

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO TAIWAN
Island Endemics and Migrants

23 April to 6 May 2006



Leaders: Tony Pym and Chung-Han Wu

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A Personal Diary

Sunday 23 April

I arrived early but Robin and Connie were already in Terminal 3 and Sue had arrived even earlier and gone through to the departure lounge. Soon both Ruth and Ellis were in sight and our small group was complete.

Check-in with Cathay Pacific was excellent, no queuing and prompt attention at the desks. We had time in the departure lounge to relax, take a tea or coffee, or pass time window-shopping. The flight was a little late departing but we were soon on our way, Hong Kong, was the stop before Taiwan. The flight to Hong Kong was to take 11 hours.

Monday 24 April

We arrived in Hong Kong at 0730. We were in transit and the walk to our next gate was quite a hike within this huge airport. We boarded the flight to Taipei. It was a short hop over the Taiwan Strait and just over an hour later we touched down in the capital of Taiwan. Immigration was superbly efficient as was the rapid delivery of the luggage. Outside, in the arrivals hall, there were three people to meet us – Chung-Han Wu (simply called Wu), our specialist bird guide whom I met 19 months ago on my last visit; Yi-chi, our translator and guide from the ground handler; and Peter, a friend of Wu (real name Chien-Hsing Tsai, and another birder!)

We were quite amazed on seeing our bus. It had a colourful exterior paint job, a spacious interior (22-seats for nine of us) and we all commented on the tasselled curtains (reminding us of a gypsy caravan!) Taipei was very busy, as always, and the drive not helped by the persistent rain. Hundreds of scooters would be lined up at each traffic light, the most efficient method of getting around the city. Our hotel, the Grand Hotel, was most impressive and built in the style of a Chinese temple, yet it had 500 rooms.

We took a late lunch in the hotel's restaurant where we had a view over part of the city. We had time to freshen-up before meeting again mid-afternoon for our first birding excursion. We drove to Yeliou and walked the path out on the promontory. This location is famous for its strange rock formations as well as being a renowned migration point. It had good cover, many bushes and stunted trees, out on an isthmus. The quiet corners, out of the breeze, often hold warblers and flycatchers. It was quiet today though, and small birds were difficult to find. A couple of Blue Rock Thrushes were seen on the lower boulders.

We stopped for dinner at a hotel on the way back to Taipei, intentionally arriving back at the Grand Hotel early evening for everyone to get a good nights rest after the long journey from London.

Tuesday 25 April

The weather was not good this morning, the rain coming down literally like stair-rods. I had a surprise when opening my outside balcony door to find a Taiwan Whistling-Thrush perched on the handrail with its bill full of worms; obviously a nest was close by. We couldn't refind it but I knew we were to see many later in the day. This was a difficult bird to find when I visited in September but in spring the birds are singing, holding territory, and more active.

We had a great breakfast, so much choice, and then we loaded the bus and set off. We walked in the grounds of the Botanic Garden but the birding wasn't too good in the rain. We did see our quarry here, the uncommon Malayan Night-Heron. Wu had found a nest last week, so we could view one of the birds sitting. There was a brief respite from the weather and we added some of the common birds like Grey Treepie, Black Drongo and Japanese White-eye.

Whilst sheltering from the rain we watched a local chap apparently showing two ladies how to relax by exercising in their bare feet. Ellis tried it, and was told it would help her *chi* (in traditional Chinese medicine the balance of negative and positive forms in the body is believed to be essential for good health).

We had a superb lunch in a vegetarian restaurant. There were more than 50 dishes on offer and we tried many, some of which had us trying to work out what they were!

We drove towards Wulai. We pulled in for a summer-plumaged Chinese Pond-Heron; it was a worthwhile stop for other birds including whistling-thrushes and prinias. The town of Wulai is well known in Taiwan for its hot springs. It is a busy place at weekends when those from Taipei drive up to use the beneficial waters. We walked through the small streets and followed the river valley. The rain stopped and we had some bird activity. The two common bulbuls here were Light-vented and Black. A female Plumbeous Redstart was seen beneath one of the bridges and yet more whistling-thrushes were calling from the valley sides and even the house roofs. A Grey-chinned Minivet was scoped but only a few of the group saw a Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler that moved through dense undergrowth. Two large swifts were debated, and then luckily they flew back into view, to be positively identified as Silver-backed Needletails.

We checked in to our hotel and agreed to meet again for dinner, which was to be in a local restaurant. We set off on an 'owl prowls', driving up a local mountain trail. A Mountain Scops-Owl responded to Wu's imitation of the call but in the darkness only a 'blur' was seen to fly in, to disappear as quickly.

Wednesday 26 April

Early morning calls were at 0530 and we left the hotel after a hasty cup of coffee. Two of Wu's friends had arrived with their cars - these would be needed, as the area this morning would be too narrow and difficult for the bus.

We piled into the cars and drove to a 'restricted forest area' where we had to lodge our passports for entry. This primary forest was superb and untouched. A number of gaudy Taiwan Blue Magpies were around, often associating with the Grey Treepies. Two Grey-faced Fulvettas showed well but briefly, another bird we would see well later in the trip.

As we walked further along the track the rain started once again making birding difficult and we retreated back to the vehicles. We drove further into the reserve but there were few birds although the forest cover was excellent, stretching high into the hills. A Crested Serpent-Eagle perched in a prominent tree, its wings spread out to dry. A second bird soared across the valley during an interlude of sunshine.

