



## TAIWAN: ENDEMIC BIRDING EXTRAVAGANZA

29 APRIL – 10 MAY 2024



*Swinhoe's Pheasant is one of the many stunning endemic species we will search for on this trip (photo Da Chih Chen).*

Taiwan is a compact island country situated 112 miles (180 kilometers) off continental East Asia, and the Peoples Republic of China. It is approximately 248 miles (400 kilometers) long and 93 miles (150 kilometers) wide, with rugged and spectacular central mountains and deep valleys. Taiwan boasts very high biodiversity – in a very manageable package, with great roads, accommodation, and food, thus making the country an excellent location for a short Asian birdwatching holiday, and our small group tour is an ideal trip whether this is your first venture into Oriental birding or your tenth!

Following International Ornithological Congress (IOC) version 11.2 taxonomy (September 2021), the Taiwan bird list stands at just under 700 bird species, this includes 31 currently recognized full endemic species and numerous endemic subspecies. In addition, there are some highly sought-after breeding (e.g. **Fairy Pitta** and **Chinese Crested Tern**), wintering (e.g. **Black-faced Spoonbill**), and passage (e.g. **Chinese Egret**) birds, as well as some birds that are easier to see in Taiwan than elsewhere in the world, such as **Malayan Night Heron**. Furthermore, there are plenty of widespread Asian species too, all combining to make Taiwan a top priority for all world birders.

We usually find all of Taiwan's endemic birds on our spring tour, as well as a high percentage of all subspecies likely to get elevated to full species status in the future. Some of the endemic highlights of this great birding tour include **Taiwan Partridge**, **Taiwan Bamboo Partridge**, **Swinhoe's Pheasant**, **Mikado Pheasant**, **Taiwan Barbet**, **Taiwan Blue Magpie**, **Yellow Tit**, **White-whiskered Laughingthrush**, **Taiwan Barwing**, **Steere's Liocichla**, **White-eared Sibia**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, **Taiwan Bush Warbler**, **Taiwan Niltava**, **Collared Bush Robin**, **Taiwan Thrush**, **Flamecrest**, **Taiwan Yuhina**, **Taiwan Bullfinch**, and **Taiwan Rosefinch**.



*Taiwan Blue Magpie is a gorgeous bird, and we will be looking out for this colorful endemic during our Taiwan birdwatching tour (photo Da Chih Chen).*



Most of the endemic birds are found in the mountains, meaning birding takes place in some absolutely gorgeous scenery with nice cool temperatures, a pleasant change from the warmer lowlands where there are also plenty of excellent birds to be found, including several more endemics, and the migratory and highly sought-after **Fairy Pitta**. A few of the species occurring in Taiwan with distinctive local subspecies (and potential future splits) include **Himalayan Owl**, **Ryukyu Scops Owl**, **Dusky Fulvetta**, **Golden Parrotbill**, **Alpine Accentor**, and **White-browed Bush Robin**, and many more.



*Taiwan Scimitar Babbler is an attractive endemic bird (photo Da Chih Chen).*

Due to Taiwan's position on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, the island offers great opportunities for connecting with numerous passage migrants from a wide range of birds, including shorebirds (waders) and numerous exciting passerines such as shrikes, warblers, thrushes, and buntings as they return north after spending the winter period in Australia, Malaysia and Indonesia.

This tour focuses on the endemics and other East Asian specials 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 for wetland birds. Orchid (Lanyu) Island also has several interesting birds, and we will spend some time there looking for localized pigeons, owls, monarchs, and bulbuls. When circumstances allow, we will leave time for other aspects of nature, the fascinating human culture, and for chasing any reported notable vagrants.

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. It also offers amazing birding and good photography opportunities.

This tour can be combined with one or more of our three exciting China tours, all of which follow this tour, in the following order: **China: Yunnan Tour**, **China: Sichuan Tour**, and **China: Qinghai Tour** for a once-in-a-lifetime Asian mega tour.

## Itinerary (12 days/11 nights)

### Day 1. Arrival in Taipei, Taiwan

Non-birding day. After your arrival at Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport, you will be met by our representative and transferred to Taipei City. After checking in to our comfortable hotel you will have time at leisure before we meet for a welcome dinner in the evening. For those with an interest, there will be the opportunity to explore Taiwan's lively night markets and Taoist temple scenes after dinner.

