

ORNITHOLIDAYS TOUR TO TAIWAN  
*Island Endemics & Migrants*

03 – 15 April 2011



**Leaders: Simon Boyes and Chiang Kuen-Dar**

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A Personal Diary

### Sunday, 3 April

We meet up for the Taiwan adventure in Heathrow Terminal 3. The Cathay Pacific 747 is on time for the overnight flight to Hong Kong, and takes a route north of Moscow.

### Monday, 4 April

After 11 hours in the air, we land at midday local time. We have less than an hour at the new gate, before boarding the Cathay 777 for the short hop to Taipei. It is mid-afternoon, cloudy and cool. Today is a much shortened day, as we have crossed so many time-zones: we are now seven hours ahead of BST. Immigration and luggage retrieval are quick and efficient, as is the process of changing a few pounds into Taiwan dollars. Here to meet us is our bird-guide Chiang, and driver James. After a half-hour drive in a comfortable VW people-carrier, we arrive at the Gala Hotel. We enjoy a hot bath and a dinner featuring many tasty Chinese dishes, eager for the action to begin tomorrow.

### Tuesday, 5 April

An excellent buffet breakfast starts us off, with a choice of western and Chinese foods. At eight o'clock we set off for the Botanical Gardens, on almost empty roads. Taipei is not always like this on a Tuesday, but today is the public holiday of Tomb Sweeping. We drive through streets lined with royal palms and flowering azaleas, and are soon out in the field, in cool and cloudy conditions that stay with us all day. We share the park with many locals doing their morning exercises or practising *tai-chi*. Taiwan Barbet is our first find, singing with bill closed and body trembling. We soon find Grey Treepies, Japanese White-eyes, and a pair of Crested Goshawks, which are clearly on territory. Brown Shrike and Pale Thrush represent the winter visitors, shortly to set off for Siberian breeding grounds.

Taiwan Barbet



The most numerous bird here, and all day, is the Chinese Bulbul, whose huge white supercilium quickly becomes a familiar sight. We are surprised to see several locals, in camouflage gear and with long lenses and tripods, all trying to photograph a Black-naped Monarch. We soon catch up with these charming flycatchers and enjoy their aerial antics.

In mid-morning, we decide to try Jinshan, an area for migrants that Chiang recommends. We leave the city on the freeway heading east, and hit the north-east coast. Here, a stop for Black-eared Kites also turns up a displaying Crested Serpent Eagle and three Dusky Thrushes, taking a final Taiwan snack on the roadside grass before departing north. Lunch comes next, at the Victoria, a restaurant with an English name but excellent international cuisine. The birding from the table is surprisingly good too for a built-up area on a main road: White-cheeked Starling, Javan Myna, Oriental Turtle Dove and Red Turtle Dove all turn up.

Chinese Bulbul



Nearby is the Jinshan Youth Centre, whose forbidding architecture (looking out to sea), complete with battlements and parade ground, reveal its military origins. Now it stands in a public park. Here is another brigade of heavily-armed bird photographers, studying a patch of ground where they have scattered grain.

Soon we are able to benefit from their efforts, in the form of three Black-faced and two Yellow-browed Buntings. The yellow-browed have a well-striped badger-like face pattern, and are not common migrants here. More expected are further Pale Thrushes. Paddyfields nearby - with newly planted rice - hold two Red-necked Phalaropes in winter plumage, as well as a Red-necked Stint and a few Little Ringed Plovers. Di puts us onto a Buff-bellied Pipit feeding on the far side.



Himalayan Black Bulbul

We return towards the city by the scenic route, along the rocky north coast, surprisingly devoid of gulls and terns. At Guandu we divert to the wetland nature reserve, now suffering from a lack of management. The habitat is excellent, mangroves, reedbeds and pools next to the Danshui River, but the viewing opportunities very few. Nevertheless, we enjoy good views of Eastern Spotbill Duck, Himalayan Black Bulbul, a fly-by introduced Sacred Ibis, and a Plain Prinia. Yellow Bittern and Black-collared Starlings (also introduced here) give more fleeting views. As the light begins to fade, large numbers of egrets fly to roost, and Black-crowned Night Herons come to life. We are back at the Gala Hotel at dusk, after an excellent first day.

### Wednesday, 6 April

We leave the Gala Hotel at 0800 and take a while to extricate ourselves from Taipei. An impressive programme of building an elevated relief freeway is underway, stretching 60 km outside the city. There are Red Turtle Doves and Japanese White-eyes to watch at a service station stop. Our road turns east, and up into the foothills. In the town of Dongshi we stop to buy beer for three nights at our unlicensed accommodation at Dasyueshan. A stop by a fruiting Japanese sea-fig (*Ficus superba*) is a confusing experience, as the hundred or so bulbuls (mostly Chinese, but some Himalayan Black) never stay still, chattering excitedly all the while. The ripe fruits erupt directly from the branches. Among the bulbuls are a few Collared Finchbills, which after much patience on our part finally sit still for the scope. Another short stop produces a large mixed flock of Grey-cheeked Fulvettas and Rufous-capped Babblers feeding in a huge bamboo clump. Two Bronzed Drongos mob a Crested Goshawk and chase it off down the valley. An Oriental Cuckoo, calling like a Hoopoe, remains hidden.