We drove back to Wulai and thanked the guys for the use of their cars. Yi-chi went shopping and bought us a breakfast of juices, yoghurts and sandwiches. We collected our bags from the rooms and set off for Ching Jing. It was raining heavily as we drove the main highway, which had us thinking about the forest birding planned for this afternoon, however news came through to Wu's mobile phone that a rare migrant had been found along the coast. It was an Asiatic Dowitcher and we changed direction, the wader would be a better bet.

The diversion was not far; maybe an hour's driving. We arrived at the site where there were many pools and a river system. We soon found two Red-necked Phalaropes, which we were looking at, when Wu called on the walkie-talkie that he had found *the* bird on a further pool. This is quite a bird to see *anywhere*, a rarity in most of the eastern countries, and what's more it was in full summer plumage!

After getting our fill of the dowitcher we turned to the other waders - Sharp-tailed, Marsh, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers, Greater Sandpipers and Red-necked Stints, all in summer plumage - the birds were here in large numbers.

We drove towards Ching Jing. It was getting dark and we stopped for dinner on the way. We had been busy since arriving in the country and we still needed to complete our first birdlist (the Asiatic Dowitcher needing to be ticked on everyone's list!), which was called in the hotel lobby.

Thursday 27 April

We left the hotel at 0600 and drove towards one of the known trails for the pheasants. Our bus soon started to have problems with the state of the roads. There had been so much rain that there were huge potholes and in places the tarmac had broken up. We came across small landslides and in one place half the road had fallen away down the mountain slope. We were still miles from where we needed to be when we had to give up - in front of us a major slip, impassable for our bus. Wu, not to be outdone, flagged down a vehicle and asked if we could jump into the back! So, we bounced up the road for the last few miles to our site.

The birding started off fine. Stylish White-eared Sibilias were calling everywhere, particularly from the upper canopy, and Steere's Liocichlas, their plumage various shades of green (better than the field-guide shows), traversed the lower scrub, giving themselves away by calling noisily. A fine Black Eagle held its wings out to dry, just like yesterday's Crested Serpent-Eagle.

We were doing quite well and had seen Grey-headed Woodpecker, Black-throated Tits, Collared Finchbills and some Taiwan specialities calling in the background were Taiwan Partridge and Mikado Pheasant, when the rain started once more. It became *very* heavy and we persevered for some time before admitting defeat. As we were walking back to the road we came across a Vivid Niltava, still chasing insects in the forest cover, and along the road itself we found Rusty Laughingthrushes and a small flock of White-bellied Green Pigeons.

Wu did his stuff again, this time hitching a ride for us all in a small minibus that was carrying produce from the market. Soon the rows of seats were back upright, and the cabbages moved to the rear. We rendezvoused with our bus and headed back to the hotel.

We were told that two of the sites that we were planning to visit were cut off completely, one by flood, the other by a landslide. Wu and I held a meeting, and after consulting the weather forecast, which was '90% chance of more rain tomorrow' took a 'management decision' to leave the area and move to lower ground where hopefully the weather would be better. Yi-chi had some hotels to change, using the mobile phone, but the weather was just so against any birding we needed to do something.

We checked out from the hotel after a quick lunch and headed southwest, down the mountains, towards Huben where we arrived late afternoon. This spot is another for Malayan Night-Heron and we hadn't even reached the car park when two had been seen from the bus. Another of Wu's contacts arrived carrying a box. Inside was a Fairy Pitta that had landed in netting at a local chicken farm. The bird was uninjured and after a few photos were taken we released it and it flew off strongly.

Good forest here meant good birds. Huben is *the* Fairy Pitta location in Taiwan and although we heard one calling a couple of times we couldn't track it down. Black-naped Monarchs, Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babblers, Dusky Fulvetta and a fine Chinese Sparrowhawk, found by Sue, were seen well. On the return walk Sue and Ruth glimpsed a Chinese Hill Partridge as it walked across a clearing – the identification confirmed when it started to call loudly.

Back at the car park we heard two species of owls calling - Brown Hawk and Mountain Scops. The tree cover was dense and we persevered with the spotlight but only Robin saw one, the scops-owl, as it flew.

We had dinner on the return to the hotel. We arrived a little earlier than in the last few days so there was a chance to relax and unwind before retiring for the night.

Friday 28 April

Morning alarm calls were organised for 0530. We headed back to the pitta area near the village of Huben. Wu knew this forest well, and we could hear pittas calling from three adjoining territories though the birds were deep in cover. It was virtually impenetrable, especially on the steep muddy slopes in the rain so we decided to try another site.

The bus took us to an abandoned tourist complex of chalets close to Xianziken. It was a ghost town (very superstitious with the Chinese!) and the buildings are now covered in vines, foliage, algae and mildew. We split the group to try two trails. Another two 'tiger bitterns' (= Malayan Night-Heron) were found (and I had

said the bird was rare!) and three Vinous-throated Parrotbills sat on a branch, huddled together, sheltering from the rain.

As we were about to leave a loud whistle came from a pitta, the closest to us so far. Wu knew this had been a traditional territory. We approached slowly and quietly. A pitta was on the edge of the path but flew quickly to our left side, whilst a second bird flew upwards and to the right, the other side of the trail. The entire group saw the bird then fly across the track to join its mate. Maybe not the best view but the shape could be seen as it shot past. We stayed at the path for a while and some saw the same bird once again, as it flew back.

