



Taiwan: Birding Formosan Endemics and Migration

April 22nd – May 1st 2025

TOUR LEADER: Doug Whitman

Report and photos by Doug Whitman



A very handsome Swinhoe's Pheasant emerged from the forest after a rainstorm to sun and preen

Taiwan is a popular birding destination, and for good reason. A suite of 32 endemics that grows by the year as genetics sort out how distinct some of the unique “subspecies” truly are, some of the most intact and beautiful forests in the region, fantastic migration, friendly people, and excellent food. Our birding set departure this year was very successful. 31/32 of the currently recognized endemics were seen well by all participants, and we had some excellent migratory bonuses—the highlight being the globally endangered and extremely rare Chinese Crested Tern. Fantastic local guide Haiden’s deep knowledge of regional food specialties and culture kept everyone well fed and happy. All of this paired with a gung-ho and enthusiastic group made this year’s tour a massive success. Checklist included at the end.

Day 1

We all met at the hotel in Taipei for a nice dinner at the hotel restaurant, and to talk about the coming day. Uneventful, in a good way.

Day 2

The day started bright and early as we grabbed a quick hotel breakfast and loaded all of our luggage into our quite comfortable bus. Our first stop and first taste of Taiwan’s forest birding and endemic birds was at Shimen Reservoir half an hour later. An oppressive dark cloud was hanging in the sky, and we made the most of our time to find as many of our targets as we could before the rain rolled in. We were mostly successful, with good looks at **Taiwan Whistling-Thrush**, **Taiwan Blue-Magpie**, and **Taiwan Barbet** as our first endemics of the trip. We also spotted a **Malayan Night Heron** stalking an open area in the park. This species is a ghost in most of its range, but a remarkably gettable resident of even city parks in Taiwan. Our morning birding was cut slightly short by the rain rolling in, and we decided to make straight for the southern half of the island near the bustling city of Tainan, as the whole northern end of the island looked to be weathered out for the day.

Tainan is in the country’s southwestern lowlands, and contains a staggering amount of habitat for migrating shorebirds and waterfowl, in addition to a nice suite of lowland songbird species. Our first brief stop was Aogu Wetlands, an enormous wetland complex. It was good to stretch our legs and have a bathroom stop after a long drive on the bus. We focused on the freshwater and forested habitat here, and added **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Eurasian Coot**, and **Eurasian Moorhen** as well as the local subspecies of **Plain Prinia** and **Yellow-bellied Prinia**. **Brown Shrike** was a fun pick up, as well as the nonnative but still quite handsome **Oriental Magpie-Robin**. With the day heating up in the lowlands and harsh light, we headed out to grab lunch enroute to our next stop.

Haiden found a small local restaurant with some good tea and some delicious fried meat dumpling type foods (the names for most of these foods were only in Chinese, and most were new to me—a true highlight of my time guiding the tour this year was working with a local guide who was also an extremely knowledgeable chef and self-described foodie). This restaurant was our first taste of many of the interesting and authentic local food Haiden was seemingly able to conjure out of thin air across this island. One participant, Simon, finished his food first and went outside to see if any birds were around in the agricultural area we were in—he quickly summoned the rest of us when he struck gold—an **Oriental Pratincole** in the fallow field behind the restaurant! Everyone quickly finished their last bites and rushed out while Haiden settled up with the owner and I retrieved the scope from the bus. Good food and good scope views of the pratincole re-energized all of us, and we got back on the bus to head to our next stop.

Having already birded a bit of freshwater and reedbed habitat, we shifted focus to the tidal flats and estuaries pouring out along Taiwan’s west coast for a different suite of birds. We walked out on a dike overlooking a large tidal flat and began scanning through birds. It was a coastal bird smorgasbord, with **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Common Redshank**, **Terek Sandpiper**, **Curlew Sandpiper**, **Gray-tailed Tattler**, **Greater Sand-Plover**, **Siberian Sand-Plover**, and more on the shorebird front. After about 20 minutes of scanning, I finally picked out what I was looking for—an ultra-rare **Chinese Crested Tern**

had been reported from this site on and off for a week or so—but seemed to move around a bit throughout the day. Today we were lucky however, and it was nestled down between a couple of Caspian Terns. The bird was a lifer for all the participants, and a new species for Taiwan for me—and would hang on until the end of the tour as one of the top 5 birds of the trip as voted by the participants. **Chinese Crested Tern** was one of six tern species seen from this one spot—joined by **Caspian Tern**, **Great Crested Tern**, **Common Tern**, **Whiskered Tern**, and **Little Tern**. A personal record for tern diversity for me, which was another highlight.



Not a great photo, but any sighting of Chinese Crested Tern (middle) is a good one. Once thought extinct, there are likely less than 200 of these birds left in the world

There was still one major target for the day, and we headed from the river estuary to a large inland salt pan and wetland complex, mercifully with a couple of covered bird blinds to avoid the heat of the afternoon. Shortly after arriving, we found what we were looking for—a large flock of the endangered **Black-faced Spoonbill**. The southwestern lowlands in Taiwan are an important wintering site for the species, and many of the young birds hang out well into April before flying back north to their Yellow Sea breeding grounds. One of the birds was even ringed—signs of the active conservation efforts that have brought this species back from the brink. Other fun pickups at this site were our first good looks at **Black-winged Stilt** and **Pied Avocet**, and a **Peregrine Falcon** that buzzed the mudflat and caused some chaos. It had been a long day, and the rest was uneventful. We arrived at our

hotel in Tainan without incident. Tainan is a large city and culinary hub in Taiwan, and with how much time we would be spending in rural areas with local Taiwanese cuisine, we took the opportunity for a bit of global food diversity for dinner with an excellent Indian restaurant a short walk from our accommodations. We turned in early in preparation for another early morning and long day ahead.



A large group of endangered Black-faced Spoonbill. If you look closely, the bird three in from the left and facing away has some colored leg bands—a sign of the active conservation efforts that are bringing this bird back from the brink.