Overnight: Hotel Riverview, Taipei

### Day 2. Taipei and Taoyuan area

Our birding tour will start in Taipei City. We will have an early birding session in Huajiang Wild Duck Nature Park, this site is also an Important Bird Area (called Taipei City Waterbird Refuge), a site identified by BirdLife International as being of international importance. The site will serve as a wonderful introduction to birding in Taiwan, or birding in Asia, if this is your first venture into the Oriental region (and it is a great place for a first Asian birding tour).

We should start off by finding **Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Oriental Turtle Dove, Red Collared Dove, Spotted Dove, House Swift, Common Moorhen, White-breasted Waterhen, Black-winged Stilt, Pacific Golden Plover**, and potentially lots of other shorebirds, if conditions allow. We could find **Yellow Bittern, Little Egret, Chinese Pond Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron**, and maybe even **Chinese Egret**. Several interesting passerines are possible, such as **Black Drongo, Brown Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, Grey Treepie, Oriental Magpie, Yellow-bellied Prinia, Plain Prinia, Zitting Cisticola, Oriental Reed Warbler, Pacific Swallow, Light-vented Bulbul, Swinhoe's White-eye, Black-collared Starling, and Black-faced Bunting**.

After breakfast we will visit Taipei Botanical Garden with the hope of finding the magnificent and locally common **Taiwan Blue Magpie**. Other birds we will look for here include **Taiwan Scimitar Babbler, Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler, and Taiwan Barbet**. After our birding session in the garden, we will travel south to Dongshi District (near Taichung City), close to the famed Dasyueshan region, where we will be birding over the next few days. Along the way we will look out for **Chinese Egrets**, with a couple of sites, such as Xucuogang Wetland often being good for this species during spring migration. We will also likely call in at Shimen Reservoir where we might find some other interesting species, such as **Taiwan Partridge, Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, Taiwan Barbet, Taiwan Blue Magpie, Grey Treepie, and Taiwan Whistling Thrush**.

Overnight: Dongshi District (near Taichung)

### Days 3 - 4. Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area

We will spend two full days in the renowned Dasyueshan National Forest, moving through a range of elevations and habitats, from subtropical lowlands to coniferous temperate mountains at over 6,500 feet (2,000 meters). We will stay in comfortable cabins at Anmashan Lodge for two nights.

At lower elevations we are likely to encounter **Collared Finchbill**, **Oriental Turtle Dove**, **Lesser Coucal**, **Taiwan Barbet**, **Grey Treepie**, **Striated Swallow**, **Pacific Swallow**, **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**. Roadside birding 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 hopefully find **Bronzed Drongo**, **Black Bulbul**, **Striated Prinia**, the striking **Taiwan Niltava**, **White-bellied Erpornis**, hopefully **White-backed Woodpecker** and **Grey-headed Woodpecker**, and probably **Formosan Rock Macaque**.



*Grey-cheeked Fulvetta usually give their presence away by their raucous calls and they can be seen in Dasyueshan National Forest (photo Da Chih Chen).*

The first big birding highlight is usually **Swinhoe's Pheasant**. While waiting for one to show, we should be entertained by **White-tailed Robin**, **Steere's Liocichla**, and **Pallas's Squirrel**. A nearby hotspot may have **Taiwan 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, so we will keep our eyes peeled for those.



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 **Maritime** (Formosan) **Striped Squirrel** will likely 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 Nutcracker** as well as **Brown-flanked Bush Warbler**, **Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler**, **Taiwan Bush Warbler**, and **Taiwan Shortwing**.



*The endemic **Mikado Pheasant** is a highly prized target species (photo Da Chih Chen).*

Mixed flocks will hold the local crested version of **Coal Tit**, **Green-backed Tit**, **Yellow Tit**, **Black-throated Bushtit**, 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 Wren**. The views here are breathtaking; in the distance we will have views of Taiwan's highest peak, Yushan, which is just short of 13,000 feet (4,000 meters).

The excellent *Trochodendron* and pine forest around our cabins is often the best place for **Ashy Wood Pigeon**, **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush**, **Brown Bullfinch**, and the local subspecies of **Eurasian Jay**, while a local waterfall is home to the gorgeous **Little Forktail**.