We stopped briefly at a Buddhist temple for some photographs before going to the small rustic visitor centre in the village. Here there were photographs of pittas adorning the walls and we were shown a very good film about the bird. I spoke to one of the researchers who had been studying the Fairy Pittas of Huben for five years – this year he will be studying natural predation at nests.

Back at the hotel we collected our luggage and had time to take a shower before lunch. We drove to a most fascinating bamboo forest on the slopes of Da-An where Wu said we had very good chances for Swinhoe's Pheasant. A flock of White-throated Laughingthrushes seemed to appear from nowhere, wanting to check us out. A friend of Wu showed us the hole where a small owl was nesting. It was a Collared Owlet but as it was tucked up for the day there was little chance of us seeing it.

We walked through the bamboo but no luck for pheasants today. A bird was heard to call, but in the distance. We continued our journey to Douliu, where we were to spend two nights, and checked in to our hotel. The birdlog was called in the restaurant.

Saturday 29 April

We had a later start today, and a chance for a lie-in, as we were going to the coast and the birding didn't require the early start. As we drove through Douliu I couldn't believe my eyes to see a Malayan Night-Heron walking on the grass of the local park.

We drove to the coast by a route only a local like Wu could follow, as it seemed to be along tracks and trails, under bridges, and through small villages. Our first stop was at Pudai, which was simply alive with waders. Wu soon found one of the prize birds for this tour to Taiwan, the Black-faced Spoonbill. There were six birds feeding typically, their bills going side to side in a sweeping motion. Apparently only eight birds this year seem to be summering as the main flocks have migrated by now. Only in the last three years or so have some birds stayed through the summer months. The good news with this endangered species is that the wintering numbers are improving and for 2005/6 reached the all-time high of some 700. Taiwan is the main wintering site. It was a relief to see this bird, as we were uncertain if any would still be around whilst we were in the country.

Waders were scattered all over this tidal area. Marsh Sandpipers alongside their cousins the Greenshanks, both Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, Curlew Sandpipers galore with many in bright red breeding plumage. Whilst scanning through a flock of godwits (both Black and Bar-tailed) two waders close to them looked odd - they had the long bills, rufous breasts but they appeared smaller and the feeding motion was different. We needed to get a closer look to confirm my suspicions and we walked back down the road - they were indeed two more Asiatic Dowitchers! Amazing, we had found our own after 'twitching' the single bird of three days back. A number of photos and video were taken of these rare waders.

We drove further, passing dozens of fish pools and shrimp farms. Many were a paradise for birds. Egrets numbered thousands, marsh terns patrolled the waters, and waders seemed everywhere. At Peimen the variety was superb. We spent time on the 'eastern' birds to begin with, before turning to the more common species we knew from Europe. Sharp-tailed, Broad-billed and Terek Sandpipers fed alongside Grey-tailed Tattlers, Red-necked Stints and both the sandpipers, and the majority of these birds were in their finest summer plumage.

We drove across to Jiang-Shung, a river estuary where we added Great Knot to our list. Already, the wader species for the day had reached 25. We took a late lunch before our last stop for the day, the Aogu Wetlands.

As we drove along the entry track the Red Collared-Doves, perching on the electricity cables, numbered many hundreds. Two Chinese Sparrowhawks were nice to see, in flight and perched. The wetlands can hold countless ducks in winter but the vast numbers had already left.

We found a restaurant for dinner on returning to the town. Yi-chi ordered a huge selection of dishes as usual. We were beginning to enjoy the Chinese food and were becoming much more proficient with chopsticks.

Sunday 30 April

Early morning we went back to Xianziken, the 'easier' of the pitta sites. Wu had arranged for two friends take us in their cars and he brought along camouflage netting to make up a blind or hide (and even collapsible seats for us!) It was bizarre sitting waiting for this bird and being served coffee and biscuits! The pitta called and flew across the track a few times. Some saw the blue on the wings; others were lucky to see it perch briefly, mid-level in a tall tree, as it continued calling.

We ate breakfast at the hotel, after which we loaded the luggage and set off once more. At Makwang the arable fields held hundreds of Pacific Golden Plovers, many Oriental Pratincoles and a few Little Curlews whilst at the more wetter areas we found a couple of Long-toed Stints.

We met the bus and started the drive to the mountains of Alishan. The drive up took a little over two hours. It was busy on the winding roads as it was Sunday. We had planned a walk but were flagged down on the approach road, as there had been another landslide. Birding along the road here was not productive so we headed to our accommodation. The road down to the hotel was brilliant for birds and we found Black-throated Tit flocks moving through the trees with nuthatches and White-eared Sibias following them. Two Taiwanese Barwings were new birds for us, and another endemic under the belt. A Taiwan Blue Shortwing sang from dense cover, a notoriously skulking species that required more time.

After dinner we called the birdlog in the coffee shop and, as it was Ruth's birthday, a cake was brought in, complete with candles, compliments of Ornitholidays. Many happy returns again!

Monday 1 May

Morning calls were at 0500 and we left the hotel shortly after 0530. It was a nice day and we needed to make the most of the weather, and the birds of the mountains. We started out well as the bus spooked a male Mikado Pheasant on the roadside verge, however, it was not seen by all as it shot rapidly back into cover.