Day 3

It was an early start the next morning, as we needed to drive from Tainan all the way down to the southern tip of the island, a few hours drive away. We had our first of many 7/11 breakfasts—Taiwanese 7/11s are quite good, with fresh hot food and coffee, and it's even possible to pay bills or use the extensive network of stores as a parallel mail service with enough local knowledge. The drive to the southern end of the island is quite pretty, as the road threads the mountains and the ocean before entering the flat plain/valley that extends up the southeast side of the island. We found our primary target quite quickly—the endemic **Styan's Bulbul** replaces Light-vented Bulbul in the far southern and eastern lowlands of the island. A brief stop at a 7/11 on the edge of the valley and mountains also yielded a quite cool sighting of a hybrid **Styan's x Light-vented Bulbul**, which can occasionally be seen in the two species' limited contact zone.

Although we had already found our main target, the forest at the south end of the island is quite nice and can be good for picking up migrant species on their way north. An hour or so of birding near Longluan Lake yielded **Gray-streaked Flycatcher**, the endemic **Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler**, and good looks at the endemic subspecies of **Crested Goshawk**. We also heard our first **Taiwan Bamboo-Partridges**, but they did not cooperate for looks this morning.



Crested Goshawk showing it's namesake crest

We were on a tight schedule as we needed to reach our lodging and a photo blind in the mountains by the mid-afternoon, so we dragged ourselves away from the lowland birding and boarded the bus. Lunch was a variety of tasty local dishes, including some excellent pork and a salad made of a local fern variety that became a favorite on the trip.

The road into the mountains was long, winding, and quite scenic. A recent landslide had wiped out part of the road to our hotel, and it was only re-opened to small vehicles, so for the last 15 or so minutes of the drive we piled into a van that the hotel had helpfully sent down for us. Check-in was quick, and before long we were happily sitting in a blind in the mid-elevation forest behind the property. Our first **Swinhoe's Pheasants** of the trip put on quite a show,

strutting around in front of the blind and letting the light catch their myriad iridescent colors. The shy **Taiwan Partridge** made several appearances, although never for long—but with persistence everyone got looks at this tiny, intricately patterned bird of the mid-elevation forest's shady floor. **Pallas's Squirrel** was also a visitor. A very welcome surprise was a male **White-tailed Robin** that popped in in front of the blind and began displaying his tail for a female lurking in the shade.



White-tailed Robin



Flashing his tail!

As dusk fell and we heard the truck coming to pick us up from the blind, we took our last looks at the partridges and pheasants and made our way up the hill. Dinner was a homecooked Taiwanese meal, kindly prepared for us by the hotel's owners. We had a brief break after dinner as night fell, before piling back into the truck and heading back up into the forest to look for owls and mammals. Our first sighting of the evening was a **Masked Palm Civet** that I picked out in the thermal—an auspicious start. Shortly after, we encountered our first **Taiwan Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel**. This

animal is truly bizarre, and a highlight of any nocturnal wildlife watching in Taiwan—it lives up to its name—a giant, house cat sized flying squirrel colored bright red and white. We picked up a single roosting bat in the thermal, whose identity is still in question, although **Dark Woolly Bat (*Kerivoula furva*)** seems to be the leading possibility. We finally heard a **Mountain Scops-Owl** that was close enough to be responsive, and after some tense whistling back and forth and scanning in the thermal, it came in quite close and provided excellent (but very brief) looks in the light for some of the group (this was remedied later, on day 8, for the unlucky folks who missed this brief appearance). It was getting late so we took the truck back down to the hotel, where most folks went to bed after our long day. However, with several more owl possibilities for the evening, three of us who were still up for it went back out and were rewarded for our efforts with views of a **Northern Boobook**. Now thoroughly exhausted, we all went to bed to get some sleep before another early morning.



Taiwan Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel is one of the strangest denizens of Taiwan's mountain forests

Day 4

It was our earliest start of the tour, with a singular goal in mind: the stunning Mikado Pheasant. Only found in the highest forests of the island, the species is never a guarantee and is considerably easier in the early mornings. We left our hotel predawn and grabbed another 7/11 breakfast in the only town before entering the heart of the mountains. The drive into the mountains was lengthy, but we arrived just after dawn at the high elevation areas of Tataka. After a brief bathroom break, we returned to the bus and began searching for the pheasant. The pheasants will often come to roadsides in the early mornings, and that's where we were looking. However, the morning wore on and no pheasants were to be found. Admitting defeat and shifting focus to other high elevation specialties, we parked the bus, hopped out, and looked down

the road to where...a **Mikado Pheasant** had just wandered out of the forest 100 meters away! We all soaked in views as the remarkably cooperative bird wandered in and out of sun and shadows, looking alternately a deep royal blue, black, purple, and every color in between as the varied light played off his iridescent feathers.



Mikado Pheasant was voted the number two bird of the whole tour. They're really, really good.

With walkaway looks at Mikado Pheasant secured, we shifted our focus to other fun high elevation species and let the endemics pile up. We started with great looks at the skulky **Taiwan Shortwing**, and quickly followed it up with **Taiwan Fulvetta**, **Taiwan Bush-Robin**, **Taiwan Yuhina**, **Taiwan Liocichla**, **Flamecrest**, and **Taiwan Rosefinch**. The endemics were rounded out by a handful of interesting endemic subspecies such as the highly erratic local subspecies of **Golden Parrotbill** working some bamboo, the local form of **Southern Nutcracker**, and in what would turn out to be a common theme for the tour, we got quite good looks at the normally shy endemic subspecies of **Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler**. **Formosan Rock Macaque** was added to the mammal list as well.



Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler is ridiculously cute. It also has one of the most remarkable songs on the island—a three part, several minute long song that starts with chipping, which leads into an impossibly high pitched, anxiety inducing crescendo before collapsing in a waterfall of trills.

With a massively successful first morning at high elevation under our belts, we began our drive through the mountains to the north of the country. We stopped at a tiny rural restaurant for lunch, where Haiden's ability to find good food anywhere shone again with a meal that included local freshwater fish and shrimp, as well as the fern salad we had come to love and some more standard pork and chicken and soup and rice. The drive to our hotel took most of the rest of the day, and after arriving in the town of Qingjing our afternoon birding plans were scuttled by a rainstorm. The rest of the evening was spent relaxing before visiting another great local restaurant for dinner and celebrating our successful day and pile of lifers.

