe to a membership plan, or close this document and delete it from your computer or device.



We pick up the trail on the second of my Japan Winter Wildlife Tours for 2019 today, as we continue to photograph the clumsily beautiful Whooper Swans at Lake Kussharo.

My final selection of images from this incredibly productive tour is still slightly over 300, so I have a little more work to do there, but I've been able to reduce the number of images to share with you today to a final twelve, so we'll finish this series covering this year's Japan winter tours with this episode.

The morning after our first panning session with the swans at Lake Kussharo, we went back to the lake hoping for a few more fly-bys and we did have a couple that gave good results. My favorite of the morning is this image, with four of the Whooper Swans almost overhead, as they approached the lake.

I really do enjoy watching these huge birds fly overhead, and when they are this close, I literally shot this with my [100-400mm lens](#) wide open at 100mm, you can often hear the wooshing sound as they





flap those huge wings. Their wingspan can be as wide as 275 cm or 9 feet, and they weigh up 14 kg or 31 pounds, so it's a hefty bird, and actually the largest that we photograph on this trip, although the

sea eagles that we'll also look at shortly take some beating when it comes to sheer awesomeness. My other settings for this shot were ISO 400 for a 1/1000 of a second at f/11.





## Three Swan Pan

At the end of this day, we were back at the lake for another panning session, and I was again trying to get more than

one swan in the frame, and did a pretty good job of it with this next image, in which we can see three swans in a line. The heads are sharp enough to keep the





image, although I'd have liked them to be just a little bit sharper.

These panning shots are a lot of fun, and generally, we leave this location with lots of smiling faces, and that's always good to see from my perspective. The hit ratio with this kind of shot is pretty low, but having two evenings to try it really helps too.

My settings for this image were ISO 1000 for a 1/50 of a second at f/16, and I was out at 100 mm still with my 100-400mm lens. Although the lake was uncommonly not frozen on the first trip three weeks before this, as you can see in this image, it had mostly from over by the time we arrived on this trip.



## Sulfur Mountain

The following morning we revisited the lake one last time, before continuing our

journey to our last major destination of Rausu, for the sea eagles. On the way, our first stop was just 15 minutes from





in this somewhat apocalyptic looking photograph from our brief stop.

The steam from the fumaroles was really heavy on this day, but the breaks in the cloud and clear sky made for a really dramatic looking scene if you time the shot just right. I was exposing this so that the sun was almost completely over-exposed, and that of course made the shadows very dark, but the Shadows slider in Capture One Pro helped to bring that detail back out, so overall I'm happy with the results. My settings were 1/1250 of a second at ISO

where we'd stayed, at Sulfur Mountain. You can see where it gets its name from with the yellow sulfur stained fumaroles

100, at f/16, and my focal length was 35 mm, with [Canon's new RF 24-105mm f/4 lens](#).



## Northern Red Fox

We also made our regular first stop at the Notsuke Peninsula during our drive and were greeted by this beautiful Northern Red Fox that posed for us on the snow for quite a while. To avoid frightening the foxes, we generally photograph them from the bus, and just open the windows, and of course, turn the engine off to stop the vibration.

Occasionally we see foxes on the peninsula with tails that are stripped of their fur, probably by the sea eagles or crows that sometimes bully them, but this fox has probably one of the most beautiful bushy tails that I've seen. I shot a number of images of him sitting up, zoomed in on his face, but the images



felt somewhat empty without that tail, so I settled for this image. My settings for this shot were ISO 1250 for an 1/800 of a





second at f/8. I was using my 200-400mm lens with the built-in Extender engaged, and zoomed to 420 mm.

## Sleepy Fox

Happy with our first encounter, I was surprised to get another fox shortly

afterwards in a completely different environment, but every bit as cute as the first. This guy was quite a way off, so I had to shoot this with an external 2X Extender fitted as well as my 200-400mm lens with the internal Extender, for a focal length of 1065 mm, but as I've mentioned, the EOS R seems to quite like this combination, so I'm finding it very workable.