We drove to one of Wu's stakeouts for this pheasant and decided that Peter would stay at one point (complete with walkie-talkie) whilst we walked the road. There were very few cars and it was peaceful with many birds singing. Our birding was gaining new species continuously - Collared Bush Robin, Alpine Accentor, Vinaceous Rosefinches and Ferruginous Flycatcher were just some of the new birds.

With no sign of pheasants we drove down towards the Mountain Centre. This was a lovely walk in the morning sun, the mountains were glorious and many peaks were in view. A bird was calling, Taiwan Blue Shortwing again, but this species requires great patience (and tape playback is illegal in Taiwan) so we moved further down the lane. We stopped for a while at the small mountain lodge where a pair of Collared Bush-Robins was nesting. The constant song of an Alishan Bush Warbler came from close to the wall we were sitting on.....what a skulker this bird was! Singing only a few feet away it kept to cover, but finally we did get a view as it moved from one clump of grass to the next, quite mouse like! This endemic was only recognised three years ago, so it was a 'good bird' for us.

As we strolled back to the bus a noisy flock of Black-throated Tits contained a few Streak-throated Fulvettas. When we got back to the bus Wu made us fresh coffee, which was most welcome.

We drove to the visitor centre where a smart White-browed Bush-Robin performed on the lawn. We watched a short slide show about Alishan and the Yushan National Park. Lunch was taken here and from the balcony we watched a Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler as it moved actively through the vegetation. Sue thought she might have had a nutcracker, which was confirmed by the 'toy trumpet' calls in the distance. We followed up on these birds, and walked the road to find eight Spotted Nutcrackers feeding in the pines. A remarkably tame White-whiskered Laughingthrush in the car park had all the cameras clicking.

We headed back to the pheasant site mid-afternoon. Wu and Peter put up camouflage netting for us to sit behind. To the inexperienced eye it did seem odd that we were using a hide for a pheasant, which most birders would think fed randomly throughout the forest. After about half an hour it started to rain, which became very heavy and we called the driver on the phone to come and collect us. The camouflage must have been good as he drove past and we had to call him again to tell him where we were!

I decided that we should sit it out, to see if the rain would ease. It became brighter, and the rain a little less, so most of the group ventured out once more and headed back to the hide. Sue called that she had seen a pheasant in the long grass opposite the hide. We got behind the netting as quickly as we could, and waited. After about quarter of an hour a fabulous male Mikado Pheasant appeared right in front of us. It was a marvellous bird.....the unusual deep blue colour and a tail even longer than most books show. It fed only ten yards away from us, on seed heads and a small white fruit, before walking off back into the dark undergrowth. It was in view for about ten minutes. Wu's hide had worked for us!

We returned to the hotel very wet, and very happy. We met for dinner, tonight a Chinese fondue (good fun but hard work!)

Tuesday 2 May

At 0530 we had left the hotel and were on our way to the Alishan Forest Recreation Centre, a central spot for local tourists. There was a railway here that transports people up the mountain, chiefly to see the sunrise, which is very popular here.

Two Coal Tits were found close to the buildings, the form here in the Far East having a pronounced crest. Steere's Liocichlas (what a name!) were common and we found our target bird Flamecrest, near the railway station. This is a typical *Regulus* in actions and habitat. They are sometimes called Taiwan Firecrest and we found these lively sprites in the pine trees. Two active Taiwan Barwings were found, shuffling between branches and finding insects with no trouble; they were in the same trees where I saw them two years back.

As we were on our return a bird started calling which was unfamiliar. I knew it had to be interesting and by its behaviour obviously a skulker. We tried for a while to track it down - the call in the undergrowth was ventriloquial, one moment coming from directly ahead, the next to our right. Suddenly, the bird hopped out onto the stones of a forest path. It was tiny with an upright stance and no tail. It was a wren-babbler, a difficult bird to see and quite a reward for us. This species has recently been split from the Pygmy Wren-Babbler of China (though others believed it was more closely related to the Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler, despite the great disjunction of their ranges). It is recognised now as another Taiwan endemic, the Taiwan Wren-Babbler. It is quite widely distributed throughout the country but seeing it is another matter! Sue succeeded in getting a short clip on her video camera, and the 'video grab' has been reproduced, and enhanced, in the photo section at the back of this report.

The rain started late morning though we did get in a little more birding on the approach road to the hotel. There were a couple of new birds for us: Ashy Wood Pigeon and Asian House Martin. The same elusive Taiwan Blue Shortwing was heard calling once more, from the bushes where it was on Sunday, but we were beaten by the rain, now heavy, and retreated to the hotel.

Another 'management decision' was taken - to leave the hotel and to try a different area for the second pheasant (maybe the weather would be better also). Yi-chi went into overdrive again, changing the hotels for us once more, and we left at lunchtime.

We drove to the pheasant site of a few days back, a large forest of bamboo. It was raining on and off, but we ventured into the forest where there was a natural hide from cut bamboo. We stayed for an hour, everyone being very quiet with nobody talking, but the bird did not appear.

Our substitute hotel was a nice unexpected surprise. It was in the town of Huwei and was brand new. We liked the Japanese-style highly polished wooden floors and the state-of-the-art showers were excellent. Over dinner we discussed the options for tomorrow....and whether to try for the pheasant once more.

Wednesday 3 May

We had a more leisurely start as the location for this morning's birding was Makwang where sugarcane and agricultural fields were bordered by overgrown water channels. Wu had left earlier to fetch two cars for this excursion, as again our bus would have difficulty on the narrow lanes.