Day 5

Although it felt almost disloyal to 7/11, we slept in slightly and ate breakfast at the hotel this morning before heading to our highest elevation of the tour. The drive up to Wuling Pass is narrow and winding, and even walking around the parking lot at the top can leave you winded—the pass is along one of the highest roads in Asia and sits at a remarkable 10,745 feet (3,275 meters) above sea level. Not much lives at that elevation, and with a bone chilling fog rolling in we didn't want to spend much time there either. Thankfully our main target, the endemic subspecies of **Alpine Accentor** showed itself



quite quickly—first offering us silhouettes singing through the mist, and then landing directly in front of us for great (but brief) looks. With accentor in the bag we piled back into the bus as fast as we could and headed (slightly) lower to look for our last few high elevation targets.

We got out lower and in the lee of the wind on the back side of the pass and quickly encountered an extremely cooperative **Taiwan Bush Warbler**. This bird's hiccupping morse code whistles are one of the best songs on the island, and we were treated to walk away looks (and listens) of it. Our final target proved to be trickier. We were enjoying better looks than we had had the previous day of quality birds like **Flamecrest**, **Collared Bush-Robin**, and **Taiwan Rosefinch**, and

even picked up a couple of surprise **Taiwan Barwings**, dapper birds which can be quite tricky. However, the elusive Taiwan Bullfinch still hadn't showed, and rain was starting to roll in. Finally, as we began to give up hope, I spotted a chunky gray

After a long wait, the endemic Taiwan Bullfinch finally appeared

bird land on top of one of the endemic Taiwan Firs. I shouted, and everyone watched as a **Taiwan Bullfinch** flew from the top of the tree

and...down into the grass near the edge of the road. We all soaked up great views, before getting some hot drinks from the service station at the top and piling into the bus.



So why do they call it Flamecrest anyway—ah, I see



Taiwan Barwing might be the most underrated endemic in all of Taiwan—its certainly one of my favorites



Taiwan Rosefinch is a deep, rich red. Looks like this one has been color-banded by some researchers.

With our high elevation target species all wrapped up and a very cold rain rolling in at the pass, we decided to go lower and make our first real foray into the diverse mid-elevation forests of the island. Rain hadn't hit the lower forests yet, so we maximized our time by birding a side road down off the main route. The mid-elevation mainstays quickly made their presence known, with **White-eared Sibia** and **Taiwan Yuhina** both seen quickly. Suddenly, a **Taiwan Cupwing** sang, and close! We went into hot pursuit, and with a bit of persistence managed great views of this king of skulkers as it scurried around over rocks, and sometimes even *underneath* the leaf litter coating the forest floor. A suspicious noise from a tree on the other side of the gorge from us prompted me to play a few calls, and we were quickly rewarded as a **Taiwan Yellow Tit** flew in and landed on the telephone line above us. The rest of our walk was occupied by a fantastically diverse mixed flock containing **Taiwan Vivid Niltava**, **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker**, **Rufous-capped Babbler**, **Black-throated Tit**, and more.



Taiwan Cupwing is adorable, loud, and devilishly difficult to lay eyes on.



Taiwan Yellow Tit is a feisty little lemon drop. This one landed directly above us to scold.

With rain rolling in quick, we made a hasty getaway for another excellent lunch, and much needed hot tea. We took a break while the rain passed through in the afternoon, and in the evening took a walk around the forest and tea plantations near the hotel to take a look around for some of the more edge-loving species. The walk was a success, with great looks at **Taiwan Bamboo Partridge**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, **White-bellied Green-Pigeon**, the endemic “large-footed” Taiwan subspecies of **Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler**, and more **White-eared Sibias** than we knew what to do with. Happy with the day, we returned to the same restaurant as the previous day for dinner. Haiden had picked up some locally grown mangoes during our time in the south and busted these out for dessert. For some people, it was the first time trying fresh local mangoes, and for everyone it was the first time trying Taiwan's special varieties. They shattered all expectations. Happy and stomachs thoroughly full, we all went to sleep.