This fox was actually licking its paws then cleaning its face with them, but I've called this image Sleepy Fox as it almost looks like he's got his head on his paws getting ready for a nice sleep. Because the light was relatively low, I was at ISO 5000 for this shot, for an 1/800 of a second at f/11, my widest aperture for this combination of Extenders. It's always nice to get the fox



up on the fishing nets like this, placing the foxes obviously in a fishing area from these visual clues, so the nets add a nice element of story.





## Stags' Play-Fighting

After a visit to the nature center, we turned our bus around and drove back down the Notsuke Peninsula, stopping

this time for some Ezo Deer stags that were sizing up each others' antlers. I like the flakes of snow in this, and the environment is beautiful, with the stags





on the frozen brackish lake, just past the vegetation that they often feed on.

Having said that, the lake is like a white

sheet, so I've cropped this down to a 16:9 aspect ratio image, removing the top a little, as it wasn't really adding anything.

You can see from the angle of the





right deer's feet that they weren't really pushing at each other here, but it's nice to see them at least starting to get ready for this year's rutting season. It seems I

still had my 2X Extender fitted for this image, as my focal length was 685 mm, and my ISO was up at 6400 with a shutter speed of 1/500 of a second at f/11.



## Steller's Sea Eagle at ISO 12800

As I often say, with the camera's we have these days, cranking up the ISO is really

not that big a deal any more, as long as you ensure that you are exposing to the right, as in, adjusting your exposure so that the right-most data of your image is almost touching the right shoulder of





the histogram. I was doing just that at dawn the following day, as we started the first of our three trips out on a boat to photograph the sea eagles.

This was around 30 minutes before the sun actually came up over the Kuril Islands, so even with a 1/200 of a second shutter speed at f/5, I still needed my ISO at 12800 to get this shot, but as you can see, there really isn't a lot of grain in this image, even in the dark bird, simply because I increased my ISO enough to get my image data over close to the right shoulder of the histogram. Had I been too scared to do that, and left it at say ISO 3200, I guarantee you, the image would have been much noisier.

## The Humble Butt Shot

Another thing that you will often hear when shooting with other photographers is people lowering their cameras as a bird or animal turns away from us, calling out the image as a "butt shot". I do this myself too, so I'm not calling anyone out with this, but I do want to point out that I feel it's a crying shame to completely rule out an image based on a popular

idea that a certain type of photograph is in some way taboo.

This shot of a Steller's Sea Eagle is, I have to tell you, one of my favorite shots from this trip. I love the detail in the tail feathers and indeed the entire bird, and it doesn't bother me one bit that this is a butt shot. Another thing that you'll often hear bird photographers talking about is getting completely sharp wings, and this also is something that I purposefully do not try to do all the time.

I like to use a shutter speed of around 1/1000 of a second, because it sometimes allows the wings to blur slightly, adding, in my opinion, some dynamism to the photograph.

I shot this with a shutter speed of 1/1250 of a second, and still have movement



in the wing tips, but I like that here, so I'm happy with my choice of settings. My ISO was at 1600 by this time, as there was now much more light, and my aperture was down at f/10, with a focal length of 400mm.





## Steller's Sea Eagle and Sea Ice

Of course, shots from the front are great too, like in this next image. Quite often with birds, we end up with our shots being from the side, which are also nice, but because it's less common to get a

bird coming straight towards you, it is nice to get some shots like this.

As you can see from these shots, we did also get a decent amount of sea ice on this second trip. The timing of the second trip does give us a better



chance of getting sea ice, although I really don't mind when we don't get any. Since talking the skipper of the boat into going out even when there is no ice, around five years or more ago, it has become one of my favorite ways to photograph the eagles.

When the ice is there though, it does add a nice additional element. My settings for this shot were ISO 1000 at 1/1600 of a second at f/10 and a focal length of 400 mm.









## Steller's Sea Eagle Silhouette

We went back down the Notsuke Peninsula once more on our second day in Rausu, but the photos weren't great, so we'll skip to the following morning, back out on the boat, as the sun rose above the Kuril Islands. I like to keep my eye out for an eagle flying close to the sun at this time, hoping for shots like this one, where the eagle is almost silhouetted against the sun's disk.