Lunch is at a wayside café with a huge panoramic view over the pear orchards that stretch in all directions. The freshly harvested bamboo shoots are a highlight of the meal. The climbing becomes steeper, the bends sharper, and orchard gives way to forest. A flock of 50 or more Taiwan Sibilias pass through the canopy where we are parked, stopping to snack on berries as they go. A male Grey-chinned Minivet creates a splash of scarlet as it flies over and perches atop a huge conifer. At km. 23 (from Dongshi) we stop at a spot (at 1400m altitude) where Swinhoe's Pheasant can sometimes be seen, since photographers scatter grain on a particular verge. It still comes at a total surprise when suddenly a brilliant male appears on the road alongside us! Soon it disappears, and instead we watch the Steere's Liocichlas, and White-tailed Robins which are also attracted to the grain.



Steere's Liocichla

After a few minutes the pheasant re-appears, and we watch and photograph it for ten minutes as it feeds, unconcerned by our presence. Howard has a great portrait of this exquisite bird with its silver back and long tail, perched up on a rock.



Swinhoe's Pheasant

We continue upwards, resting during a spell where low cloud envelops us. We pass the visitor centre complex (at km 43, and at 2275m), where our rooms and restaurant are also situated, and climb further in the vehicle until the sun breaks through. A Spotted Nutcracker perches up in the sun on a dead tree, its breast spots much reduced in this endemic form, which is a definite candidate for a future split.

A viewpoint makes a wonderful panorama for our cameras, with a blanket of cloud filling the valleys and sunlit mountains stretching above it. Just beyond here we stop at km 47, (2400m), where the local birders and photographers are out in force, hoping for a Mikado, Taiwan's other spectacular endemic pheasant. We watch the antics of Perny's Squirrels and Taiwan Striped Squirrels which rush across the road to steal their share of the pheasant's grain. Down on the poorly lit forest floor a Johnstone's Robin perches on mossy logs. Then suddenly a female Mikado Pheasant arrives, and takes no notice of the clicks of cameras and the wows of appreciation from the locals. As the light begins to fade, we decide the show is over, having watched the female for a good 15 minutes. But the icing in the cake turns up on the drive down: a male Mikado has turned up to feed on a different verge, quite unbothered by its admirers. The light is not brilliant, but still many photos are taken.

Delighted with making so many inroads into the island's endemics, we check into our rooms as dusk falls. Our rooms are comfortable though not heated, and the electric blankets on the beds much appreciated as the mountain air is distinctly chilly.

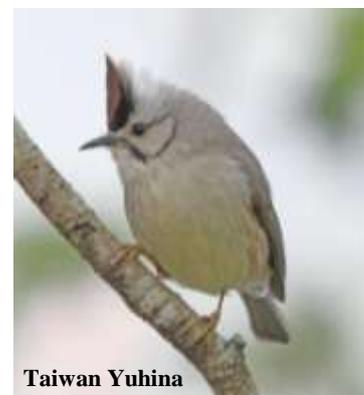
**Thursday, 7 April**

Taiwan Sibia, Steere's Liocichla and Taiwan Yuhina are the birds around our rooms at breakfast time. The yuhinas are flighty and not inclined to pose for the scope. A Taiwan Shortwing calls nearby but remains heard only, as shortwings usually do. We have a beautiful calm, sunny morning, though the clouds inevitably roll in later. We spend most of the day exploring the higher section of the forest, between our rooms at km 43 and the end of the road at km 50. The first stop has a singing Rufous-faced Warbler and Taiwan Yuhina. At the viewpoint, a Taiwan Bush Warbler responds to a



Spotted Nutcracker

little gentle playback by perching on the verge of the road, a bold move for such a skulker. At the Mikado site (km 47), a pair of Vinaceous Rosefinches are wonderfully obliging, allowing a close approach as they feed among the moss-covered rocks by the roadside. The male's deep crimson plumage has a luminous quality.



Taiwan Yuhina

The road opens out at a picnic area where two fine species are waiting for us, hoping for crumbs. A veritable suite of Spotted Nutcrackers fly in, allowing us to see how different they look from European birds. As for the

endemic White-whiskered Laughingthrushes, they come far too close for Howard's long lens. The end of the road is called Siasyueshan ('small snow mountain', contrasting with Dasyueshan, which translates as 'big snow mountain'). Here the altitude is 2,600m, the highest point of our tour. A walk here produces two Grey-faced Buzzards, migrating north from wintering grounds in the Philippines to breeding areas in Japan or Manchuria. A Grey-headed Woodpecker remains heard only. Our first Large-billed Crows fly over, and we watch a Coal Tit of the local crested subspecies. Lunch is an excellent meal, featuring noodles and omelettes among other local dishes. As the clouds envelop us, we watch a short DVD about Dasyueshan and its wildlife in the visitor centre. There are Black Bears, Serow, and Muntjacs here, though rarely seen. It also shows the origins of the F.R.A. (forest recreation area): it began in 1956 as a source of timber. The excellent road that takes us up and down was built for the logging trucks. In 1974 it was transferred to the local authorities for all visitors to enjoy. Unfortunately none of the old logging side-roads, once open for walks, are now available for walking since a recent earthquake.

**White-whiskered Laughingthrush**



**Mikado Pheasant**

On the way down, we have a magical Mikado encounter at km 47. For ten minutes or so male and female feed together on the verge, allowing Howard his hoped-for shots in reasonable light. They punctuate their feeding with quiet grunts. What is more surprising is to see them fly off into the trees, where they perch on the dead conifer branches below eye-level to us. The male no longer has food on his mind, as he attempts to land next to the coy female. He spreads his delicately patterned tail streamers in display. Eventually we leave them and try to call a White-backed Woodpecker out of the forest. Our attempts are no more successful than with the other woodpecker this morning.