After dinner we will be looking for the endemic subspecies of **Himalayan Owl**, **Collared Scops Owl**, and **Mountain Scops Owl** as well as the charismatic **Red-and-White Giant Flying Squirrel**. **Formosan Serow** and **Reeves' Muntjac** may also be encountered. In the mornings it is usually fun to search the grounds around our accommodation where the secretive **Taiwan Partridge** and the tiny **Taiwan Cupwing** are worth the extra effort to find them. Other species

we will be keeping our eyes peeled for here include **Rusty Laughingthrush**, **Taiwan Barwing**, **Taiwan Rosefinch**, **Flamecrest**, **Taiwan Fulvetta**, and **Taiwan Bullfinch**.

Overnight (two nights): Anmashan Lodge, Dasyueshan



*The gorgeous **Taiwan Rosefinch** can be found quietly eating seeds on the ground in the mountains (photo Da Chih Chen).*

### Day 5. Dasyueshan to Basianshan to Qingjing

We will have a final morning wrapping up the birding in Dasyueshan, potentially finding one or two new birds or gaining better views of birds already seen over the previous two days. In the afternoon we will drive to Basianshan where we will look for **Chestnut-bellied Tit**, **Taiwan Blue Magpie**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, **Plumbeous Water Redstart**, **Brown Dipper**, and some other low-elevation birds again. We will then continue to Qingjing for the night.

Overnight: Qingjing, Nantou

### Day 6. Hehanshan to the southwest Coast

We will spend the morning birding in the Taroko National Park at the Hehuan Mountains (also known as Hehuanshan), this is the only place we can find the endemic subspecies of **Alpine Accentor**, a good candidate for a potential split and elevation to full species status. Although the accentor will be the main target, we could also find **Mountain Hawk-Eagle**, **White-whiskered Laughingthrush**, **Taiwan Rosefinch**, and many others. After our mountain birding, we will drop down to the lowlands of Chiayi City.

Overnight: Chiayi City



*The endemic **White-whiskered Laughingthrush** is often incredibly confiding (photo Da Chih Chen).*

### **Day 7. Coastal lagoons, Aogu Wetland Forest Park to Kenting**

Today, among the coastal lagoons (Aogu and Budai wetlands), our targets will be any lingering **Black-faced Spoonbill** and passage delights such as **Great Knot**, **Asian Dowitcher**, and **Sharp-tailed Sandpiper**. **Black-faced Spoonbill** is listed as Endangered by BirdLife International and Taiwan, along with Japan, is one of the best places to see this bird during the non-breeding season. Birds usually persist at a few sites in Taiwan into April and May, and we will be looking out for them today.

These huge wetland areas hold hundreds of bird species and this is sure to be an exciting day with a large number of species possible. We will also target **Oriental Skylark**, **Oriental Pratincole**, **Black-tailed Gull**, **Roseate Tern**, **Bridled Tern**, **Intermediate Egret**, **Greater Sand Plover**, **Lesser Sand Plover**, **Terek Sandpiper**, **Marsh Sandpiper**, 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 Bittern**, **Cinnamon Bittern**, **Far Eastern Curlew**, **Red-necked Stint**, and **Long-toed Stint**. **Western Osprey**, **Black-winged Kite**, or **Eastern Marsh Harrier** may also make a showing. Other familiar shorebirds (waders), terns, and ducks are likely.

Scrubby embankments can hold **Zitting Cisticola**, **Golden-headed Cisticola**, **Vinous-throated Parrotbill**, **Eastern Yellow Wagtail**, and various starlings, so there are plenty of quality birds to keep us occupied throughout the day before we travel to the southern tip of Taiwan at Kenting.

Overnight: Kenting





*We will hope for a lingering **Black-faced Spoonbill** or two during our time in the Aogu wetlands of western Taiwan (photo Da Chih Chen).*



***Oriental Pratincoles** should have returned from their Australian wintering grounds in time for our Taiwan tour.*

### Days 8 - 9. Lanyu (Orchid) Island

We will depart Kenting on the early boat to Lanyu (Orchid) Island. On the ferry between Kenting and Lanyu (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. We will then spend the majority of the day, and the following morning, birding on Lanyu Island.

