

## NATURE IN SHORT

BY KEVIN SHORT

# Welcome to the world of neighborhood birds

**A**t this time of year, the weather can be highly unsettled, with several warm balmy days followed by a return to snow and icy winds. But with the second moon of the year already waxing toward first quarter, and the equinox and cherry blossoms looming on the horizon, it's safe to assume that full-blown spring is just around the corner.

The upcoming turn of the season can be clearly seen in the behavior of the local birds. The huge winter roosts and communal feeding flocks are breaking up as mating pairs begin to establish their own nests and nesting territories. Little sparrows will fight viciously over desirable nesting sites; and the crows, which seemed like one enormous happy family during the cold months, will zealously chase each other out of their respective areas.

This is a good time to get to know your local neighborhood birds. Serious birdwatching requires substantial effort and a good pair of binoculars, but there are a dozen or so species of bird that are so well-adapted to human environments that they can be identified and observed with the naked eye.

### TREE SPARROW (*suzume*)

Familiar to small Japanese children as *chun-chun*. Once common in cities and residential areas, but recently on the decline. Often hops and feeds

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on ground.

### RUFIOUS TURTLE DOVE (*kiji-bato*)

Readily distinguished from the common feral pigeon by the rufous plumage and distinctive slash marks on the neck. Soft, seductive *De-Deh-Po-Poh* cooing. At this time of year, males become so involved in showing off to prospective mates that they ignore the people around them. Many also ignore cats as well, to their immediate demise. Usually walks slowly on ground.

### GRAY STARLING (*mukudori*)

Aggressive grayish bird with white streaks on face and bright orange legs and bill. White rump patch is reliable field mark in flight. Frequent ground walker.

### DUSKY THRUSH (*tsugumi*)

Heavy-set powerful brownish bird. Often repeats a pattern of three to five hops followed by a stop. Does not breed in Japan but usually stays around until the rice paddies are planted in early May.

### WHITE WAGTAIL (*haku-sekirei*)

Once found mostly at riverbanks, rice paddies and coastal plains, these medium-size fast-running birds have now thoroughly adapted to urban and suburban habitats. Flicks long tail up and down. Low, undulating flight.

### JAPANESE WAGTAIL (*seguro-sekirei*)

Similar to white wagtail but with more black on head and face.

### JAPANESE WHITE EYE (*mejiro*)

Tiny olive green and yellow bird, smaller than a

sparrow, with a long thin black bill. Highly arboreal. Flits energetically from branch to branch. Frequently sips nectar from cherry blossoms.

### BUSH WARBLER (*uguisu*)

Drab-colored bird that skulks in thick brush, rarely coming out in open. Loud, clear *Ho-Kyeh-Kyoh* call associated with ume apricot (plum) blossoms of early spring.

### BROWN-EARED BULBUL (*hiyodori*)

Medium-size bluish-grey bird with distinctive comma-shaped chestnut mark on cheek. Mostly in trees. Flies in wavy pattern. Loud, abrasive *Piyo-Piyo* call. Tail long but clearly shorter than a magpie's.

### AZURE-WINGED MAGPIE (*onaga*)

Large grayish bird with blue wings and tail and black cap. Spends time in trees. Extremely long tail unmistakable field mark.

### JUNGLE CROW (*hashibuto-garasu*)

Huge all-black bird with steep forehead and incredibly thick bill. Most common garbage crow in urban and residential areas. Very aggressive protecting nest, and will even dive-

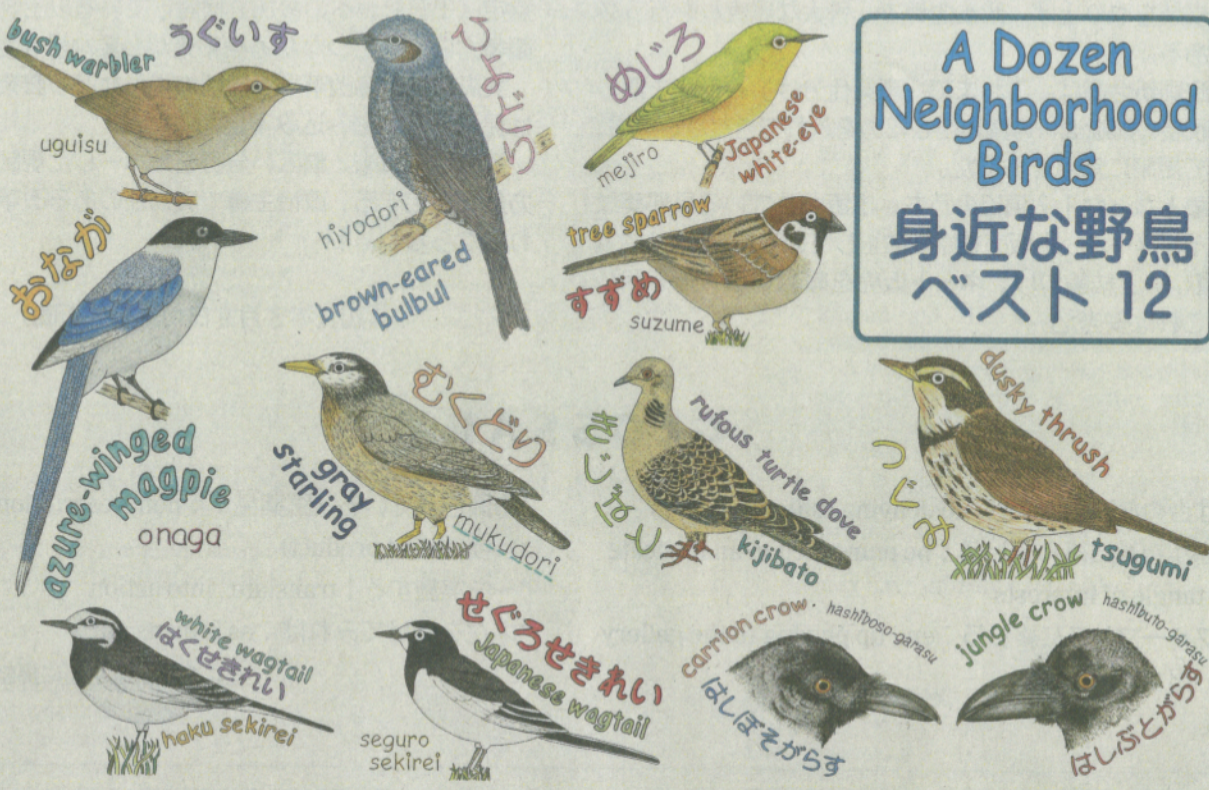
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By Kevin Short

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**CARRION CROW (hashiboso-garasu)**  
Slightly smaller than jungle crow, with thinner

bill and more gently sloping forehead. Less com-  
mon in urban and residential areas, but often seen  
in suburbs and countryside.