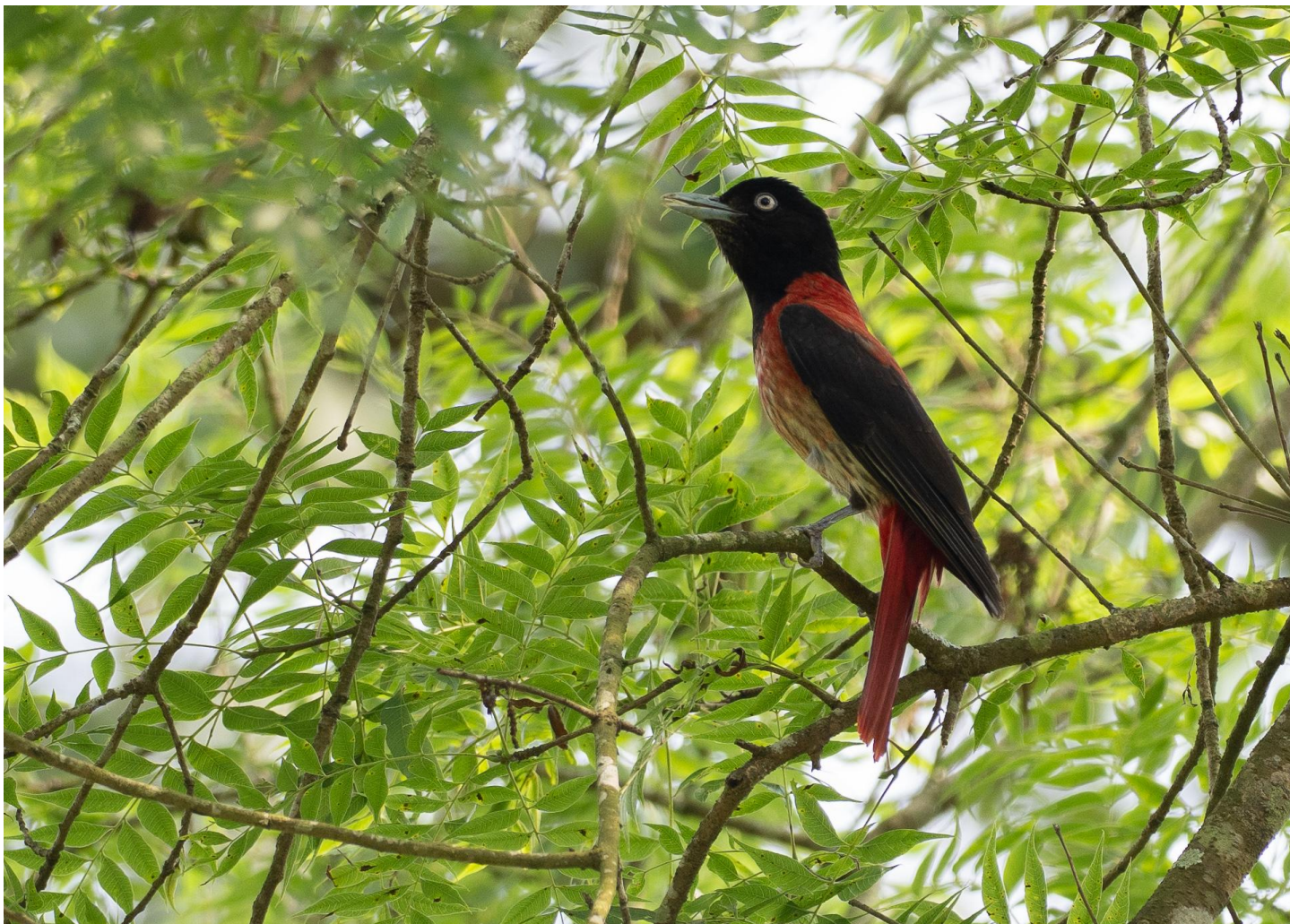


Brownish-flanked (or "large-footed") Bush Warbler. The third unusually showy bush warbler species of the tour.

Day 6

The day started with a return to our classic 7/11 breakfast enroute to a quite cool foothill forest area near the town of Puli. Our main target of the day was the charismatic **Chestnut-bellied Tit**, a family of which showed quite well within minutes of our arrival. The park was quite busy with tourists this day, but with a bit of searching we were able to find a relatively quiet trail to bird along. **Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker** and the odd **White-bellied Erpornis** were nice pickups, and we enjoyed more views of **Taiwan Scimitar-Babblers**. Despite much searching, the shy Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler was a no show on this day. We heard a **Dusky Fulvetta** singing close by and with some (a lot) of persistence, we all managed views of this subtly patterned skulker. We made for the exit as the day was heating up but had one more surprise in store for us with a surprise **Plain Flowerpecker** on our walk to the bus.

Our next stop was lunch, where Haiden had secured seats at a well-known local restaurant. The specialty food in Puli is a type of water bamboo, which was quite refreshing and served alongside delicious soup, fish, rice, pork, ferns, and other dishes. Refreshed from lunch, our next stop was the famous (among birders) Puli Temple to search for the extremely distinctive endemic "Crimson" subspecies of **Maroon Oriole**. Although a bit quiet when we arrived, the orioles eventually showed and provided great looks. We also had more looks at **Taiwan Blue Magpie**, and an interesting raptor show on the afternoon thermals with **Crested Serpent-Eagle**, **Crested Goshawk**, and **Oriental Honey-buzzard** all soaring over at various points.



A young Maroon Oriole showing some interesting transitional plumage. Not really maroon, in Taiwan...

At this point we were forced to make a last-minute hotel change (the pipes had burst in our original accommodation—at least they called us before we arrived) and not knowing how food options would be at the new spot, we made a stop at a grocery store to stock up just in case, and ate dinner at a nice restaurant serving steak and other western food in town. The drive up to the hotel was uneventful, with a late but mostly smooth arrival. As a bonus, we were now staying on the road up to the famous Daxueshan.

Day 8

We made an early start this day in a mostly unsuccessful attempt to beat the rain. However, rain or no, we got our birds. Our first stop was near the entrance to Daxueshan proper, at about 35 KM along the road. Soon after we stepped off of the bus we heard the distinctive, rich whistles of a **Rusty Laughingthrush**. Everyone managed good views of this odd laughingthrush and not a moment too soon, as the clouds that had been threatening all morning suddenly opened up and rain came pouring down. We rushed back to the bus to eat a bit of chocolate and warm up, and I headed back out to see if anything was moving in the rain. It was a mostly fruitless endeavor, with little to show for my efforts except rain covered glasses.

Birding lower along the road wasn't much better—a **Large Hawk-Cuckoo** sang in the distance while we wishfully staked out a fruiting tree for the enigmatic and elusive Taiwan Thrush, but it was to no avail. Outside of a staggering amount of

White-eared Sibias, we came up mostly empty. Cold, wet, and hungry we retreated to the hotel to rest, have lunch, and regroup. The restaurant adjacent to our hotel was quite good—hot tea and hot food can do wonders on a day like this. Food was steamed buns with a mixture of beef and vegetables provided to load it to your taste, like a sandwich. To my American soul it was a delicious Taiwanese sloppy joe, and exactly what we all needed.

With the weather starting to clear and a belly full of good food, we regrouped and headed back up the mountain. Our first stop was to look for what had thus far been a bit of a ghost for the trip—the big, shy, **Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler**. We heard the distinctive sound of a pair of them duetting, way down into a bamboo-choked gully off the side of the path. Stepping back and quietly waiting, we eventually spotted them—two now-silent scimitar babblers creeping around the undergrowth. With a sigh of relief and a cheer for a bird that had been eluding us since day 1 at Shimen, we continued up the mountain.

When we had barely gotten back to KM 35, the weather turned once again and rain started coming down. I spent most of the rainstorm searching for birds, joined by Simon who didn't feel like sitting in the bus. We encountered a nice mixed flock of Black-throated Tits, Taiwan Yuhinas, and some other species, but nothing that was new for the trip. Eventually, finally, the rain cleared and the sun poked through. As folks got off the bus and stretched their legs, the birds did much the same. There was a burst of song and activity, and even a **Swinhoe's Pheasant** swaggered out of the forest and sat up on a rock to preen and sun himself (see the cover photo of this report). As we birded our way down the road enjoying the sunlight and warmer temperatures, a few odd chucks and whistles sounded through the canopy to our right. Suddenly, a gang of 8 curious **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush** burst onto the scene. The white throat glows against any background, and once a group of them has made their appearance they're ridiculously fun birds to watch. Birds chatter, talk to, and preen one another, catch bugs, dangle upside down, and hop along tree trunks probing under bark. Certainly underrated, and also our 31st and final true endemic species of the trip—leaving only the erratic Taiwan Thrush.



Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush are a social, bouncy, charismatic companion in Taiwan's mountain forests

Day 9

We used some of our groceries supplemented with food kindly prepared by the hotel for a nice breakfast before heading out for the day on a birding transect of Daxueshan from bottom to top. We started in the foothill zone, with the weather, much, much improved from the previous day. Raptors and songbirds alike seemed to be taking advantage of the change in the wind, and **Chinese Sparrowhawks** were a frequent sight—both birds foraging or perched in the forest, and birds thermaling in the sky engaging in active migration. A **Crested Goshawk**, **Peregrine Falcon**, and a few **Crested Serpent-Eagles** also began circling on the thermals as the morning rolled on. A flock of seven(!) **Chestnut-bellied Tits** flew in to the surprise of all of us, and flocks of 40-60 **Gray Treepie** could be seen working along the far ridge line. Maybe a bit of seasonal movement? It certainly seemed to be the day for it. Up close and personal views of **Taiwan Hwamei** were a major improvement on our sighting from a couple of days prior, and **Plumbeous Redstart** was a nice pickup along a creek.



Taiwan Hwamei singing its rich, complex song

Once the day began heating up we retreated to the bus and made our way up to the 35 KM area we had been at the previous day, but this time to hike the lovely FR 210. FR 210 is a long, decommissioned dirt road that runs along the side of the mountain at mid-elevations. It's a wonderful way to see Taiwan's mid-elevation fauna and always has a few surprises in store. Today those surprises consisted of a flock of over 20 **Rufous-capped Laughingthrush**, **Taiwan Yellow Tit**, the endemic subspecies of **Eurasian Jay**, **Eurasian Nuthatch**, and more. One highlight came on the hike back—I heard a quiet chip from a mossy gully to the left of the trail. On a hunch, I played some tape, and a tiny **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** popped out! One of the smallest members of Muscicapidae, and an endemic subspecies—beautiful, but local and never guaranteed when visiting Taiwan. We had barely finished looking at the flycatcher when a **Reeve's Muntjac** (a small

fanged, barking, deer) popped out along the trail ahead of us. We stayed quiet and got extended looks at another one of the odd mammals that calls the island home. Despite extensive searching, Taiwan Thrush remained elusive on this morning's birding.



Snowy-browed Flycatcher is a beautiful, tiny sprite of mossy gullies in mountainous forest



A Reeve's Muntjac (Taiwan endemic subspecies), caught mid-chew

We had a field lunch of noodle bowls, crackers, and coffee near the entrance gate while enjoying birds drawn to a fruiting cherry tree in the parking lot. A few of us tried the cherries—a bit bitter, but a great resource for the **White-bellied Green-Pigeons** and **Taiwan Yuhinas** frequenting the tree. Lunch was also crashed by a particularly friendly **Swinhoe's Pheasant** who seemed all too comfortable checking out people's picnics—no complaints from us!

After lunch we checked out the higher elevations of the park, running into old friends like **Taiwan Bush Warbler** and the local form of **Coal Tit**. Interestingly, Coal Tit was the final of Taiwan's 4 (5 with Black-throated) native tits that we had seen just that day. Although the famous Anma Lodge high on Daxueshan was closed for lodging this April, the gift shop was still open, and we enjoyed a quick spin around the bird-themed merchandise there as well.



A Taiwan Yuhina peruses ripe cherries in a fruiting tree where we ate lunch

With sunlight somehow fading already, we began our drive down the mountain for dinner. Dinner was some excellent home cooked local fare from the hotel owners. I had heard a Mountain Scops-Owl from the hotel the night prior, and suggested we go owling. Folks who had gotten a good look at the bird earlier in the trip opted to rest up, but a dedicated group of 4 of us hiked up the hill from the hotel and began our search. It was a resounding success, with more up close and personal views of the elusive **Mountain Scops-Owl** a short walk up the road. Now thoroughly exhausted, it was time for bed for the rest of us.

Day 10

There was one major target left—one that's saved for the end of the trip for good reason. The tour is carefully timed—and by April 30, the elusive, migratory **Fairy Pitta** should be just arriving to breeding grounds and quite vocal. Even trying for the bird at the best time of year in the best places is no guarantee, and so the next morning we met up with a local hunter-turned-guide who has spent years monitoring and protecting the birds to give us the best shot, near the town of Huben. The first spot we visited was a popular forest trail where the birds are often a bit showier. No luck today. We could hear a Fairy Pitta, and incidental good looks at **Black-naped Monarch** was certainly nice. But not what we came for.

Moving along, we followed our local guide up a back road where a pair had a territory nearby. This time we heard them again—and 3 people even briefly saw the bird. But it was tough, and most of the group (me included) standing on the

other side missed it. Seeming to pull out all the stops, our local guide led us on an off trail hike up a dried-up riverbed, deep into the lowland subtropical forest. Sweating profusely, we all finally arrived at a clearing in the forest where the creek bed widened. Playing his tape, there was an immediate response from high above us. After a tense few moments, Simon spotted the bird, and moving to his location, I was able to see it as well. For being large and brightly colored (the Chinese name directly translates to “8 colored bird”), the bird was able to blend in remarkably well in the canopy. Mercifully it was quite stationary, and with some persistence everyone managed good looks at this enigmatic species.



Fairy Pitta is beautiful. And for being brightly colored and chunky, very hard to spot!

