

The Nature of Japan: From Dancing Cranes to Flying Fish

Essays on the Natural History of the Japanese Archipelago

by

Mark Brazil

Illustrated by Hisashi Masuda

In this collection of 12 essays Mark Brazil reflects on thirty years of traveling the Japanese Archipelago marveling at its beautiful landscapes and fascinating biodiversity. Perhaps best known for his review of the Japanese avifauna in “*The Birds of Japan*” and more recently for his “*Field Guide to the Birds of East Asia*”, Brazil is also an accomplished essayist. For more than 30 years he has enticed foreigners to visit the wilder parts of Japan, especially Hokkaido, through his regular essays appearing in *The Japan Times* newspaper and a wide range of other publications. In this new collection of essays, organized seasonally and monthly, Brazil reveals his deep-seated respect for the natural world, his passion for Japanese wildlife, and his love of Hokkaido. His essays, written in a personal, reflective style and based on his personal experiences, carry the reader from Okinawa to Sado-jima, from the Japan Alps to Mt Fuji, but most frequently to his favourite parts of Hokkaido, Daisetsu, Shiretoko, Akan and Nemuro. Brazil weaves his essays from the colourful threads of his own wildlife observations, from chance encounters with other naturalists, and from Japanese and Ainu folklore. Written in an easy, flowing style, this book will appeal equally to naturalists, birdwatchers and students of English. Illustrated with more than 75 line drawings by Hisashi Masuda, this book is more than just a good read, it is a delight to the eye and will attract art-lovers who enjoy the meticulous detail of Masuda’s work.

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"*The Nature of Japan* is more than just a delightful read – the distillation of more than three decades of Mark's careful observations and amazing adventures, hiking and skiing around the Japanese archipelago – it is an insight into the Japanese relationship with nature."
Ian Redmond OBE

Long isolated from the neighbouring Asian continent lies a seemingly inscrutable, but fascinating island chain. The Japanese Archipelago is a treasure trove of natural wonders, ranging from coral reefs and tropical fish to sea-ice and fur seals. It rises to alpine meadows home to high altitude butterflies and birds, and falls through rich waters to one of the deepest ocean trenches in the world. It is washed by great ocean currents, one cold from the north, one warm from the south, which connect Japan to the Bering Sea and the tropical Pacific. These islands witness nature at its most calamitous, with avalanches, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons and blizzards as frequent events. The thousands of islands that make up this diverse chain vary from tiny rocky islets supporting rare and endemic seabirds to a great arcing crescent of land rising to alpine peaks over 3,000 m in altitude that is home to endemic giant salamanders and Asiatic black bears. Migrant birds further connect Japan with distant lands as far away as Australia and New Zealand, northeast Russia and Alaska, and South and Southeast Asia.

The web of life that binds these Japanese islands together into a natural whole, distinguishing them and connecting them, has been Mark Brazil's fascination for more than thirty years. The distinctive biodiversity of these extraordinary islands has been the subject of his writing for equally as long. *The Nature of Japan* presents not only a broad view of this geographical and biological diversity, but through personal essays reveals Brazil's passion for the nature and seasons of his adopted home.

Mark Brazil is the author of *Birds of East Asia*, *The Whooper Swan*, *Wild Asia* and other books, a columnist for *The Japan Times* and writer in residence for *JapanVisitor.com*. A resident of Hokkaido, he travels widely throughout Japan each year to witness and describe its changing seasons and its biodiversity.

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