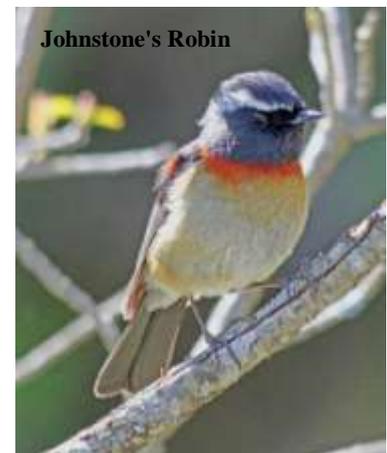
The shop and displays at the main information centre near our rooms occupy us happily for a while, before we head back for hot showers and dinner.

### **Friday, 8 April**

Another fine day in Dasyueshan provides us with many of the species we enjoyed yesterday, and a few new ones too. Taiwan Yuhinas seem to be everywhere today, often in large flocks, and frequently posing for photos. A male Johnstone's Robin perches out in the sun, showing off orange collar. We meet Yellow-bellied Bush Warblers in two places, one intent on singing, the other on feeding. In the heard only category are distant Collared Owlet and an arch-skulker, the Taiwan Wren-Babbler.



**Vivid Niltava**



**Johnstone's Robin**

At lower altitude, we stop at a bridge where a hundred or so Asian House Martins are flying round at eye level, similar to our familiar species but for narrower white rump and off-white breast. In the same area are Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker and a fine pair of Vivid Niltavas, another candidate for a future split.

After a satisfying noodle soup lunch in the main visitor centre at Anmashan (the settlement where our rooms are), we walk a nature trail in the forest, impressively maintained with many sturdy steps and boardwalks over the rocky slopes. Here the superb forest is more the focus of attention than the birdlife: huge cypresses which the loggers spared, budding and flowering rhododendrons, mosses and lichens. Howard finds us a pair of Grey-chinned Minivets among the many yuhinas, and there are brief views of a Eurasian Nuthatch.

The final session is a walk at km 46, where we need patience as clouds frequently envelop us: for good reason is this referred to as cloud forest. In the clear spells, we come across Taiwan Barwings, silently feeding alongside Black-throated and Green-backed Tits, Rufous-faced Warbler and masses more yuhinas. A Taiwan Macaque looks down on us from a tree directly above us: Chiang, our ever considerate guide, suggests we keep our mouths closed. The views over the mixed forests of hemlock, cyprus, and fir are spectacular.

### **Saturday, 9 April**

We leave our montane retreat and head down the hill just as the weekend visitors are starting to arrive. A White-backed Woodpecker puts on a good performance for scope and camera, and the Asian House Martins at the bridge are nest-building. They constantly return to a rocky bank where dead pine needles have fallen, and are busy picking them up in their bills for nest-lining. Vivid Niltavas sing a pleasant five-note song, but fail to compete with the noisy Taiwan Sibilas' *wheech-oo*. Nearer Dongshi, where the heat is building up, we stop to look for Taiwan Hwamei, a laughingthrush with a spectacular song, much prized as a cage-bird. After patiently waiting, we see it pop up on the giant grasses where it has been skulking: it stays in view for good scope views.

Lunch is at a service station on Freeway 3, at Nantou. Next is a short stop at Jiji where Chiang knows of a Collared Scops Owl that has been faithful to its roost for seven years. It's still there, and looks down at us with no interest at all. At three o'clock we arrive at Huben, our next main destination, for two sessions of lowland birding. Much of our first walk is on government land, on which farmers are encouraged to act in sympathy with wildlife, thanks to a strong local conservation lobby. Huben is dubbed an 'ecovillage,' and its particular claim to fame is a population of Fairy Pitta, which will arrive in three weeks' time for the summer, to breed. Here we meet another Chiang, whom our Chiang helpfully calls Mr Chiang to avoid confusion. He

is an ex-hunter, who now puts his great observation skills into watching the local birdlife and guiding. We enjoy good views of Collared Finchbill, Rufous-capped Babbler, a pair of Taiwan Barbets at the nest, and a spectacular trio of Maroon Orioles, which perch up on the giant bamboos. Two Taiwan Hill Partridges beat a hasty retreat up a bank when they see us, and Dusky Fulvetta puts in a first appearance. It seems more a ground-storey bird than the more common Grey-cheeked Fulvetta. An Emerald Dove flies past with its usual speed, and a pair of Taiwan Scimitar Babblers offer excellent portraits, again for both camera and scope. Its close relative the Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler is a much shier beast, and is only heard.



**Maroon Oriole**

We take a short break from Huben to check into our fine rooms in nearby Douliou City, where we can unpack a little and shower. Here again we find bottled water available in our rooms, as it always is in the vehicle too. At dusk we return to Huben, and park outside the impressive Taoist temple. A Taiwan Blue Magpie flies across the bamboos to perch in view, one of a small number that were translocated here. Mr Chiang points out a Taiwan Giant Flying Squirrel, which appears from its roost in a tree-trunk as it gets dark, and watches us from the top of its

tree. Then suddenly it launches into mid-air, presumably to land lower down on another trunk. Next comes a Crested Goshawk at its roost, exactly as Mr Chiang predicted. The only disappointment is the refusal of the Mountain Scops Owl to show itself. We hear its double whistle, and the lower notes of a Brown Hawk Owl too, but neither is prepared to leave the safety of the forest.

