

Kiyosu Yukiyasu, Ornithologist

Kiyosu Yukiyasu (1901–1975) was a pioneer in ornithology as well as photography. He owned a vacation home in Shiobara and used it as a base for his research for over 20 years.

Kiyosu made many advances in the study of wild birds and pioneered the study of their ecology, including their migration, breeding patterns, and feeding habits. In an era when no one had yet studied Japanese alpine birds, he spent 10 years studying them in the northern mountains of Japan, where he discovered a number of species. Kiyosu was the first to determine that Shiobara is a habitat for birds such as the spotted nutcracker, goldcrest, common tree creeper, and golden eagle.

The Birds of Japan was Kiyosu's monumental three-volume work. Its 917 pages include anatomical descriptions, preservation techniques, maps, charts, and hundreds of photographs and illustrations of birds, chicks, nests, feathers, and eggs. In 1945, just before it was scheduled to be published, the work was almost entirely destroyed during the fire-bombing of Tokyo in World War II. Kiyosu later rewrote the entire manuscript at Shiobara, and it was finally published in 1952, a full 14 years after he had begun working on the project.

Kiyosu was born into the Sanada clan, a well-known feudal-era daimyo family, and his father was the last lord of the Matsushiro domain in the present-day city of Nagano. During his college years, Yukiyasu was adopted into the Kiyosu family, a branch of Japan's imperial family. He studied science at Tokyo Imperial University (now Tokyo University) and researched the physiology of birds during his graduate work at Kyoto Imperial University (now Kyoto University). He was a lecturer, assistant professor, and professor at Utsunomiya University from 1954 to 1964.