



TAIWAN BIRDING EXTRAVAGANZA

30 APRIL - 11 MAY 2016



Taiwan Scimitar Babbler is one of the endemic species we search for on this trip

Taiwan not only has great avifauna but also a host of other winning points that make it a wonderful destination for a comfortable birding trip. With about 30 endemics, many endemic subspecies that could be split, and all its migrants and widespread Asian birds because of Taiwan's position on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, there's stacks to look forward to. Taiwan is located 100 km east of the coast of China, south of Japan and Korea, and north of the Philippines. Less than 400 km long and 150 km wide, with rugged central mountains and deep valleys, it boasts a very high biodiversity – in a very manageable package.

This tour focuses on the endemics and other East Asian specialities in Taiwan's well-protected forests. Most of our time will be spent in the mountains, but we will also allow some time in the lowlands and at the coast, looking out for wetland birds. Orchid Island (Lanyu) has several interesting birds. When circumstances allow we will leave time for other aspects of nature, for the fascinating human culture, and for chasing any reported notable vagrants.

The weather should be generally dry and pleasant, but with a chance of showers and cold at the highest points. Photo opportunities are good.

The Taiwanese are a very friendly and welcoming people. They have blended the best parts of unspoiled, traditional Chinese culture with the influence of colonial Japan, along with the native Austronesian culture. Taiwan is free and democratic, has good infrastructure, and is considered safe.

Focus: Birds. But also a bit of other aspects of nature and human culture.

Grading: Easy walks on good surfaces. Good photo opportunities.

Climate: From comfortably warm in the lowlands to cool or even cold at the highest points.

Highlights:

- Around 30 endemic species (over 60 subspecies/dubious splits)
- Many other resident and passage birds – lots of widespread East Asian species
- Excellent scenery, varied habitats, flora, and butterflies
- Interesting culture
- Good food, supplemented with familiar snacks and drinks
- Good infrastructure, comfortable, safe, and clean environment
- Adequate time and flexibility built in to chase notable 'megs', etc.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (12 days/11 nights)

Day 1. Arrival and Taiwan lowlands

On arrival at Taipei airport we will make full use of the evening light to explore a farming and coastal area very near the airport. As well as hoping to encounter things more exotic, here we will familiarize ourselves with some common lowland species, such as **Light-vented (Chinese) Bulbul, Red Turtle (Red Collared) Dove, Spotted Dove, Long-tailed Shrike, late-passage Brown Shrike, Black Drongo, Oriental Skylark, Plain Prinia, Yellow-bellied Prinia, Japanese White-eye,** and various wagtails and munias.

With some work we may find a **Crested Myna** among the more common **Javan**. This may

also be our first chance to run into the local subspecies of the **Crested Serpent Eagle**, **Silver-backed Needletail**, and **Pacific (Fork-tailed) Swift**.

We then travel to our well-located hotel. Tonight, after birding and dinner, those with an interest will have an option to explore Taiwan's lively night-market and Taoist temple scene.

Day 2. Wulai

This will be our first opportunity to get into low-elevation forest birds. Wulai is a stronghold for some birds trickier elsewhere, such as the magnificent **Taiwan Blue (Formosan) Magpie**, **Maroon Oriole**, **Taiwan (Formosan) Whistling Thrush**, **Plain Flowerpecker**, **Varied Tit**, and **Silver-backed Needletail**. The valleys here are home to many altitudinal migrants and to raptors such as **Besra** and **Grey-faced Buzzard**. **Mandarin Duck** (proper native ones) can sometimes be spotted. Transient **Grey-streaked** and **Ferruginous Flycatchers** are also to be watched out for.

Transfer to a Central Taiwan Hotel

Days 3 – 5. Low to mid to high elevation Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area

We spend three days in the renowned Dasyueshan National Forest nearby, moving from subtropical lowlands to coniferous temperate mountains at over 2,000 meters. We stay in the comfortable cabins at Anmashan for two nights.