Tonight's dinner, for a mid-tour change, is at a steak house in bustling Douliou, where the beef and chicken steaks, salad bars and dessert choices are all much appreciated. We head back to our rooms overlooking the city and the train station after another enjoyable Taiwan day.

### Sunday, 10 April



Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler

As we enjoy an excellent buffet breakfast on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor restaurant of the Metro Hotel, Striated Swallows fly past the windows. We see more as we step out of the vehicle at Huben. Mr Chiang has a different walk for us today, along a quiet road with papaya and orange orchards on one side. Almost immediately we are watching Black-necklaced Scimitar Babblers, an inquisitive pair that perform for Howard's lens. A parade of interesting species turn up as we stroll: Yellow-bellied and Plain Prinias, Scaly-breasted Munia nest-building, White-rumped Munias on the verge, an Oriental Cuckoo on a bamboo frond, and a Grey-faced Buzzard perched and flying. A Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker perches on a wire – a strange place for a woodpecker – and we enjoy watching Crested Serpent Eagles and an Oriental Honey-buzzard thermalling together. Green tea is served for us at the community café at the end of the walk. Here we say goodbye to Mr Chiang, and offer him a hat with a Blue Magpie embroidered on it, which he wears straight away with a grin. In Taiwan

a gift is more acceptable than a cash tip. Before we leave Huben, we look round the temple where we parked yesterday. Its ornamentation and wall-paintings are magnificent, and we have the benefit of Chiang's explanations about Taoist ceremonies and practices. Soon after leaving the village, a short stop on a river bridge produces Black-winged Stilts, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Little Ringed Plover and Greenshank feeding together.

There is time to take a shower and a rest back in Douliou before the midday check-out time. Now we continue south, and stop at the Gu Keng service area for lunch. Noodle soup and Japanese dorayaki are popular choices. Dorayaki are like drop-scones, with a red bean or custard filling. Now we cross the invisible line into the tropics, as we continue south on the freeway. The Guantian wetlands make a good place to stop in the afternoon. Here an area has been saved from development to protect a population of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas. It was to have been in the path of a high-speed rail line, which was diverted following representations from the Wild Bird Society of Taiwan. Now there is an information centre with excellent display boards, and three hides to visit, overlooking the shallow lily-covered ponds. We see several jacanas, adults in breeding plumage as well as non-breeders. They feed with long tails blowing in the breeze, and occasionally show off all-white wings in flight. Following a discussion about the jacana's scientific name *chirurgus* (the surgeon), it comes from their scalpel-like carpal spurs. Also here are Garganey and Pintail, Eastern Yellow Wagtail and Grey-throated Martins. It is encouraging to see two coach parties of local youngsters, enjoying a Sunday outing with cameras and binoculars.

From here an hour's drive takes us to our sumptuous accommodation in the large city of Tainan. We have rooms in the Zenda suites, where visiting academics stay, as it is part of the university. The rooms are the

epitome of luxury, with great views from the upper floors over the city below. We eat out at a traditional Chinese restaurant where the many dishes are tasty and much enjoyed. We are all making daily improvements to our chopstick techniques.

### **Monday, 11 April**

After an excellent buffet breakfast, we set off for a day of wetlands and waders to the north of the city. On both sides of Cigu town, there is a vast mosaic of fish-ponds and salt-pans, some drained, some too deep for waders. We soon come to a series of pans with exposed mud and shallow pools. They are suitable for over a hundred Marsh Sandpipers, a few Greenshank, and a variety of plovers: Greater and Lesser Sandpipers, and Kentish all in the same scope field. The sandpipers are in fine rusty breeding plumage. Also side-by-side are the two stint species with yellow legs: plain-backed Temminck's and scaly-backed Long-toed. Red-necked Stints are also on the same pans, and will reach three figures for the day.

Pressing on further north, we have views of our first Long-tailed Shrikes, and a Common Kingfisher in flight. The most northerly salt-pans at Beimen, where we turn round, have many Little Terns resting with one Whiskered, over a hundred Pacific Golden Plovers, and six Sharp-tailed Sandpipers. Wader watching is ideal in these warm but breezy conditions. A well-placed 7/11 shop-cum-café provides us with a very adequate lunch, before we turn towards the coast. Curlew Sandpipers appear by the hundred in one particular pan, many brick red and ready to head north. There is one Spotted Redshank, also half way into its dusky plumage. Various ducks appear through the day: a few Garganey, Teal, Shoveler and Pintail, with many more Wigeon. Chiang leaves the best till last, as we arrive at the spoonbill information centre on the north side of the Zengwen River at 1520. Here in front of us are 63 Black-faced Spoonbills, about 3% of the world



**Black-faced Spoonbills & Caspian Terns**

population, estimated at 2,000. Half of that number usually winter in Taiwan, but many have now left for breeding grounds in and around Korea. Their future is far from certain since Korea is noted more for development than conservation. The spoonbills are active and lively, only feeding a little, but preening and interacting with each other with their unlikely-shaped bills. Many have acquired the yellow breast patch of summer. Nearby are 27 Caspian Terns, two Eastern Black-tailed Godwits, many Terek Sandpipers both resting and feeding, and a single Grey-tailed Tattler! This fine group of birds keeps us happy with scopes and cameras for an hour. The Tereks feed alongside smart Lesser Sandpipers in full breeding finery. Two Oriental Pratincoles fly over; and James, our enthusiastic driver, makes sure we don't miss the Osprey that flies overhead.