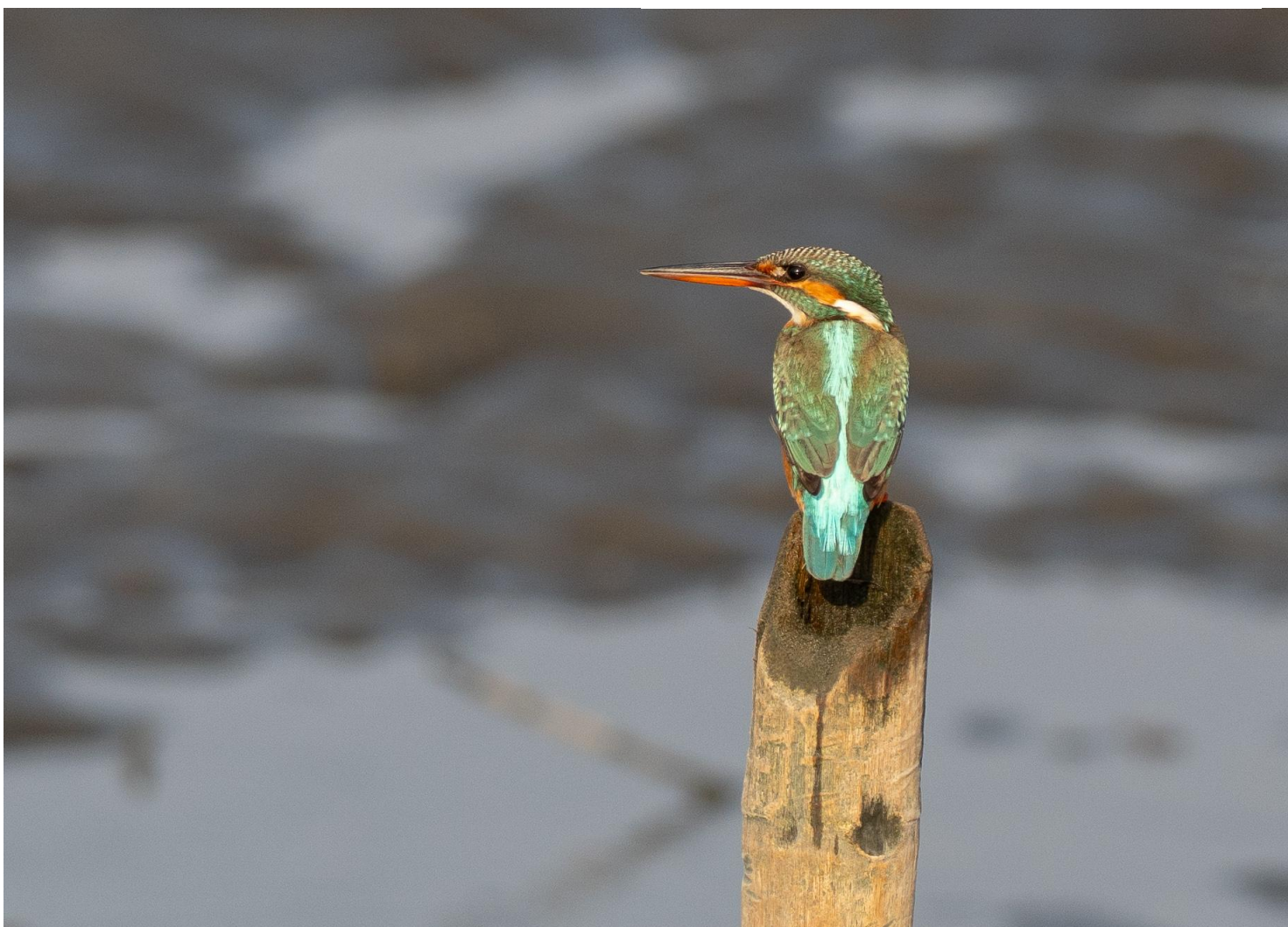
With **Fairy Pitta** now in hand after a full morning of tough work, the rest of the day became a bit more open. The bus needed some quick maintenance, so we stopped in a local town that Haiden knew for lunch, boba tea, and a quick visit to a gorgeous temple in the historic district. The bus maintenance was quick, and before we knew it we were on our way to some wetlands on the west coast for some fun birding and to see what else we could add to the trip. Our first stop was a mostly empty pond that had a group of **Black-tailed Godwits** hanging out in it. Off to an auspicious start, we continued to a tidal flat, which at low tide seemed to stretch forever. The shorebird and heron list was nice, and was easily topped by a **Chinese Egret**! Never particularly common, I had spotted a heron darting and juking across the tidal flat way out, and everyone was able to enjoy it's unique foraging behavior in the scope. A close runner up was a **Far Eastern Curlew** that dropped in—an enormous shorebird with an even bigger bill. And finally a sleeper hit, a particularly photogenic **Common Kingfisher** hunting the area made one person's top 5 birds of the trip.



Black-tailed Godwit in breeding plumage



An endangered Chinese Egret stalks the tidal flat



The sun catching a Common Kingfisher just right

From the tidal flat we drove to the city of Douliu for our last night of the tour. The hotel check-in was smooth, and for dinner we visited a local hole-in-the-wall Haiden knew to finally try Taiwan's famous beef noodles. They lived up to expectations, and along with some delicious dumplings made for an excellent final dinner. On the walk back to the hotel Haiden picked up a few interesting local deserts to try, and we listened to and watched **Savannah Nightjars** flying in the lights out front of the hotel.

Day 11

In a never-ending quest for "just one more bird" we left our hotel early for one last morning of birding before the airport and visited the lovely forest at Sun-link-sea. We didn't have too much time but were able to enjoy some **Mandarin Ducks** (native here!), and most excitingly, the endemic subspecies of the very cute, waterfall loving **Little Forktail**. Dragging ourselves away, we made our way to the airport where the tour ended.

Top 5

It was a tough contest for a "top 5" birds of the tour. 21 different birds got votes. With 8 people voting (myself included) and 5 points allocated to the number 1 bird and 1 point allocated to the number 5 bird, these were the final results:

1. Fairy Pitta, 15 points
2. Mikado Pheasant, 13 points
3. Chinese Egret, 9 points
4. Mountain Scops-Owl, 8 points
5. Snowy-browed Flycatcher, 8 points
6. Chinese Crested Tern, 8 points

Notably, there was a three-way tie for the number 4 slot. The honorably mentions getting at least one point were White-bellied Green-Pigeon, Taiwan Cupwing, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Common Kingfisher, Alpine Accentor, Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Flamecrest, White-tailed Robin, Taiwan Partridge, Taiwan Barwing, Swinhoe's Pheasant, Little Forktail, and the hybrid Styan's x Light-vented Bulbul.