Lower down we are likely to encounter our first **Collared Finchbill**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Lesser Coucal**, **Taiwan Barbet**, **Grey Treepie**, **Striated** and **Pacific Swallows**, **Oriental Reed Warbler**, **Lanceolated Warbler**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, **Taiwan Scimitar Babbler**, and **Rufous-capped Babbler**.

With a bit of luck we might also encounter **Bull-headed Shrike**, **Yellow-browed Warbler**, **Black-browed Reed Warbler**, **Middendorff's Grasshopper Warbler**, and **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker**.

A side road usually produces great views of **Grey-chinned Minivet**, **Brown Dipper**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **Grey-cheeked Fulvetta**, **Malayan Night Heron**, and **Striated Heron**.

As we get higher we will find **Bronzed Drongo**, **Black Bulbul**, **Striated Prinia**, the striking **Vivid Niltava**, **White-bellied Erpornis**, and hopefully **White-backed** or **Grey-headed (Grey-faced) Woodpecker**, and probably Formosan rock (Taiwanese) macaque.

The first big birding highlight is usually **Swinhoe's Pheasant**. While waiting for the right one to show we should be entertained by **White-tailed Robin**, **Steere's Liocichla**, and red-bellied squirrel. A nearby hotspot may have **Island Thrush** and your first views of the abundant **White-eared Sibia** and **Taiwan Yuhina**. **Asian House Martin** can be found nesting under a bridge close by.

The main target in the forests above our cabins is the graceful **Mikado Pheasant**. While staking them out along the road, the very confiding **White-whiskered Laughingthrush** and Formosan striped squirrel will pose for you. Nearby we will be on alert for **White-browed Bush Robin** and the smart **Collared Bush Robin**. As we get into hemlock and dwarf bamboo forest at the highest points, we will meet the distinctive local version of **Spotted (Eurasian) Nutcracker** as well as **Brown-flanked Bush Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler**, **Taiwan Bush Warbler**, and **White-browed Shortwing**.

Mixed flocks will hold the local crested version of **Coal Tit**, **Green-backed Tit**, **Yellow Tit**, **Black-throated Bushtit (Tit)**, the cute **Rufous-faced Warbler**, **Collared Owlet**, and **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**. The excitement of a mixed flock often also attracts familiar birds such as **Eurasian Nuthatch** and **Eurasian (Winter) Wren**. The views here are breathtaking: in the distance we will have views of Taiwan's highest peak, Yushan, which is just short of

4,000 meters (about 13,000 feet).

The excellent *Trochodendron* and pine forest around our cabins is often the best place for **Ashy Wood Pigeon**, the local sub-species of **Eurasian Jay**, **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush**, and **Brown Bullfinch**, and a local waterfall is home to **Little Forktail**. After dinner we will be looking for the endemic subspecies of **Tawny Owl** as well as for two scops owl species and the charismatic White-faced flying squirrel. Taiwan serow and Reeves' muntjac may also be encountered. In the mornings it is usually fun to search the grounds around our accommodation. The secretive **Taiwan Partridge** and the tiny **Taiwan Wren-babbler** are worth the extra effort to find them.

In the evening of Day 5 we return to the western lowlands and drive to the fishing town of Dongshan, just south of the Tropic of Cancer, and our hotel for the night.

Day 6. Coastal lagoons, Aogu Wetland Forest Park to Kenting National Park

Today, among the coastal lagoons, our targets will be any lingering **Black-faced Spoonbill** and passage delights such as **Great Knot**, **Asian Dowitcher**, and **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**. Also targeted are **Oriental Skylark**, **Oriental Pratincole**, **Black-tailed Gull**, **Roseate and Bridled Terns**, **Intermediate Egret**, **Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers**, **Terek and Marsh Sandpipers**, and **Broad-billed Sandpiper**. Local fields and ditches attract **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Greater Painted-snipe**, **Pheasant-tailed Jacana**, **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Ruddy-breasted Crake**, **Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, and **Red-necked and Long-toed Stints**. **Western Osprey**, **Black-winged (Black-shouldered) Kite**, or **Eastern Marsh Harrier** may make a showing. Other familiar waders and ducks are likely. Scrubby embankments can hold **Zitting Cisticola**, **Golden-headed Cisticola**, **Vinous-throated Parrotbill**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, and various starlings. We might also encounter **Styan's Bulbul** at Kenting National Park.