When the spoonbills, terns, and waders decide (as if of one mind) to fly off to feeding grounds elsewhere, we do likewise, and are back at our luxury suites just after 1730. Chiang has told us that Savanna Nightjars roost (and even nest) on the flat roofs of urban buildings in southern Taiwan: so an hour later we gather on the top floor to look for them. No luck there, but we can reflect on another great day in the field.

### **Tuesday, 12 April**

After breakfast, we leave our little oasis of Tainan luxury, and head north. We find Oriental Skylarks on scrubby rough ground between new developments on the edge of the city. Their habitat is bound to shrink as relentless progress continues in this rapidly urbanizing country. A Lesser Coucal appears nearby, and flies across the road. We decide to call in at Guantian again, to see the jacanas in better light and with less noise: on Sunday two coach loads of noisy locals detracted from the peace of the lily-ponds. Surprisingly, there are fewer jacanas to see, but the ducks are of interest: the Garganey and Pintail are now joined by Teal and Shoveler, and best of all, a rare vagrant: a drake Cotton Pygmy-Goose which is a new bird for Chiang! At the last hide, a juvenile Cinnamon Bittern furtively walks along the water's edge.



Taiwan Blue Magpie

Heading north, we stop for lunch at the Nantou service area, and head up into the hills where our rooms at Huisun await us. Just before we enter the forest area, a stop by a river produces a Brown Dipper immersing itself in the current, and a Plumbeous Redstart by the water's edge. At the Huisun Education Centre, a flock of Taiwan Blue Magpies are out in the open, in no hurry to go anywhere. We spend half an hour with them, as they fly from tree to ground, perching on stumps and railings, preening, bathing in a small pond, and offering photos.

Taking a break from the magpies, we check in to our rooms further up the hill at the guest house, and enjoy a cup of jasmine tea in our rooms. A walk down to the education centre has a frustrating moment when I turn a corner and come across a male Swinhoe's Pheasant running away through the undergrowth by the road. Nobody else has time to see it, but we were lucky with Wednesday's memorable encounter. We spend half an hour with a Malayan Night Heron on one of the lawns near the centre. It is finding plenty of earthworms, some about nine inches long. There are three here: we see another on the ground nearby, and hear a third uttering deep owl-like hoots. James drives us back up the hill

for a shower before we head out to dinner. Chiang recommends a place 20 minutes down the hill, which cooks us up a fine meal with many tasty dishes.

### **Wednesday, 13 April**

At 0610, Blue Magpies fly past our bedroom windows. One or two pause briefly at a ripe papaya tree to snatch a beakful, but they seem restless. The most conspicuous of the Huisun species are Grey Treepies and Black Bulbuls, but we also see Japanese White-eye, Black-naped Monarch and Taiwan Barbet before breakfast. Bamboo Partridges call near the education centre, but stay hidden. Howard is happy with his photos of the Malayan Night Heron, which has returned to the same lawn as yesterday. More Blue Magpies pass through, but without obliging our cameras.



Malayan Night Heron

After breakfast, we spend time by the coffee shop, below the impressive river gorge that runs parallel to the entrance road. Here we watch Maroon Oriole, Collared Finchbill, Bronzed Drongo, and our first White-bellied Erpornis, not to mention more magpies and Treepies travelling together. On my previous visit to Huisun in July 2009, not one magpie was visible! At midday we return to our rooms to pack. Ann and Di write postcards while I check the group in on-line for our flights home. Taiwan internet connections are excellent.

We leave Huisun soon after midday, and take lunch in a 7/11 in Ganzihlin. As with Monday's lunch, this small shop doubles up as a café, with seats, microwaves, hot drinks, and restrooms. Small boys next to us do their Mandarin homework, and look after their caterpillars which (according to Chiang) is also part of their schoolwork. A clear run along Freeways no. 6 and 1 has us back in Taipei before the rush-hour gets busy at five o'clock. We have time for relaxing in a hot bath, before our next adventure: on the Taipei subway. Chiang takes us out to a German Beer Keller for our special final meal. (We choose to bring this meal forward one day, since our start for the airport is so early on Friday). The subway is spotlessly clean and efficient, as we have now come to expect from Taiwan. We enjoy the meal and the jugs of beer, served by locals in traditional Alpine costumes. We hope that the pheasant feathers in the waiters' hats did not originate from Swinhoe's or Mikado!

#### Thursday, 14 April

After breakfast, we set out for Wulai. Our main target is the one possible missing endemic, Taiwan Whistling Thrush. By chance one appears in the suburbs, flying up onto a garden fence. We watch a dispute



Brown Dipper

between three individuals, and hear much scratchy singing and whistling as they try to sort out their boundaries. Further on, the road runs alongside a beautiful river, where Brown Dippers, Common Kingfisher, and Plumbeous Redstarts entertain us. A Striated Heron is a surprise, among the far more numerous egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons. We hear a flock of Blue Magpies above us, but our views are brief and distant. Thankfully we saw them so well at Huisun. A Plain Flowerpecker perches on a wire and sings, one of the features that helps to distinguish it from the similar female Fire-breasted Flowerpecker,

which would occur at higher altitudes. A Crested Serpent Eagle perches on a wire below eye-level: during the morning we several more in flight.

