

Taiwan Endemics

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An unexpected change in family holiday plans meant an opportunity arose to bird a destination I've been wanting to visit for a long time. Despite supposedly not being 'the ideal time', virtually all endemics, and many important resident subspecies were bagged. A awe-inspiring result - on a very interesting and climatically diverse island.

I flew from Bangkok with EVA booked on Expedia. All local arrangements were made by the tireless Richard Foster taiwanecotours@gmail.com. Many thanks to him for great guiding, smooth logistics and fun conversation. The weather was generally pleasant - only a couple afternoon showers, hot to warm at low elevations, warm to fresh higher up.

Day 1.

On the heels of a tropical storm arrived Saturday night in Taipei airport and transferred to hotel in Fenyuan City, central Taiwan. No birds seen due to the dark!

Day 2.

An early start to the countryside gave us moving-car views of the common lowland birds - Tree Sparrow, **Chinese Bulbul**, Red Turtle Dove, Spotted Dove, Black Drongo, Little Egret, Japanese White-eye, Myna species (ignored, Common and other - possibly Javan or Jungle) and Barn Swallow were in abundance.

Our first proper stop, not far up the Dasyueshan Road, had us on to **Taiwan Barbet**, **Collared Finchbill**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Plain Prinia, Yellow-bellied Prinia, Gray Treepie **Taiwan Scimitar-babbler**, **Rufous-capped Babbler**, Oriental Turtle Dove, Black Bulbul, and a swift species. Rubbish views of the noisy **Bamboo Partridge**. Golden-headed Cisticola heard.

Further up the main road we stopped a few times in a fruitless search for the tricky Black-necklaced Scimitar-babbler, but that was forgiven by encounters with snazzy **Bronzed Drongo**, **White-bellied Erponis**, **Grey-cheeked Fulvetta**, Striated Prinia, **Vinous-throated Parrotbill** and a pair of Serpent Eagles of the local subspecies.

A **Malayan Night-heron** was well seen on our way to lunch overlooking a very pleasant (Dipper-free) river. Entertained by **Grey-chinned Minivet**, then disturbed by a sparrowhawk species. Also new (and photographed) were **Taiwan Liocichla**, **Taiwan Yuhina**, Plain Flowerpecker, Plumbeous Redstart and Common Kingfisher.

Now in fantastic broadleaf forest, we resisted the temptation to stop again until the famous 23 kilometer mark. For five long minutes, the Taiwanese photographers and I sat watching Liocichla, **White-tailed Robin** and Red-bellied Squirrels feast before a stunning male **Swinhoe's Pheasant** pranced around to the

sound of Canon, Nikon and my humble Lumix. One pheasant down!

Oh yes, just up the road - also Black-throated Tit, **Yellow Tit !!!**, **Flamecrest!!!**, **Vivid Niltava**, **Taiwan Sibia**, Green-backed Tit and **Asian House Martin** all put on a showing.

It was decided out time would be best spent by hastening up to the 47 km mark. Disappointing birdless break at the permit checkpoint. On arrival we were entertained by **White-whiskered Laughing-thrushes**, **Taiwan Rosefinch**, Formosan Striped Squirrels, pointy nosed squirrels.

It was only when the chilly mist rolled in (and all the photographers had left) did the star of the show - the **Mikado Pheasant** dare to show up. First a female, then a breathtaking male that permitted us to approach in the dim light. Second pheasant in the bag, time to break out the bubbly and electric blanket.

To the cabins at Big Snow Mountain. Dinner, White-faced Flying squirrel viewing, and then sleep to the sound of barking deer.

What a superb day!

Day 3.

I was woken by **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush** in the pines. After a coffee we scoured the accommodation grounds seeing some good birds including **Taiwan Whistling Thrush**, and Eurasian Jay

On the way back up the road better views of the **Collared Bush-robin** but no White-browed Bush-robin at it's 'reliable' location. Then to the end of the road at the 50 kilometer mark. Generally great views of assorted good species including **Taiwan Fulvetta**, **Yellow-bellied Bush-warbler**, **Eurasian Nutcracker**, Large-billed Crow, **Coal Tit** (crested Asian version), but heard-only **White-browed Shortwing** and Winter Wren.

Lower down, not far from the police station, the **Taiwan Cupwing** gave us the runaround but did give us tickable fly-by glimpses. Mid afternoon we descended lower and soon picked up **Varied Tit** (apparently a good bird for here) in the canopy, **Ferruginous Flycatcher**, and **Rufous-faced Warbler**

Our second visit to a postcard-fit waterfall produced **Little Forktail** and poor views of **Taiwan Barwing** nearby.

Out of the mountains, a splendid celebratory dinner and then we started the long journey south to our nice guesthouse near the Kenting Peninsula. A 7-11 stop on route provided liquid refreshments and a flying **Savanna Nightjar**.

