



remaining, mostly coastal, marshes and reedbeds for nesting, they number about 500. The more widely read may also know of Arasaki, Kyushu, in southern Japan, where 10,000 migratory hooded and white-naped cranes gather each winter and which are a conspicuous eco-link between Japan and her continental neighbours – Korea, China and Russia.

But dependence, amongst birds alone, on Japan's wetlands does not end with the cranes. Up to one and a half million waterfowl, including whooper and Bewick's swans, bean and white-fronted geese, and more than twenty species of ducks, flock to Japanese wetlands each winter, and tens of thousands of a wide range of shorebirds from northern Europe and Asia pass through on spring and autumn migration.

Some of these long distance migrants, such as godwits and knots, moving within the East Asian/Australasian flyway, reach New Zealand in considerable numbers. For others like turnstone, far eastern curlew, red-necked stint, sharp-tailed sandpiper and Japanese snipe, only a few dozen to a few thousand spend any time here. But Japan's position on their flyway is a crucial one for all of them.

Other groups, not only shorebirds, are dependent too. The numbers of wintering gulls visiting Japan's coastal wetlands



▲ Japanese cranes. Over a quarter of the world population of this crane is dependent on the wetlands in Hokkaido.

◀ The most important of Japan's 85 internationally significant wetlands, and the Japanese arms of the East Asian/Australasian bird migration flyway.