On the far side of Wulai town we explore both banks of the river. During the first walk, Taiwan Scimitar Babblers show themselves well and often: including one posing in a *Datura* shrub. A pair of Oriental Honey-buzzards soar above us. We pass a relaxing half-hour watching the stream below, drinking soft drinks and sitting in wicker chairs. On the other walk, we scan the gorge below for more Whistling Thrushes, and a small stream forming a high waterfall for Little Forktail – the latter would be a lucky chance. Eventually we retreat from the hot sun and head back towards the city for lunch.



Striated Heron



Taiwan Scimitar Babbler

Dante's Coffee Shop provides us with a selection of sandwiches, paninis, tortillas, juices and coffee. Next stop is the headquarters of the Wild Bird Society of Taiwan, where we shop for items to take home: carved birds, *gilets*, and wildlife books all find their back into our luggage. We arrive back at the Gala Hotel and say our farewells to friendly, reliable Chiang. I have a de-brief with our agents, while the others have plenty of time for relaxing and packing. We settle on an early buffet dinner in

the Gala at six, and head for rest soon afterwards, as the alarms will ring too early for comfort.

### **Friday, 15 April**

James comes to collect us: we leave the hotel at 0420, and arrive at the airport half an hour later. The first leg of the flight home takes us to Hong Kong, where we have time for the duty-free shops. The London flight is a little late taking off, but only because if we'd left on time, we would arrive too early in London, with no parking bays available. The whole flight is in daylight, though almost all the window blinds are closed all the way! We take a northerly route, over the Gobi Desert, endless expanses of snowy boreal forest, and Helsinki. The flight time is just short of 12 hours, and we arrive at 1520 BST, 40 minutes ahead of schedule. Luggage arrives 20 minutes before we're even due to land: is this a record? We say our farewells by the carousels, before setting off to our various homes. We can reflect on our wonderful Taiwan weather, the variety of different habitats and altitudes we experienced, and many superb wildlife encounters.

### **Acknowledgements**

Many thanks to Chiang for excellent guiding, and to James for safe and comfortable driving. Also thanks to Mr Chiang in Huben for a cameo performance! Thanks also to our agents, for making excellent arrangements for our visit. Most of all, thanks to you all for participating in the tour with good humour and enthusiasm at all times. I hope we may meet up on another Ornitholiday again soon. Special thanks also to Howard for the wonderful photographs that illustrate this report.

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May 2011

## Itinerary and Weather

Wherever possible, **shade** temperatures at dawn and midday are given.

- 04 April Arrive Taipei 1600.  
Cloudy, 14°C (57°F)
- 05 April Taipei. Botanical Gardens. Jinshan Youth Centre & Paddyfields. Guandu Nature Reserve.  
Dry, cloudy, 13-19°C (55-66°F)
- 06 April Taipei to Dasyueshan Forest Recreation Area.  
Dry, mostly cloudy, 13-19°C (55-66°F)
- 07 April Dasyueshan.  
Dry, sunny a.m, cloudy p.m. 9-17°C (48-63°F)
- 08 April Dasyueshan.  
Dry, sunny a.m, cloudy p.m. 10-17°C (50-63°F)
- 09 April Dasyueshan to Douliou, via Huben Ecovillage.  
Sunny, 10-28°C (50-82°F)
- 10 April Douliou to Tainan, via Huben and Jacana Project, Guantian.  
Hazy early, then sunny, 22-27°C (72-81°F)
- 11 April Tainan. Cigu Wetlands & Zengwen Estuary.  
Dry, partly sunny, 21-27°C (70-81°F)
- 12 April Tainan to Huisun, via Guantian.  
Dry, hazy, 20-27°C (68-81°F)
- 13 April Huisun, to Taipei in p.m.  
Dry, mostly sunny, 18-26°C (64-79°F)
- 14 April Taipei. Wulai.  
Sunny, 20-29°C (68-84°F)
- 15 April Taipei, depart 0625.  
Dry, cloudy, 21°C (70°F)

## CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

<b>No of days recorded</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Abundance Scale</b> (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on	T = Taipei, Jinshan, Wulai	1 = 1 – 4 individuals
1 day and heard on	D = Dasyueshan	2= 5 - 9
2 other days	E = Huben Ecovillage	3 = 10 - 99
	Z = Zengwen Estuary & Cigu	4 = 100 - 999
	H = Huisun	
	> = on journey to ...	

Order, nomenclature & taxonomy follow *Birds of East Asia* by Mark Brazil. Endemic subspecies have trinomial added.  
**Endemic species are in bold.** \* Likely to be split soon. (I) Introduced.