The area is very good for rails and crakes but the only member of this family we saw, apart from Moorhen, was White-breasted Waterhen. We scoped a Cinnamon Bittern that stood motionless in the waterside vegetation and two Greater Painted-snipe were seen briefly, including a stunning female (the brighter sex in this species). A buttonquail scurried along the roadside edge – this one having various names, depending on the field-guide used, most commonly called Barred Buttonquail. Two more interesting birds this morning were Grey-streaked Flycatcher, a migrant on its way to Siberia to breed, and a well-marked form of the Barn Swallow, this one showing rufous underparts, probably the migrant race *tyteri* on its way to northeast China.

At the hotel we had time to shower or relax for an hour. Our bags were loaded onto the bus and, after lunch, we headed for Da-An once more, to try for the Swinhoe's Pheasant. Third attempt lucky? Wu and Peter erected the camouflage netting to create a hide whilst we birded a small side road. We were called on the walkie-talkie when all was in place. I had a quiet chuckle to myself, to see the group sitting on comfy folding chairs behind a temporary hide and being served coffee and biscuits, all whilst in a bamboo forest.... luxury indeed!

We stayed for two hours when the bird appeared.... only problem, it was seen by Peter and no one else! To make matters worse it was a full-blown male, which crossed a clearing. At dusk I heard one bird giving the roosting call.

Thursday 4 May

The rain cleared as we ate breakfast. We were to drive to Kenting today, the southernmost town of Taiwan, with a couple of good birding stops planned on the way.

Our first was at Guantian, a new reserve where much work was still going on, mainly to the paths and bamboo screens. The land is owned by the Taiwan Sugar Company but the high-speed rail consortium pays the rent. This wetland reserve is to protect and increase the numbers of, Pheasant-tailed Jacana.

The jacana is a common bird throughout parts of Asia but in Taiwan it is very scarce. It has a charming name in Chinese *ling po xian zi*, which means 'fairies walking over ripples'. This was a very good birding site and one of Wu's friends was in charge of the reserve and showed us around, even though it was not officially open yet. We saw a number of jacanas, many were calling and pair-bonding. Also, we had some great views of Greater Painted-snipen through the scopes, and a flighty Cinnamon Bittern.

We stopped to buy some deliciously sweet pineapples at a farm entrance before entering the driveway to Yengda Farm. There was a camping ground here with scattered mature trees reminiscent of parkland. This is a known stakeout for both Black-naped and Maroon Orioles, both of which were seen well. A Besra perched briefly, and rose to circle on a thermal. The Whistling Green-Pigeons were quite common here - this bird has a small range and apart from Taiwan is found only on the islands off southern Japan and the Batanes Islands north of the Philippines.

We continued south and stopped at a small village temple where Yi-chi explained some of the beliefs of Taoism for us. (Remember in future; 'enter the dragon and leave by the tiger'). This temple was dedicated to the god of mercy. A little further on and the bright lights and signs announced we had entered Kenting. This was a holiday area and the main street was in the style of a mini Hong Kong, complete with the shops, discos and the like. At our 'resort hotel' we disembarked to hear a Savannah Nightjar.

There was an amazing choice of food in the restaurant. Various chefs, at different stations, offered a great choice of dishes and a comprehensive barbeque was underway outside. We had a nice surprise during the evening as Wu and Peter had prepared a slide show for us, set to music, of the holiday. Peter had been taking photos throughout and gave everyone a nice gift, a CD of the presentation - a memento of the holiday, the country and its birds.

Friday 5 May

There were large numbers of tourists around the hotel - the great majority were Taiwanese. I couldn't believe my eyes to see over 1,000 people sitting down for breakfast in the dining room! Whilst Connie, Robin, Ellis and I were eating our food a Styan's Bulbul, another endemic, appeared in the trees outside.

We checked out from this busy resort and drove to Long Luang Tan, a system of wetlands. It was hot and humid with a pleasant light breeze. A few Spot-billed Ducks were distant but the large waterfowl numbers found here during the winter months had already left. Two Richard's Pipits strutted about in the ploughed fields amongst the Oriental Skylarks.

We drove to Tong Kang to collect another of Wu's friends and to find somewhere serving lunch. His friend told us that he was studying 'raptor and small bird interaction' and next year would be working on Black-naped Orioles.

He directed our driver to Lin-Beng, a system of fish farms. We had one bird in mind here, Chinese Egret. This is an uncommon and vulnerable species, and a non-breeding visitor to the country. We may be too late in the season already to find this bird.

We searched through countless egrets; there were hundreds. We had a couple of false alarms when two Pacific Reef Egrets, superficially similar to Chinese Egret, were put into the scope. A shout came from Wu that he had the bird in the scope and there wasn't any doubt with this one. Sure enough, in view was a breeding plumage Chinese Egret.... we were lucky!

We drove to the airport in Kaosiung. This was where Wu and Peter would leave us. We said goodbye to two excellent guys who had helped in countless ways on this tour. At the airline desk we found that our flight was delayed and checked if there was another to Taipei. We switched to an earlier flight and arrived in the capital earlier than originally planned. Yi-chi used her mobile phone to change our transfer bus - we were amazed when a 52-seater coach arrived, and there were seven of us!

At the hotel the dinner schedule was changed so the group could eat earlier, and in the Grand Hotel's restaurant, so that we could get some sleep before leaving early in the morning for the airport. Yi-chi hosted our farewell dinner, ordered many Chinese dishes for us, and presented everyone with a gift from her company, our ground agents, which was a nice gesture, typically Taiwanese. We toasted the success of the tour with a glass (or two) of nice wine.