Experience highlights included the Chinese Crested Tern, long hikes and particularly our morning of birding on FR 210, the group dynamic, Haiden's food knowledge, friendly people, and views (including scenery, flowers, and birds).

Taiwan is always a fun time, and incredibly dynamic—not only is it fun every time, but it's fun *in different ways every time*. Guiding the set departure this year was a privilege.

BIRD LIST

The list includes everything that was seen by at least one of the group, including the guide/tour leader. Taxonomy follows: Clements, J. F., T. S. Schulenberg, M. J. Iliff, D. Roberson, T. A. Fredericks, B. L. Sullivan, and C. L. Wood. 2024. The eBird/Clements checklist of birds of the world: v2024. Downloaded from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/clementschecklist/download/>

(H)=heard only

(GO)=guide only

(I)=introduced species

(Essp)=endemic subspecies

Bold=endemic species

Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl (Anatidae)

Eastern Spot-billed Duck

Anas zonorhyncha

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos

Tufted Duck

Aythya fuligula

Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies (Phasianidae)

Taiwan Partridge

Arborophila crudigularis

Taiwan Bamboo-Partridge

Bambusicola sonorivox

Mikado Pheasant

Syrnaticus mikado

Swinhoe's Pheasant

Lophura swinhoii

Grebes (Podicipedidae)

Little Grebe

Tachybaptus ruficollis

Pigeons and Doves (Columbidae)

Rock Pigeon (I)

Columba livia

Oriental Turtle-Dove (Essp)

Streptopelia orientalis orii

Red Collared-Dove

Streptopelia tranquebarica

Spotted Dove

Streptopelia chinensis

White-bellied Green-Pigeon

Treron sieboldii

Cuckoos (Cuculidae)

Large Hawk-Cuckoo

Hierococcyx sparveriioides

Oriental Cuckoo

Cuculus optatus

Nightjars and Allies (Caprimulgidae)

Savanna Nightjar (Essp)

Caprimulgus affinis stictomus

Swifts (Apodidae)

Pacific Swift

Apus pacificus

House Swift (Essp)

Apus nipalensis kuntzi

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots (Rallidae)

Eurasian Moorhen
Eurasian Coot
White-breasted Waterhen

Gallinula chloropus
Fulica atra
Amaurornis phoenicurus

Stilts and Avocets (Recurvirostridae)

Black-winged Stilt
Pied Avocet

Himantopus himantopus
Recurvirostra avosetta

Plovers and Lapwings (Charadriidae)

Pacific Golden-Plover
Siberian Sand-Plover
Greater Sand-Plover
Kentish Plover
Little Ringed Plover

Pluvialis fulva
Anarhynchus mongolus
Anarhynchus leschenaultii
Charadrius alexandrinus
Charadrius dubius

Sandpipers and Allies (Scolopacidae)

Whimbrel
Far Eastern Curlew
Black-tailed Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Curlew Sandpiper
Red-necked Stint
Swinhoe's Snipe
Terek Sandpiper
Common Sandpiper
Gray-tailed Tattler
Common Greenshank
Wood Sandpiper
Common Redshank

Numenius phaeopus
Numenius madagascariensis
Limosa limosa
Arenaria interpres
Calidris ferruginea
Calidris ruficollis
Gallinago megala
Xenus cinereus
Actitis hypoleucos
Tringa brevipes
Tringa nebularia
Tringa glareola
Tringa totanus

Pratincoles and Coursers (Glareolidae)

Oriental Pratincole

Glareola maldivarum

Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers (Laridae)

Little Tern
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Whiskered Tern
Common Tern
Great Crested Tern
Chinese Crested Tern

Sternula albifrons
Gelochelidon nilotica
Hydroprogne caspia
Chlidonias hybrida
Sterna hirundo
Thalasseus bergii
Thalasseus bernsteini

Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns (Ardeidae)

Yellow Bittern

Botaurus sinensis

Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Botaurus cinnamomeus</i>
Gray Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Medium Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
Chinese Egret	<i>Egretta eulophotes</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Eastern Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>
Black-crowned Night-Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Malayan Night-Heron	<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>

Ibises and Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)

Black-faced Spoonbill	<i>Platalea minor</i>
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Osprey (Pandionidae)

Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
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Hawks, Eagles, and Kites (Accipitridae)

Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>
Crested (Taiwan) Serpent-Eagle (Essp)	<i>Spilornis cheela hoyi</i>
Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>
Crested (Formosan) Goshawk (Essp)	<i>Lophospiza trivirgata formosae</i>
Chinese Sparrowhawk	<i>Tachyspiza soloensis</i>

Owls (Strigidae)

Mountain Scops-Owl (Essp)	<i>Otus spilocephalus hambroeki</i>
Northern Boobook	<i>Ninox japonica</i>

Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)

Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
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Asian Barbets (Megalaimidae)

Taiwan Barbet	<i>Psilopogon nuchalis</i>
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Woodpeckers (Picidae)

Gray-capped (Pygmy-) Woodpecker	<i>Yungipicus canicapillus</i>
White-backed Woodpecker (Essp) (H)	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos insularis</i>

Falcons and Caracaras (Falconidae)

Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
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Pittas (Pittidae)

Fairy Pitta	<i>Pitta nympha</i>
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Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)

Gray-chinned Minivet
Ashy Minivet

Pericrocotus solaris
Pericrocotus divaricatus

Shrikes (Laniidae)

Brown Shrike

Lanius cristatus

Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis (Vireonidae)

White-bellied Erpornis

Erpornis zantholeuca

Old World Orioles (Oriolidae)

Maroon (Red) Oriole (Essp)

Oriolus traillii ardens

Drongos (Dicruridae)

Black (Hartert's) Drongo (Essp)

Dicrurus macrocercus harterti

Bronzed (Taiwan) Drongo (Essp)

Dicrurus aeneus braunianus

Monarch Flycatchers (Monarchidae)

Black-naped Monarch (Essp)

Hypothymis azurea oberholseri

Crows, Jays, and Magpies (Corvidae)

Eurasian (Taiwan) Jay (Essp)

Garrulus glandarius taivanus

Taiwan Blue-Magpie

Urocissa caerulea

Gray (Formosan) Treepie (Essp)

