Bird Prints with Japanese Poems
Introduction

Humans worldwide write poems to express their thoughts and feelings. In Japan, writing poetry was a very popular hobby during the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. Some of the poems written then were more playful than others. The most playful type, called kyōka, often included words with a double meaning or a pun which was intended to amuse readers. A kyōka poem had five lines with 31 syllables arranged as follows: 5-7-5-7-7. A second, usually more serious type of poem was called haikai. It had only three lines with 17 syllables arranged as follows: 5-7-5. Some of these haikai and kyōka poems were added to printed artwork which created a powerful combination of verbal and visual expression. Twenty-five examples of these pictures-with-poems are presented in this virtual exhibition. Examples were selected from the Reader Collection of Japanese Art which includes a number of pictures-with-poems of bird subjects. Perhaps the most famous of these bird pictures-with-poems are those drawn by two prominent Japanese printmakers of the time, Utamaro Kitagawa and Hiroshige Utagawa. Utamaro’s book entitled Momochidori Kyōka Awase (Birds Compared in Humorous Verses), published in 1790-1, included fifteen pictures. Each picture showed two different bird species with a kyōka poem about each. All fifteen pictures are shown below along with English translations of the kyōka poems. Hiroshige drew hundreds of bird pictures, each accompanied by either a kyōka or haikai poem. These pictures-with-poems were sold individually during the 1830-40s. Ten of Hiroshige’s bird pictures are included here, four with kyōka poems and six with haikai poems. An English translation of each poem is provided.

Additional Reading

1 Japanese bush-warbler (Cettia diphone)
Near the eaves I hear the warbler sing a song of envy; he must be watching us, my lover and me.

Varied tit (Sittiparus varius)
Not a sign of you do I find in your bed tonight; alone but sad, I am but a tit in love.
2. Skylark
(Alauda arvensis)
Conceited skylark flying high in the sky; even you must come down to earth when night falls.

Japanese quail
(Coturnix japonica)
Although the quail coos and coos to be with you, like the ears of ripe millet you do not so easily fall.
| 3 | White-backed woodpecker (*Dendrocopos leucotos*) | True to his name the woodpecker pecks and pecks away, never stopping to listen to what people are saying. | Japanese grosbeak (*Eophona personata*) | Going to meet his secret love, the grosbeak lets out a warble and gives his name away. |
White wagtail
(Motacilla alba)

My heart was soothed when we met at night; but now, I must suffer what people may say.

Copper pheasant
(Syrmaticus soemmerringii)

The copper pheasant cries and cries and sheds tears to no end; for too many nights you have stayed away.
Your words are like swords when we meet; even my open wings soon shrivel to nothing.

Barn swallow (Hirundo rustica) I came dressed like a swallow; but now, I untie my sash looking forward to the long night ahead.
Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

6 Japanese white-eye (Zosterops japonicus) Pushed out of his honey-filled nest following a fight, the white-eyed bird seems not to mind at all.

Long-tailed tit (Aegithalos caudatus) Come and let yourself be mine; for us the nights will be as long as the tit’s tail.
Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

7 Common snipe (Gallinago gallinago) In the night unable to sleep waiting for a lover, loneliness snips away at the snipe’s empty heart.

Winter wren (Troglodytes troglodytes) Since your heart is as lofty as the great mythical bird taihō, how can this wretched wren ever hope to fly so high.
Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

8 Meadow bunting (Emberiza coides) Your dimples like the bunting so full of charm; beware the stealthy birdlime of love. Domestic fowl (Gallus gallus) The mouth of a perfume bottle can be capped, but the cock of the morn crows without ceasing.
Even uso the bullfinch
(Pyrrhula pyrrhula)
sleeps in the night
but your lies
give me no perch to rest.

I laugh and cry
(Loops scops)
at the same time
since you ignore me
like an eared owl in the tree.
| 10 | Little egret (Egretta garzetta) | More than the chatty black crow that kisses and tells, I dislike the little egret who is mostly beak. | Cormorant (Phalacrocorax sp.) | In the river the cormorant swims washed by waves; soon he too will be drowned in rumors. |
Utamaro Kitagawa. 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

11  | Japanese robin (*Erithacus akahige*) | My heart like the robin is joyful in name only; I can hardly go on burdened so with love. |
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<tr>
<td>Great tit (<em>Parus major</em>)</td>
<td>Seeing my feathers you think of me only as an old great tit; your cruel reply is a little hard for me to take.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Rock dove \textit{(Columba livia)}</td>
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<td>Eurasian tree sparrow \textit{(Passer montanus)}</td>
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**Utamaro Kitagawa.** 1790-1. Momochidori Kyōka Awase.

| 13  | Ural owl (Strix uralensis) | You must have the eyes of an owl; how is it that you come at night but never during the day. | Eurasian jay (Garrulus glandarius) | My pledges sung in a voice like that of the jay; even when I cry you do not lend an ear. |
Common kingfisher
(Alcedo atthis)
When you and I
go into the next life;
let us perch
on lotus leaves
like kingfishers wing to wing.

Mallard duck
(Anas platyrhynchos)
To a man
sending a love note,
even the swift messenger
seems slow as a duck
stuck on birdlime.
| Bull-headed shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*) | I feel as if my heart were shrinking, hung to dry on a withered branch by the many-tongued shrike. | Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) | If I were a hawk, I would make a meal of the little birds spreading rumors. |
Scops owl (*Otus scops*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

The eared-owl asail for a three-day cruise on the three-night moon, longs to hear pine music float slowly through his ears.
Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

The cock starts to crow; the time to part has come. Take me to a town where the rooster is not heard; that's the only place for dawn.
Domestic fowl (*Gallus gallus*) by *Hiroshige Utagawa*

The hour of parting, with all its deep feelings, in drifts about them, they hear the melting tones of the rooster in the snow.
Northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) and Eurasian tree sparrow (*Passer montanus*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Passing the cold night watching over little ones asleep in the nest - ingratitude is something only human beings know.
20  Common kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Preening his feathers in a watery mirror - kingfisher in flight.
21 Japanese quail (*Coturnix japonica*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

Perhaps for a dream of autumn
the quails
cry.
Will it come again - another night like this one?
Wild geese and the moon.
A duck calls softly; a breeze sets ripples moving over the water.
Blundering into a path where tasty grasses manage to grow tall.
25 Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*) by Hiroshige Utagawa

For mandarin ducks
thin ice is a wedding cup
now and forever.