Saturday 6 May

We had a very early start from the hotel. Morning calls were arranged for 0330 and we left for the airport at 0415. We said goodbye to Yi-chi before checking-in for the flight to Hong Kong. Our connection time was ideal, just over one hour, and we had time to call the final birdlist whilst at the gate. We boarded the London flight and left Hong Kong on time at 1000. The flight time was 12 hours to London and we were on the ground in England a half-hour ahead of schedule. At the baggage carousel we said goodbye to each other after returning from a distant land, only the journeys to our homes remained.

Acknowledgements

This was Ornitholidays first tour to Taiwan and we saw some fine birds - notable amongst them were Black-faced Spoonbill, Chinese Egret, Asiatic Dowitcher, Fairy Pitta and Taiwan Wren-Babbler. The tour was titled *Island Endemics and Migrants*.... and we saw plenty of both!

Many thanks to Wu, our specialist birding guide - he knew his birds, and where to find them. He was more than a birding guide though - he was a Mr Fixit, coffee boffin, driver, loaning out brand-new optics, carrying luggage, always wanting to please.... I could go on.

Thanks to Peter, Wu's friend, for coming along, even taking vacation from work to be with us. He helped in many ways also; carrying the bags, loading the vehicle, erecting the hides, and as 'group photographer' he produced the CD's for us.

Yi-chi represented our ground agents and was our translator who worked tirelessly with the hotels and restaurants. Behind the scenes Yi-chi had to rearrange hotels, food and transfers - she did this very well indeed. Many thanks!

I hope you all enjoyed Taiwan, the country and its birds (if not its weather this time around). It is impossible to accurately predict weather on any tour, so that variations higher or lower than that specified may occur and unfortunately we experienced abnormal rainfall for this time of year. Thanks to all of you for coming. I enjoyed your company and hope to see you on another Ornitholidays tour in the near future.

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May 2006

Itinerary and Weather

23 April	Flew from Heathrow, London to Hong Kong
24 April	Flew Hong Kong to Taipei, Taiwan. Arrival and transfer to city. Yeliou Rain, sometimes heavy, humid 25°C
25 April	Taipei Botanical Gardens. Wulai Rain all day, only short breaks 24°C
26 April	Wulai area (Wu Yu Forest Park). Hubau. Ching Jing Rain, occasional breaks 24°C
27 April	Ching Jing. Huben Heavy rain (higher altitude), cloudy (lower altitude) 24°C
28 April	Huben. Xianziken. Da-An Rain, occasional breaks 25°C
29 April	Pudai. Peimen. Jiang-Shung. Aogu Wetlands Cloudy but warm and humid 26°C
30 April	Xianziken. Makwang. Alishan Scenic Area Cloudy, a little sun, warm, humid 28°C
1 May	Alishan. Yushan National Park Nice bright day, rain late afternoon 20°C
2 May	Alishan Recreation Area. Da-An Cool, occasional rain sometimes heavy 21°C
3 May	Makwang. Da-An Warm, humid, a little rain in the hills 28°C
4 May	Guantian. Yengda. Kenting Warm, humid 28°C
5 May	Long Luang Tan. Lin-Beng. Flew from Kaosiung to Taipei Hot, humid 31°C
6 May	Flew from Taipei, Taiwan to Hong Kong and Hong Kong to Heathrow, London

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

Max no of days seen or heard	Location	Abundance scale Maximum seen (on one day)
Maximum 12	T = Taipei and Yeliou	1 = 1-4
h = heard only	M = central mountain areas incl. Wulai, Ching Jing, Alishan	2 = 5-9
	W = western coast/foothills incl. Huben Forest, Da-An, Xianziken, Pudai	3 = 10-99
	G = Guantian wetlands	4 = 100-999
	S = southwest and southern areas/coast incl. Long Luang Tan, Yengda, Lin-Beng	5 = 1,000-9,999

The order and nomenclature principally follows the recommended field guide

‘A Field Guide to the Birds of China’
by John MacKinnon and Karen Phillipps

E. = endemic species

Taxonomic Notes follow the list

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Location	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
Taiwan Partridge E.	- 3h	M W	1	<i>Arborophila crudigularis</i>
Chinese Bamboo-Partridge	1	W	1	<i>Bambusicola thoracica</i>
Swinhoe's Pheasant E.	- 2h	W	1	<i>Lophura swinhoii</i>
Mikado Pheasant E.	1	M	1	<i>Syrnaticus mikado</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	1	W	1	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Spot-billed Duck	1		S 2	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Barred Buttonquail	1	W	1	<i>Turnix suscitator</i>
Grey-capped Woodpecker	2 2h	M	1	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>
White-backed Woodpecker	- 1h		S 1	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	1	M	1	<i>Picus canus</i>
Black-browed Barbet	5 2h	M	S 2	<i>Megalaima oorti</i>
Common Kingfisher	2	T W	1	<i>Alcedo meninting</i>
Large Hawk-Cuckoo	- 1h	M	1	<i>Cuculus sparverioides</i>
Oriental Cuckoo	- 2h	M W	1	<i>Cuculus saturatus</i>
Lesser Coucal	3	W	S 2	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
Silver-backed Needletail	1	M	1	<i>Hirundapus cochinchinensis</i>
Pacific Swift	1		S 1	<i>Apus pacificus</i>
House Swift	11	T M W	S 5	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Mountain Scops-Owl	1 1h	M W	1	<i>Otus spilocephalus</i>
Brown Hawk-Owl	- 1h	W	1	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
Savannah Nightjar	- 1h		S 1	<i>Caprimulgus affinis</i>
Ashy Wood-Pigeon	1	M	1	<i>Columba pulchricollis</i>
Oriental Turtle-Dove	1	W	1	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Spotted Dove	10	T W G	S 2	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Red Collared-Dove	7	W G	S 4	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Emerald Dove	1	W	2	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
White-bellied Green-Pigeon	1	M	2	<i>Treron sieboldii</i>
Whistling Green-Pigeon	1		S 2	<i>Treron formosae</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	1 1h	W	1	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Common Moorhen	7	W G	S 2	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Snipe sp.	1	W	1	<i>Gallinago sp.</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	1	W	3	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	2	W	1	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Little Curlew	1	W	1	<i>Numenius minutus</i>
Whimbrel	2	W	1	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	1	W	1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Spotted Redshank	1	W	1	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Redshank	1	W	1	<i>Tringa totanus</i>