Dendrocitta formosae formosae

Oriental Magpie

Pica serica

Southern Nutcracker (Essp)

Nucifraga hemispila owstoni

Large-billed Crow

Corvus macrorhynchos

Swallows (Hirundinidae)

Gray-throated Martin

Riparia chinensis

Barn Swallow

Hirundo rustica

Pacific Swallow

Hirundo tahitica

Eastern Red-rumped Swallow

Cecropis daurica

Asian House-Martin

Delichon dasypus

Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice (Paridae)

Coal Tit (Essp)

Periparus ater ptilosus

Chestnut-bellied (Taiwan Varied) Tit

Sittiparus castaneiventris

Green-backed Tit (Essp)

Parus monticolus insperatus

Taiwan Yellow Tit

Machlophus holsti

Long-tailed Tits (Aegithalidae)

Black-throated Tit

Aegithalos concinnus

Nuthatches (Sittidae)

Eurasian (Formosan) Nuthatch (Essp)

Sitta europaea formosana

Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)

Collared Finchbill (Essp)

*Spizixos semitorques cinereicapillus***Styan's (Taiwan) Bulbul***Pycnonotus taivanus*

Light-vented Bulbul (Essp)

Pycnonotus sinensis formosae

Black Bulbul (Essp)

*Hypsipetes leucocephalus***Kinglets (Regulidae)****Flamecrest***Regulus goodfellowi***Cupwings (Pnoepyidae)****Taiwan Cupwing (Wren-Babbler)***Pnoepyga formosana***Bush Warblers and Allies (Scotocercidae)**

Rufous-faced Warbler

Abroscopus albogularis

Brownish-flanked (Strong-footed) Bush-Warbler (Essp)

Horornis fortipes robustipes

Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler (Essp)

*Horornis acanthizoides concolor***Leaf Warblers (Phylloscopidae)**

Arctic Warbler

*Phylloscopus borealis***Grassbirds and Allies (Locustellidae)****Taiwan Bush Warbler***Locustella alishanensis***Cisticolas and Allies (Cisticolidae)**

Yellow-bellied Prinia

Prinia flaviventris

Plain Prinia (Essp)

Prinia inornata flavirostris

Zitting Cisticola

*Cisticola juncidis***Parrotbills, Wrentit, and Allies (Paradoxornithidae)****Taiwan Fulvetta***Fulvetta formosana*

Golden Parrotbill (Essp)

*Suthora verreauxi morrisoniana***White-eyes, Yuhinas, and Allies (Zosteropidae)****Taiwan Yuhina***Yuhina brunneiceps*

Swinhoe's White-eye

*Zosterops simplex***Tree-Babblers, Scimitar-Babblers, and Allies (Timaliidae)**

Rufous-capped (Bright-faced) Babbler (Essp)

*Cyanoderma ruficeps***Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler***Pomatorhinus musicus***Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler***Megapomatorhinus erythrocnemis***Ground Babblers and Allies (Pellorneidae)**

Dusky (Brown) Fulvetta (Essp)

Schoeniparus brunneus brunneus

Laughingthrushes and Allies (Leiothrichidae)**Morrison's (Gray-cheeked) Fulvetta***Alcippe morrisonia***Taiwan Hwamei***Garrulax taewanus***Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush***Ianthocincla ruficeps***Rusty Laughingthrush***Ianthocincla poecilorhyncha***White-whiskered Laughingthrush***Trochalopteron morrisonianum***White-eared Sibia***Heterophasia auricularis***Steere's (Taiwan) Liocichla***Liocichla steerii***Taiwan Barwing***Actinodura morrisoniana***Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)****Gray-streaked Flycatcher***Muscicapa griseisticta***Ferruginous Flycatcher***Muscicapa ferruginea***Oriental Magpie-Robin (I)***Copsychus saularis***White-rumped Shama (I)***Copsychus malabaricus***Taiwan Vivid Niltava***Niltava vivida***Taiwan Shortwing***Brachypteryx goodfellowi***Taiwan Whistling-Thrush***Myophonus insularis***Little (Taiwan) Forktail (Essp)***Enicurus scouleri fortis***White-tailed (Mountain) Robin (Essp)***Myiomela leucura montium***Taiwan (White-browed) Bush-Robin***Tarsiger formosanus***Collared Bush-Robin***Tarsiger johnstoniae***Snowy-browed (Taiwan) Flycatcher (Essp)***Ficedula hyperythra innexa***Plumbeous Redstart (Essp)***Phoenicurus fuliginosus affinis***Starlings (Sturnidae)****Common Myna (I)***Acridotheres tristis***Javan Myna (I)***Acridotheres javanicus***Chestnut-tailed Starling (I)***Sturnia malabarica***Flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae)****Plain Flowerpecker (Essp)***Dicaeum minullum uchidai***Fire-breasted Flowerpecker (Essp)***Dicaeum ignipectus formosum***Accentors (Prunellidae)****Alpine Accentor (Essp)***Prunella collaris fennelli***Wagtails and Pipits (Motacillidae)****Eastern Yellow Wagtail***Motacilla tschutschensis***White Wagtail***Motacilla alba***Finches, Euphonias, and Allies (Fringillidae)****Taiwan (Vinaceous) Rosefinch***Carpodacus formosanus***Taiwan (Gray-headed) Bullfinch***Pyrrhula owstoni*

Old World Sparrows (Passeridae)

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

*Passer montanus***Waxbills and Allies (Estrildidae)**

White-rumped Munia

Lonchura striata

Scaly-breasted Munia (Nutmeg Mannikin)

Lonchura punctulata

Chestnut (Formosan) Munia (Essp)

*Lonchura atricapilla formosana***MAMMALS****OLD WORLD MONKEYS: Cercopithecidae**

Formosan Rock Macaque

*Macaca cyclopsis***SQUIRRELS: Sciuridae**

Taiwan Red-and-white Giant Flying-Squirrel

Petaurista alborufus lena

Maritime (Formosan) Striped Squirrel

Tamiops maritimus formosanus

Pallas's (Formosan) Squirrel

*Callosciurus erythraeus***DEER: Cervidae**

Reeve's Muntjac (Essp)

*Muntiacus reevesi***BATS: Chiroptera**

Dark Woolly Bat

Kerivoula furva