With an indigenous culture that is closer to that of the Philippines, Lanyu is a nice contrast to mainland Taiwan. **Taiwan Green Pigeon**, **Philippine Cuckoo-Dove**, **Brown-eared Bulbul**, **Japanese Paradise Flycatcher**, the endemic subspecies of **Ryukyu (Lanyu/Elegant) Scops Owl**, and **Lowland White-eye** are the main targets here and can be expected, as well as other passage passerines, possibly including raptors, shrikes, warblers, and buntings. It is a fun, small, island to explore and gives the opportunity to find some interesting species.



*The endemic subspecies of **Ryukyu Scops Owl** can only be found on Lanyu Island and might warrant full species status as **Lanyu Scops Owl** in the future (photo Da Chih Chen).*

Once back in Kenting, after our birding on Lanyu, we will look for the endemic **Styan's Bulbul** in its only remaining stronghold.

Overnight (one night each): Lanyu Island and Kenting

### Day 10. Kenting to Alishan National Scenic Area

We will head north from Kenting towards the spectacular Alishan National Scenic Area where, in the mountains, we will likely have more views of **Taiwan Barwing**, **Yellow Tit**, **Collared Bush Robin**, and **Taiwan Partridge**. We will keep a lookout for raptors such as **Crested Honey Buzzard**, **Crested Goshawk**, and **Japanese Sparrowhawk**. **Black Eagle** and **Mountain Hawk**-

**Eagle** are sometimes encountered too. Summer visitors to this area include **Large Hawk-Cuckoo** and **Himalayan Cuckoo** so we will listen out for their calls indicating their presence. In the evening we will hopefully get views of **Mountain Scops Owl**, **Collared Scops Owl** and maybe **Savanna Nightjar** and the local subspecies of **Brown (Himalayan) Wood Owl**.

In the secondary forest we can look for **Rusty Laughingthrush**, **Dusky Fulvetta**, **Taiwan Bamboo Partridge**, **Common Emerald Dove**, **Taiwan Green Pigeon**, and **Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler**.

Overnight: Guanghai



*The endemic **Collared Bush Robin** is a rather dainty and approachable bird of the higher elevations that we will spend time birding in while on Taiwan (photo Da Chih Chen).*

### Day 11. Yusahan National Park/Tataka to Huben

We will have a final morning birding in the higher elevations around the Alishan and Yushan, maybe having a final look at the delightful **Swinhoe's Pheasant** and **Mikado Pheasant**, both are likely to feature on our long list of highlight species from the tour.

After our birding in the mountains, we will descent back to the lowlands where in the late afternoon we will start our search for **Fairy Pitta**, a spectacular breeding visitor to Taiwan.

Overnight: Douliu



**Day 12. Huben to Taipei and international departure**

We will spend the morning looking for breeding **Fairy Pitta** and will also have another good opportunity to look for the statuesque **Malayan Night Heron** that can often be found in the same area! After this we will freshen up and return to Taipei where the tour will conclude.

Overnight: Not included



*Fairy Pitta* breed near Huben in Taiwan and is probably one of the most reliable places to see this gorgeous species in the world.

*Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.*

**Duration:** 12 days  
**Group Size:** 6 - 8  
**Dates:** 29 April – 10 May 2024  
**Start:** Taipei, Taiwan  
**End:** Taipei, Taiwan  
**Prices:** US\$ 5,990 per person sharing – based on 4 - 8 participants (2024)  
**Single Supplements:** US\$770 (2024)

**Price includes:**

All accommodation (from Day 1 to Day 11 as described)  
Meals (from evening meal on Day 1 until lunch on Day 12)  
Drinking water – please bring a refillable water bottle  
Expert tour leader  
Local bird and wildlife guides fees  
Birdwatching site entrance fees and travel permits  
All ground transport and tolls/taxes while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop-off

**Price excludes:**

Flights  
Expenditures due to flight cancellations/delays or other causes beyond our control (force majeure)  
Visa fees if visa required  
Departure tax  
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.  
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding/sightseeing/monument excursions Soft/alcoholic drinks  
Personal travel insurance  
Camera permits  
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))