Marsh Sandpiper	2		W		3	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	
Common Greenshank	3	T	W	S	3	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	
Wood Sandpiper	3		W		3	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	
Terek Sandpiper	1		W		2	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>	
Common Sandpiper	4		W	S	2	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	
Grey-tailed Tattler	1		W		2	<i>Heterosceles brevipes</i>	
Ruddy Turnstone	1		W		1	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>	
Asiatic Dowitcher	2		W		1	<i>Limnodromus semipalmatus</i>	
Great Knot	1		W		1	<i>Calidris tenuirostris</i>	
Red-necked Stint	2		W		3	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>	
Long-toed Stint	2		W		1	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>	
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	4		W		3	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>	
Dunlin	1		W		1	<i>Calidris alpina</i>	
Curlew Sandpiper	3		W		3	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	
Broad-billed Sandpiper	1		W		2	<i>Limicola falcinellus</i>	
Red-necked Phalarope	2		W		2	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>	
Greater Painted-snipe	2		W	G	1	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	1			G	3	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	
Black-winged Stilt	4		W	S	3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	
Pacific Golden Plover	6	T	W	S	4	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	
Grey Plover	1		W		1	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	
Kentish Plover	2		W		1	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	
Lesser Sandplover	1		W		3	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	
Greater Sandplover	2		W		3	<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	
Oriental Pratincole	3		W	G	3	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>	
Gull-billed Tern	1		W		1	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>	
Caspian Tern	1		W		3	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	
Little Tern	2		W		3	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	
Whiskered Tern	3		W	S	4	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	
White-winged Tern	1		W		1	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	
Black Kite	2	T		S	2	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	
Crested Serpent-Eagle	2		M		2	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	
Crested Goshawk	2		M	S	1	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	
Chinese Sparrowhawk	3		W		1	<i>Accipiter soloensis</i>	
Besra	1			S	1	<i>Accipiter virgatus</i>	
Black Eagle	1		M		1	<i>Ictinaetus malayensis</i>	
Little Grebe	3		W	G	S	3	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Little Egret	10	T	W	G	S	4	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Chinese Egret	1			S	1	<i>Egretta eulophotes</i>	
Pacific Reef-Egret	1			S	1	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	
Grey Heron	2		W		1	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	
Great Egret	8	T	W	G	S	3	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	2			G	S	1	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Cattle Egret	9	T	W	G	S	4	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Chinese Pond-Heron	1	T			1	<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>	
Black-crowned Night-Heron	7	T	W	G	S	4	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Malayan Night-Heron	6	T	W		1	<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>	
Yellow Bittern	2		W	S	1	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	
Cinnamon Bittern	3			G	S	1	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
Black-faced Spoonbill	1		W		2	<i>Platalea minor</i>	
Fairy Pitta	3		W		1	<i>Pitta nympha</i>	
Brown Shrike	7	T	W	G	S	2	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Long-tailed Shrike	4		W		1	<i>Lanius schach</i>	
Eurasian Jay	4		M	W	1	<i>Garrulus glandarius taivanus</i>	
Taiwan Blue Magpie E.	2		M		3	<i>Urocissa caerulea</i>	
Grey Treepie	5	T	M		S	2	<i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>
Black-billed Magpie	1		W		1	<i>Pica pica</i>	
Spotted Nutcracker	1		M		2	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>	
Large-billed Crow	6		M		2	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	
Black-naped Oriole	1			S	2	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	
Maroon Oriole	1	1h	M		S	1	<i>Oriolus traillii ardens</i>
Grey-chinned Minivet	2		M		3	<i>Pericrocotus solaris</i>	
Black Drongo	6	T	M	G	S	1	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>