Day 4.

An early start had us studying the **Taiwan (Styan's) Bulbuls** at it's most northern west-side range. Farm fields gave us Long-tailed Shrike, Oriental Skylark, Little Ringed Plover, White-breasted Waterhen.

As predicted, the 100+ passenger ferry left 10 minutes early! From the upper deck we were soon seeing Bulwer's Petrel, **Streaked Shearwater**, Black-naped Tern, as well as flying fish and a crowd-pleasing

dolphin.

After a couple minutes of chaos at the crowded dock we had our car and headed for our sole destination on tropical Lanyu - Flycatcher Creek. On route we were seeing plenty of **Brown-eared Bulbul** and **Lowland White-eye**. On arriving at the bridge above the creek we were treated to excellent views of a Lesser Coucal, and roosting **Whistling Taiwan Green Pigeon** - whistling its broken heart out. A minute into the creek we were seeing **Japanese Paradise-flycatchers** easily. The **Philippine Cuckoo Dove** only allowed shoddy views but the **Lanyu Scops Owl** eventually arrived and behaved rather well.

A heavy lunchtime shower eased the effects of the energy-sapping heat by forcing us to a shaded lunch of flying fish and cold refreshments. Having all the key targets sorted we relaxed and picked up a few other decent birds on this beautiful island...and then an unforeseen race to the ferry.

The return pelagic cruise was uneventful and unbirdy with only a couple Little Tern and possible Bridled Tern when rounding the southernmost point. Feeling very chuffed (and tired) with our successful rate of travel we celebrated with fine food, beer, and another night at the same hotel.

Day 5.

A later start saw us at a lovely nearby butterfly/dragonfly hotspot, and a local reservoir-lake. An Emerald Dove posed for the camera, and **Black-shouldered Kite**, **Eastern Spot-billed Duck**, Zitting Cisticola, **Oriental Pratincole**, Cattle Egret, Plain Martin, Scaly Munia were added to the list. Other swallow (Striated?) species refused to allow confident identification.

By mid afternoon we were climbing bendy narrow roads (**Crested Goshawk**, **Brownish-flanked Bush-warbler**, and needletail species seen on route) into the hills again, keen to get into the hide at Fireflies Hotel in Alishan on time. After only an hour's wait in the hide, around ten **Taiwan Hill Partridge** made a hurried appearance, maybe spooked by the female Swinhoe's Pheasant.

After dinner, firewater sipping, and another hairy drive up the hill we were able to get good views of a **Mountain Scops Owl**. **Collared Scops Owl** and Large Hawk-Cuckoo also heard but refused to come close.

Day 6.

Well rested, headed to higher Alishan and the Yushan National Park area.

While hunting for **Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler** a flock of 20 **Ashy Pigeons** flew over, possibly spooked by the **Mountain Hawk Eagle**. Only passable views of the babbler. White-rumped Munia at scenic bridge near a 7-11 village.

Near a 'sacred tree' a **Collared Owlet** came to see what the fuss was about. **White-capped Woodpecker** seen by others. Taiwan Macaque had a checkpoint further along.

The car park at Yushan was busy with birds including an unexpected **Grey-headed Bullfinch**. Finally **Taiwan Bush Warbler**, **White-browed Bush Robin** were pulled out of the reed-like bamboo with tape,

the shortwing not.

An afternoon shower quietened everything down and we made our way via Sun Moon Lake and tea farms to our guesthouse near Wushe. **White-bellied Green Pigeon** at km 133 mark road number 21 rest area, Black-crowned Night-heron at the lake.

Day 7.

Wished I could have stayed longer breakfast-balcony birding. Instead we headed to Chun-yang Farm where the **Rusty Laughingthrush** cooperated but not the Bamboo Partridge. White Wagtail (ocularis) near car.

Brief stops at the Blue Gate Trails produced now familiar birds plus Eurasian Nuthatch and more satisfying views of the Barwing and Yellow Tit (really great bird). Having most of the mid to high elevation species sorted we ignored most of the rather-too-sunny sites on Hehuan Mountain but soon picked up **Alpine Accentor** on scree beyond the highest pass.

The last bird before our 3-hour drive to our hot-spring hotel in Wulai was **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker** near Meifong Farm. Along the way Taipei City and views of Taipei 101.

Day 8.

The two main targets for the day - **Maroon Oriole** and **Taiwan Blue Magpie** were bagged after a stressful (countdown to early afternoon flight) hour with several pairs of Whistling Thrush and a **Dusky Fulvetta** (finally!). A wetland stop on the way back to Taipei added Little Grebe, Common Moorhen and a probable **Yellow Bittern**.

I used Mark Brazil's Birds of East Asia and various other books provided. Sounds downloaded from Xeno-canto. Lifers in **bold**.