

Australia. Part One - Unscheduled Japan!

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Thanks to flight cancellations, three days chasing butterflies in the Naita and Osaka areas, 21 species seen, including quite a number of swallowtail species and others, including Angled Sunbeam and Japanese Oakblue.

It is a long way from eastern Europe to Australia! Departing on 18 July with a planned route via Helsinki and Tokyo, we should have spent 18.5 hours in the air, plus a few in transit. All well and good, except the nice airline decided to cancel the last leg, stranding us in Japan! And the new flight? Perhaps four or five days in the future! To add insult to injury, they had no intention of paying hotels. Some hours of argument later, I had managed to secure an early morning flight to Osaka two days later, with a later overnight flight from there to Cairns, our final destination. Yet more arguing finally got us hotels for our stay. After returning home a month later and engaging in a little legal debate, I managed to wrangle 1200 euro compensation for this delay, so all was well. So Australia on hold, three days in Japan on offer instead. A hot sweaty Japan it has to be said, the country sweltering under an extreme heatwave, temperatures topping 37 C and humidity hitting the roof! Birding the Narita area was never going to be productive in such heat, so I opted for a focus on butterflies instead. A few minutes on google maps and I had my plan – the Narita area on the first day, coastal areas near Choshi on the second, then a coastal strip near Osaka airport on the third. With no fieldguide with me, all I would need to do would be to photograph everything, then identify online.

Narita area, 19 July. A pretty good walking route right from the airport – a grassy track of some kilometres aside the small Tokyo River, then a zigzag through woodland patches to Narita town and finally a wander around Naritasan Park in Narita itself. Dripping with sweat minutes after leaving the airport, but not too bad it turned out to be – abundant Pale Grass Blues and Small Coppers, a few Eastern Pale Clouded Yellows, a Common Grass Yellow too. Things got even better soon after – a cryptic Common Five-Ring, then a stunning Old World Swallowtail, followed by a pair of Common Gliders. Sure was tough going in the heat and humidity though, probably a lack of sleep from the overnight flight not helping either. Soon however I was looking at butterflies I couldn't even assign to family – a small pale butterfly that transpired to be an Angled Sunbeam, another with vivid blue upperwings that was a Japanese Oakblue. Even more dramatic, some big beasties – vivid green and black butterflies that were Blue Triangles and, topping the lot, big monster-sized butterflies in the form of Big Mormons and Red Helens, both large tropical butterflies, some 10-15 cm across with lobed tails. More sweating and more kilometres, slowly the tally of species was rising, the top being impressive Red Ring Skirts. I however was beginning to wain and by the time I got to the Naritasan Park, I was pretty exhausted. Stumbled around for a while, a couple of nice Red Helens drifting about, then called it a day and headed to the hotel.

Choshi area, 20 July. Maps suggested some nice forest blocks next to the sea some 50 km east of Narita, an easy hop on the train. With a sea breeze, I reckoned on less humidity too, so it seemed an ideal location. Getting off the train at the small Inubu Station, first exploration however didn't prove particularly good – large numbers of Blue Triangles floating about, plus a handful of Pale Grass Blues, but otherwise precious little. Walking the other way however, I was soon in a mini paradise – a shrubby patch next to a pond kicking things off with the ladonides race of Holly Blue, Asian Comma and several Old World Swallowtails and Asian Swallowtails. Leading off from here, a woodland edge trail that proved a most pleasant experience, butterflies all the way all. Among the species here - more Asian Commas, but even better big bold things in abundance, though all rarely settling and thus difficult to photograph - among this a cocktail of the larger Papilios, many Red Helens, several Big Mormons and a number of Long-tailed Spangles, exotic things all! Adding Small White, Short-tailed Blue and Branded Swift, I thereafter wandered back to the Inubu just in time for a train back to Narita. Great Egrets, Black Kites and Eastern Spot-billed Ducks from the train, then headed back to the hotel, a pretty pleasing day.

Osaka Airport, 21 July. Not a lot of options here, the airport itself on a small artificial island totally devoid of greenery. As I have done in the past, I took the train one stop and concentrated on Rinku Park, a small waterside slither of pines and mixed bushes. This proved pretty good overall, lots of Old World Swallowtails and Asian Swallowtails, plus Red Helen, Chinese Peacock Swallowtail and my second Angled Sunbeam of the trip. Also found a flowering shrub that was proving to be a magnet for blues - quite a number of ladonides Holly Blues, several Pale Grass Blues and my only Long-tailed Blues of the trip. Also a bunch of birds here, White-eared Starlings, Blue Rock Thrushes, Brown-eared Bulbul etc. Very nice for a locality just ten minutes from the airport! One week later it was destroyed by a typhoon!

So there it was, three unscheduled days in Japan over, 21 species of butterfly noted, quite a pleasant stop-over all things considered. In the evening, we boarded a flight, next stop Australia. For 'Part Two' of my trip, [CLICK HERE](#)
Northern Queensland