SPECIES	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale	SCIENTIFIC NAME
<b>Taiwan Partridge</b>	1	E	1	<i>Arborophila crudigularis</i>
Chinese Bamboo Partridge *	- 4h T	E	H	<i>Bambusicola thoracicus sonorivox</i>
<b>Swinhoe's Pheasant</b>	1	D	1	<i>Lophura swinhoii</i>
<b>Mikado Pheasant</b>	2	D	1	<i>Syrmaticus mikado</i>
Cotton Pygmy-Goose	1		>H	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	2	Z	3	<i>Anas penelope</i>
Eastern Spot-billed Duck	1 T		1	<i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>
Northern Shoveler	2	Z	>H	<i>Anas clypeata</i>
Northern Pintail	3	Z	>H	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Garganey	3	Z	>H	<i>Anas querquedula</i>
Eurasian Teal	3 T	Z	>H	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Little Grebe	4 T	Z	>H	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Sacred Ibis (I)	1 T		1	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
Black-faced Spoonbill	1	Z	3	<i>Platalea minor</i>
Yellow Bittern	1 T		1	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>
Cinnamon Bittern	1		>H	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
Striated Heron	1 T			<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Malayan Night Heron	2		H	<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	7 T	>E Z	>H	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Eastern Cattle Egret	5 T	>D >E Z	>H	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
Grey Heron	1 T		3	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Great Egret	4 T	Z	3	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Intermediate Egret	3 T	Z	2	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Little Egret	7 T	>D E Z	>H	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Osprey	1	Z	1	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Oriental Honey-buzzard	2 T	E	1	<i>Pernis orientalis</i>
Black-eared Kite	3 T		>H	<i>Milvus lineatus</i>
Crested Serpent Eagle	4 1h T	>D E	2	<i>Spilornis cheela hoya</i>
Crested Goshawk	3 T	D E	1	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus formosae</i>
Grey-faced Buzzard	2	D E	1	<i>Butastur indicus</i>
White-breasted Waterhen	1 T		1	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Common Moorhen	4 T	Z	>H	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
Black-winged Stilt	3	Z	>H	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pacific Golden Plover	2	Z	>H	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>
Grey Plover	1	Z	1	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Little Ringed Plover	3 T	E Z	1	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Kentish Plover	2	Z	3	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>
Lesser Sand Plover	1	Z	3	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>
Greater Sand Plover	1	Z	1	<i>Charadrius leschenaultia</i>
Pheasant-tailed Jacana	2	>Z	>H	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
Common Snipe	1	E >Z	1	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Eastern Black-tailed Godwit	1	Z	1	<i>Limosa melanuroides</i>
Eurasian Curlew	1	Z	1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Spotted Redshank	1	Z	1	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Redshank	1	Z	3	<i>Tringa tetanus</i>

Marsh Sandpiper	1				Z		4	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Common Greenshank	3			E	Z		3	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper	1			E			1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	2			E	Z		1	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Grey-tailed Tattler	1				Z		1	<i>Tringa brevipes</i>
Terek Sandpiper	1				Z		3	<i>Xenus cinereus</i>
Common Sandpiper	2	T			Z		1	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Red-necked Stint	2	T			Z		4	<i>Calidris ruficollis</i>
Temminck's Stint	1				Z		1	<i>Calidris temminckii</i>
Long-toed Stint	1				Z		1	<i>Calidris subminuta</i>
Sharp-tailed Sandpiper	1				Z		2	<i>Calidris acuminata</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	1				Z		4	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Dunlin	1				Z		3	<i>Calidris alpina</i>
Red-necked Phalarope	1	T					1	<i>Phalaropus lobatus</i>
Oriental Pratincole	1				Z		1	<i>Glareola maldivarum</i>
Caspian Tern	1				Z		3	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
Little Tern	1				Z		3	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Whiskered Tern	1				Z		2	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
Rock (Feral) Pigeon (I)	8	T	>D	>E	Z	>H	3	<i>Columba livia</i>
Oriental Turtle Dove	2	T		>E			3	<i>Streptopelia orientalis orii</i>
Red Turtle Dove	6	T	>D		Z	>H	3	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>
Spotted Dove	7	T		E	Z	H	3	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>
Emerald Dove	2			E			1	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Oriental Cuckoo	1	2h	D	E			1	<i>Cuculus optatus</i>
Lesser Coucal	1				Z	>H	1	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>
Mountain Scops Owl	-	2h		E		H	-	<i>Otus spilocephalus hambroeki</i>
Collared Scops Owl	1			>E			1	<i>Otus lettia</i>
Collared Owlet	-	3h	D			H	-	<i>Glaucidium brodiei</i>
Brown Hawk Owl	-	1h		E			-	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
House Swift	3			E	Z		2	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>
Common Kingfisher	3	T			Z		1	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>
<b>Taiwan Barbet</b>	7	T	D	E		H	2	<i>Megalaima nuchalis</i>
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	2		D	E			1	<i>Yungipicus canicapillus</i>
White-backed Woodpecker	1	1h	D				1	<i>Dendrocopos leucotos insularis</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	-	2h	D				-	<i>Picus canus</i>
Grey-chinned Minivet	2		D				1	<i>Pericrocotus solaris</i>
Brown Shrike	1	T					1	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
Long-tailed Shrike	1				Z		2	<i>Lanius schach</i>
Maroon Oriole	2			E		H	1	<i>Oriolus traillii ardens</i>
Black Drongo	7		>D	>E	Z	>H	2	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus harterti</i>
Bronzed Drongo	4		>D	E		H	1	<i>Dicrurus aeneus braunianus</i>
Black-naped Monarch	5	T	>D	E		H	1	<i>Hypothymis azurea oberholseri</i>
<b>Taiwan Blue Magpie</b>	4	T		E		H	3	<i>Urocissa caerulea</i>
Grey Treepie	6	T		E	Z	H	3	<i>Dendrocitta formosae formosae</i>
Common Magpie (I)	4	T			Z		2	<i>Pica pica</i>
Spotted Nutcracker	4		D				2	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes owstoni</i>
Large-billed Crow	3	1h	T	D		H	1	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Green-backed Tit	3		D				1	<i>Parus monticolus inseperatus</i>
Coal Tit	1	1h	D				1	<i>Periparus ater ptilosus</i>
Grey-throated Martin	3				Z		3	<i>Riparia chinensis (paludicola)</i>
Barn Swallow	8	T		E	Z	>H	3	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Pacific Swallow	8	T	>D	E	Z	H	3	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
Striated Swallow	3			E	Z		3	<i>Cecropis striolata</i>
Asian House Martin	2		D				4	<i>Delichon dasypus</i>
Black-throated Tit	1		D				2	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
Oriental Skylark	1				Z		1	<i>Alauda gulgula</i>
Yellow-bellied Prinia	1			E			1	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>
Plain Prinia	4	T		E	Z	H	1	<i>Prinia inornata flavivestris</i>
Collared Finchbill	4		D	E		H	2	<i>Spizixos semitorques cinereicapillus</i>
Chinese Bulbul	8	T		E	Z	>H	3	<i>Pycnonotus sinensis formosae</i>
Himalayan Black Bulbul	7	T		E		H	3	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus nigerrimus</i>
Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler *	1		D				1	<i>Cettia acanthizoides concolor</i>
<b>Taiwan Bush Warbler</b>	1	1h	D				1	<i>Bradypterus alishanensis</i>