Bronzed Drongo	4	T	W			1	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	
Black-naped Monarch	3	1h	M	W		1	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	
Blue Rock Thrush	1	T				1	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	
Taiwan Whistling Thrush E.	2	1h	M			2	<i>Myophonus insularis</i>	
Taiwan Blue Shortwing E.	-	2h	M			1	<i>Brachypteryx goodfellowi</i>	
Grey-streaked Flycatcher	2			W	S	1	<i>Muscicapa griseisticta</i>	
Ferruginous Flycatcher	1		M			1	<i>Muscicapa ferruginea</i>	
Vivid Niltava	1		M			1	<i>Niltava vivida</i>	
White-browed Bush-Robin	2		M			1	<i>Tarsiger indicus</i>	
Collared Bush-Robin E.	2		M			2	<i>Tarsiger johnstoniae</i>	
Plumbeous Redstart	2		M			1	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	
White-tailed Robin	1		M			1	<i>Cinclidium leucurum</i>	
Crested Myna	7			W	G	S	3	<i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	2		M			2	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	
Coal Tit	1		M			2	<i>Parus ater ptilosus</i>	
Green-backed Tit	3		M			1	<i>Parus monticolus</i>	
Black-throated Tit	3		M			3	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>	
Sand Martin	1			W		2	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	
Plain Martin	1			W		1	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	
Barn Swallow	7	T		W	G	S	2	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Pacific Swallow	10	T	M	W	G	S	3	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
Striated Swallow	6		M	W	G	S	1	<i>Cecropis striolata</i>
Asian House-Martin	1		M			3	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	
Flamecrest E.	2		M			1	<i>Regulus goodfellowi</i>	
Collared Finchbill	2		M			1	<i>Spizixos semitorques</i>	
Light-vented Bulbul	10	T	M	W	G	S	3	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis</i>
Styan's Bulbul E.	1					S	3	<i>Pycnonotus taiwanus</i>
Black Bulbul	7	T	M		G	S	3	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Zitting Cisticola	2			W		1	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	
Yellow-bellied Prinia	3			W	G	S	1	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>
Plain Prinia	3	T		W		1	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	
Japanese White-eye	7	T		W	G	S	3	<i>Zosterops japonica</i>
Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler	1		M			1	<i>Cettia acanthizoides</i>	
Alishan Bush-Warbler E.	1		M			1	<i>Bradypterus alishanensis</i>	
Rufous-faced Warbler	6		M	W		1	<i>Abroscopus albogularis</i>	
White-throated Laughingthrush	3			W		3	<i>Garrulax albogularis</i>	
Rusty Laughingthrush	1		M			1	<i>Garrulax poecilorhynchus</i>	
White-whiskered Laughingthrush E.	1		M			2	<i>Garrulax morrisonianus</i>	
Steere's Liocichla E.	5		M	W		2	<i>Liocichla steerii</i>	
Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler	2		M			1	<i>Pomatorhinus ruficollis</i>	
Taiwan Wren-Babbler E.	1	1h	M			1	<i>Pnoepyga formosana</i>	
Rufous-capped Babbler	4		M	W		1	<i>Stachyris ruficeps</i>	
Taiwan Barwing E.	3		M			1	<i>Actinodura morrisoniana</i>	
Streak-throated Fulvetta	1		M			1	<i>Alcippe cinereiceps</i>	
Dusky Fulvetta	1			W		1	<i>Alcippe brunnea</i>	
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta	6		M	W		1	<i>Alcippe m. morrisonia</i>	
White-eared Sibia E.	3	2h	M	W		1	<i>Heterophasia auricularis</i>	
Taiwan Yuhina E.	6		M	W		2	<i>Yuhina brunneiceps</i>	
Vinous-throated Parrotbill	2		M	W		1	<i>Paradoxornis webbianus</i>	
Oriental Skylark	5			W	G	S	3	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	1		M			1	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	11	T	M	W	G	S	3	<i>Passer montanus</i>
White Wagtail	1			W		1	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	
Yellow Wagtail	4			W	G	S	2	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
Grey Wagtail	1			W		1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	
Richard's Pipit	1					S	1	<i>Anthus richardi</i>
Alpine Accentor	1		M			1	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	
White-rumped Munia	1			W		1	<i>Lonchura striata</i>	
Vinaceous Rosefinch	2		M			1	<i>Carpodacus vinaceus</i>	

Taxonomic Notes

(1) Most publications still record 15 endemic species in Taiwan, though there is now general acceptance of two further, making 17 - these being Taiwan Blue Shortwing and Taiwan Wren-Babbler. The first has a longer bill, plumage and voice differences from the races of White-browed Shortwing - there are currently fourteen races recognised and a review of the taxonomic status of these is required. The second, the wren-babbler, has been allied to Pygmy and Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler in the past, but it is vocally different to both these

(2) Of the 17 endemic species, 13 were seen by the group (the leaders saw three more) and the last was heard only

(3) N J Collar (*Birding ASIA, number 2, 2004*) suggests that another nine endemic subspecies require further study and may need upgrading to species status - five of these were seen on this tour:

Chinese Bamboo-Partridge

Black-browed Barbet

White-throated Laughingthrush

Rusty Laughingthrush

Streak-breasted Scimitar-Babbler

CHECKLIST OF MAMMALS SEEN IN TAIWAN

Taiwan (Formosan Rock) Macaque	2		M	W	1	<i>Macaca cyclopis</i>
Squirrel sp.	2	T		W	1	<i>Fam. Sciuridae</i>
Brown Rat	2	T		G	1	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>

These lists represent those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.



Poor photographs but 'record shots',
through-the-telescope, of two

Asiatic Dowitchers

Note: these are summer-plumaged



More 'record shots' - **Taiwan Wren-Babbler**

A widespread species in Taiwan, but a skulker! Thanks to Sue Clifton for these frames from a video grab





This **Fairy Pitta** had flown into netting at a chicken farm - it was uninjured and released at Huben

Front cover – an endemic; White-whiskered Laughingthrush