Days 7 – 8. Orchid Island (Lanyu)

With an indigenous culture that is closer to that of the Philippines and the Pacific, Lanyu is a nice contrast to mainland Taiwan. We take a 2-hour ferry from Taiwan's most southern point. **Whistling Green Pigeon**, **Philippine Cuckoo-Dove**, **Brown-eared Bulbul**, **Japanese Paradise Flycatcher**, the endemic subspecies of **Elegant Scops Owl** ("Lanyu Scops Owl"), and **Lowland White-eye** can be expected, as well as other passage passerines. On the way there and back we will look for **Bulwer's Petrel**, **Streaked Shearwater**, **Black-naped Tern**, **Little Tern**, and **Brown Noddy**, as well as for dolphins and flying fish.

Day 9. Huben

Today we will focus on finding the breeding **Fairy Pitta** and **Malayan Night Heron**, as well as better views of lowland forest species.

Days 10 – 11. Alishan National Scenic Area, Hehuan Mountain, north coast

We return to the mountains for more views of **Taiwan Barwing**, **Yellow Tit**, and **Taiwan (Taiwan Hill) Partridge**, as well as any species missed at Dasyueshan. We will keep a lookout for raptors such as **Crested (Oriental) Honey Buzzard**, **Crested Goshawk**, and **Japanese Sparrowhawk**. **Black Eagle** and **Mountain Hawk-Eagle** are sometimes encountered. Summer visitors include **Large Hawk-Cuckoo** and **Himalayan Cuckoo**. Bunting, flycatcher, and pipit species are possible.

In the evenings we will hopefully get views of **Mountain Scops Owl** and **Collared Scops Owl**, and maybe **Savanna Nightjar**, the local subspecies of **Brown Wood Owl** ("Himalayan

Wood Owl”), or giant flying squirrel.

In the secondary forest our targets will be **Rusty Laughingthrush, Dusky Fulvetta, Chinese Bamboo Partridge, Common Emerald Dove, White-bellied Green Pigeon, and Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler**. We may catch up again with **Black-naped Monarch** and **Snowy-browed Flycatcher**.

We then drive to the highest road pass east of the Himalayas at over 3,300 meters in search of **Alpine Accentor, Taiwan Rosefinch, and Taiwan Fulvetta** in the junipers and rhododendrons. Dropping down from the alpine-like areas, in the pine trees we will be on the lookout for **Grey-headed Bullfinch** and **Flamecrest**. The heather-like bamboo will give us more chances of **Golden Parrotbill** and **Taiwan Bush Warbler**.

Day 12. North coast

We will allow time today to make a visit to a coastal promontory on the north coast for uncommon Eastern Palearctic visitors such as **Japanese Robin, Bluethroat, Siberian Rubythroat, and Chinese and Japanese Grosbeaks** – as well as for more run-of-the-mill **Blue Rock Thrush** and **Pacific Reef Heron**. We will also survey the rocky shore for **Chinese Egret** and **Grey-tailed Tattler**.

Duration:	12 days
Limit:	1 - 6
Date:	April 30 – May 11 2016
Start:	Taipei
End:	Taipei
Price:	US\$3884 per person sharing
Single supplement:	US\$490

Price includes:

Accommodations
 Meals (mostly excellent Chinese, but supplemented by lots of familiar food, snacks, and refreshments)
 Vehicles
 Service of guide and driver
 Admission fees
 Snacks and water

Price excludes:

International and domestic flights
 Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts
 Travel insurance
 Alcoholic drinks
 Gratuities

No visa is required for most passports.

We provide bird checklists; butterfly and mammal checklists are possible too.