Rufous-faced Warbler	2			D				1	<i>Abroscopus albobularis</i>
<b>Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler</b>	1	4h	T		E		H	1	<i>Pomatorhinus erythrocnemis</i>
<b>Taiwan Scimitar Babbler</b>	3		T		E			2	<i>Pomatorhinus musicus</i>
<b>Taiwan Wren-Babbler</b>	-	2h		D			H	-	<i>Pnoepyga formosana</i>
Rufous-capped Babbler	3	2h		D	E			1	<i>Stachyris ruficeps praecognita</i>
<b>Taiwan Hwamei</b>	1							1	<i>Garrulax taewanus</i>
<b>White-whiskered Laughingthrush</b>	2			D				3	<i>Garrulax morrisonianus</i>
<b>Steere's Liocichla</b>	4			D				2	<i>Liocichla steerii</i>
<b>Taiwan Barwing</b>	1			D				1	<i>Actinodura morrisoniana</i>
Dusky Fulvetta	1	2h		>D	E			1	<i>Alcippe b. brunnea</i>
Grey-cheeked Fulvetta	2			>D	E			1	<i>Alcippe m. morrisonia</i>
<b>Taiwan Siberia</b>	4			D				3	<i>Heterophasia auricularis</i>
<b>Taiwan Yuhina</b>	4			D				3	<i>Yuhina brunneiceps</i>
White-bellied Erpornis	1						H	1	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>
Japanese White-eye	6		T	D	E		H	2	<i>Zosterops japonica simplex</i>
Eurasian Nuthatch	1			D				1	<i>Sitta europaea</i>
Javan Myna (I)	8		T	>D	>E	Z	>H	3	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
Common Myna (I)	1					Z		2	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Black-collared Starling (I)	1		T					2	<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>
White-cheeked Starling	1		T					1	<i>Sturnus cineraceus</i>
<b>Taiwan Whistling Thrush</b>	1	1h	T					1	<i>Myophonus insularis</i>
Pale Thrush	6		T	D	E			2	<i>Turdus pallidus</i>
Dusky Thrush	1		T					1	<i>Turdus naumanni</i>
<b>Taiwan Shortwing</b>	-	2h		D				-	<i>Brachypteryx goodfellowi</i>
<b>Johnstone's Robin</b>	3			D				1	<i>Luscinia johnstoniae</i>
Oriental Magpie-Robin (I)	1		T					1	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Plumbeous Redstart	2		T				H	2	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosa affinis</i>
White-tailed Robin	1			D				1	<i>Myiomela leucura montium</i>
Vivid Niltava	2			D				1	<i>Niltava vivida vivida</i>
Brown Dipper	2		T				H	1	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
Plain Flowerpecker	1		T					1	<i>Dicaeum concolor uchidai</i>
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	8		T	>D	>E	Z	>H	3	<i>Passer montanus</i>
White-rumped Munia	1				E			2	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
Scaly-breasted Munia	2				E		>H	1	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
Eastern Yellow Wagtail	2					>Z	>H	1	<i>Motacilla tschutschensis</i>
Grey Wagtail	1				E			1	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
White Wagtail	4		T		>E		H	2	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Buff-bellied Pipit	1		T					1	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>
Vinaceous Rosefinch	2			D				1	<i>Carpodacus vinaceus formosanus</i>
Yellow-browed Bunting	1		T					1	<i>Emberiza chrysophrys</i>
Black-faced Bunting	1		T					1	<i>Emberiza spodocephala</i>

#### MAMMALS

Taiwan Macaque	2			D				1	<i>Macaca cyclopis</i>
Taiwan Giant Flying Squirrel	1				E			1	<i>Petaurista philippensis</i>
Red-bellied Tree Squirrel	3		T				H	1	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus</i>
Taiwan Striped Squirrel	3			D				1	<i>Tamiops maritimus</i>
Perny's (Long-nosed) Squirrel	2			D				1	<i>Dremomys pernyi</i>

**OTHER ANIMALS** included Swinhoe's Japalura and other lizards, fiddler crabs, etc.

This list represents those birds and other animals seen by party members of this tour.

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