To enable me to get this sort of image, this is one of the few times when I use Auto-ISO, and allow the camera to control the exposure

itself. That way when I'm shooting away from the sun the ISO shifts to give me a brighter bird, but then when the sun







is in the frame, like this, the ISO drops automatically, giving me a silhouette. The other settings I did set manually,

which were an 1/800 of a second and an aperture of f/10. My focal length was 371 mm.



Steller's Sea Eagle's  
Grimace

Another shot that I'm happy with from a few minutes later, while the sun was still pretty low in the sky, is this one, of





a Steller's Sea Eagle, probably landing, kicking up snow and ice, but with his wings still open, as though he's about

to take off. The three eagles in this shot are obviously quite dark, because I'm shooting into the sun, but I love this angle and the sense of movement in this majestic raptor.

Having photographed the subjects on this trip so many times, it takes a lot to impress my wife when I get home, but she was impressed with this shot, as it's something pretty different to what I usually come home with, and that feels good. My settings for this were ISO 1600 for a 1/1000 of a second at f/10, and a focal length of 400 mm.





## Fishing in Dawn's Warm Glow

The following morning, once again, I got lots of great shots, although the increasing number of seagulls and crows

made it more difficult than usual. Before we finished our third and final trip out to shoot the eagles though, I asked the skipper to throw some fish into the sea in the open water, rather than onto the





ice, so that we could get some photos like this one, with the eagles taking the fish from the water.

I really like that we have the warm glow of the dawn sky reflecting in the water in this photograph, as that makes up for the fact that we had to shoot back towards the sun a little. To ensure that the eagle was bright against the bright background, I actually shot this at ISO 4000, with a shutter speed of 1/1600 of a second at f/10. I was also very happy that the EOS R continued to perform well, autofocussing admirably against this contrasty water and ice. We did our usual drive around the base of the Shiretoko Peninsula, and played with some Intentional Camera Movement and the waterfalls etc. around Utoro, but we'll skip those images so that we can finish the series here.



## Canon EOS R

Having completed all three of my Japan Winter Tours this year shooting almost exclusively with the new [EOS R](#), Canon's first full frame sensor mirrorless camera, I would just like to relay that I continued to be very happy with this camera, having now shot a total of around 16,000 images with it. There was the problem of the viewfinder fogging up, that I talked about in my review back in Episode 650, but other than that, it has way surpassed my expectations and even my hopes.

This doesn't mean that my 5Ds R bodies are all of a sudden bad cameras, but I have instantly learned to appreciate the size and weight of the EOS R, and I'm now considering selling one of my two 5Ds R bodies, and keeping the funds on my point card at my local camera store, as I wait for the 5Ds R Mark II, which is rumored to also be coming along with the R Mount, and therefore obviously also a mirrorless camera. Although there have been plenty of people giving the EOS R a bad rap, personally, I'm incredibly pleased that I waited for Canon to finally release a full frame mirrorless camera, and I am really looking forward to being able to continue to use all of my beautiful Canon lenses moving forward.



## Participant Comments

Before we wrap up this final travelogue episode for my 2019 winter season, I do of course have our final round of participant comments to play you from the bus on the final morning of the tour, as we headed towards the airport to fly back to Tokyo and disband. [Please listen with the audio player at the top of the [blog post](#) to hear what each participant had to say about the trip.]





It was lovely, as usual, to hear the group again, now more than three weeks after the tour finished. Thanks to everyone for your wonderful comments!

## Japan Winter Wildlife Tours 2020

OK, so we'll wrap it up for now, but please do note that although Tour #1 has now sold out, we do still have some places open on the 2020 Japan Winter Wildlife Tour #2, so if you might be interested, please [check that out here](#).





## Thank you for reading this article!

Check out our Tours & Workshops, eBooks and fine art prints and other products and services, or listen to the audio of our articles on our website!

<https://www.martinbaileyphotography.com>

This article was published on March 26, 2019 by



**MARTIN BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHY K.K.**

## Notice of Rights

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher.