



Birding Formosa October, 2015

A ten day tour of spectacular Taiwan from sea level to 10,000 feet above



The beautiful Formosan Magpie, one of 20+ bird species that can only be seen in Taiwan

(Text and photos by Nature Trip guides Eddie Bartley and Noreen Weeden)

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Itinerary:

- October 22 Arriving Taoyuan International Airport
- October 23 Taipei City Tour and YIBF Welcome Party
- October 24 Bird watching in Taipei Guandu Nature Park
- October 25 Hualien & Taroko National Park (2000+ m/6600+ ft.)
- October 26 Mt. Hehuan Route (3000+ m/9900+ ft.)
- October 27 Huisan (1000 m/3300 ft.)
- October 28 Alishan (2000+ m/6600+ ft.), Tataka, Yushan (2600m/8600 ft.)
- October 29 Zengwen River Estuary (Cigu), Tainan
- October 30 -31 Dasyueshan National Forest (Anmashan) (2000 m/6600 ft.)
- November 1 Guguan Hot Springs region
- November 2 Taipei Botanical Gardens
- November 3 Cultural Extension - Taipei City Tour
- November 4 Cultural Extension - Taipei City Tour



Taiwan Barbet (*Psilopogon nuchalis*)

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October 22, 2015 Taipei: Our group arrived at Taoyuan from the 14 hour direct flight from San Francisco about 11:00pm where we were greeted by our guide Richard Chen of Birding@Taiwan who escorted us to our centrally located hotel in the “Old Walled City” district in Taipei.

October 22, 2015 Taipei: A good way to decompress from the long flight, drop some jet lag and get introduced to parkland birds is to spend a day in Taipei’s beautifully designed City Parks. Peace Park was but a short stroll from our hotel and we began our birding adventure there. A light drizzle was a remnant of a category 5 Typhoon Koppu that had wreaked havoc the week before in the Philippines. Almost immediately we were met with the raucous calls of Gray Treepie while introduced Japanese White Eyes lit up the canopy. Light Vented Bulbul, Eurasian Tree Sparrows, and Common Magpie joined in. A pleasant surprise was a juvenile Crested Goshawk that ignored our close examination. Both Black Crowned Night Heron and Malaysian Night Heron stalked the grounds and ponds where Common Moorhen protected young and Little Egret waded. Viewing aboriginal artifacts and interesting Taiwan natural history displays at the gorgeous National Taiwan Museum was the perfect break when the drizzle picked up momentarily.



Malaysian Night-heron

(Gorsachius melanolophus)

Formerly uncommon, this handsome heron has become a regular in Taipei parklands

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After a delicious Hakka style lunch some of our group shared a fun pilgrimage to the former home where one of our participants lived for a year as a pre-teen. We strolled nearby Daan Park on the return trip and added a number of new trip birds including the Oriental Turtle-Dove, Black Drongo, Taiwan Barbet, and Common Kingfisher.



The Deputy Mayor of Taiwan greeted us and our group was recognized at the Taipei International Bird Festival's Welcome Dinner at Taipei's City Hall. We met attendees representing many Asian countries and also enjoyed good food and entertainment by local youth.

Our group at the Taipei International Bird Festival Welcome Party at Taipei's City Hall – jet lagged for sure but happy to attend.

Below: Opening ceremonies of the TIBF



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Day 1: October 24, 2015 Taipei – Jinshan – Hualien

Kick off of the tour: at 7:30 AM sharp we hopped on the magical birding bus and headed to the Taipei International Bird Festival site at Guandu Nature Park. Before checking out the festival grounds we toured the wetlands loop and were treated with great views of White-breasted Waterhen, Brown Shrike, an Osprey fishing over the ponds, Eurasian Teal, Eastern Spot-billed Duck, Intermediate and Cattle Egret, Spotted Doves, Brown Shrike and Daurian Redstart. A juvenile Oriental Honey Buzzard whizzed just overhead startling us. Gray Plover, Common Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilt and Common Greenshank were easily scoped while Sacred Ibis flew in the distance.

It was about this time when one of our members spotted a juvenile falcon perched at a distance but just above the festival grounds. We debated about the identification: too small for a Peregrine, not a Kestrel or a Hobby but a falcon- we guessed it to be was very rare here. As we approached the grounds for a closer look our guide ran into a raptor researcher friend and he confirmed one of our guesses that it was an Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*), accidental to Taiwan and a surprise to everyone. We were able to scope the bird for almost an hour and many festival attendees shared a “lifer” while the opening ceremonies proceeded.



Amur Falcon presiding over the opening ceremonies of the Taipei International Bird Festival

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A special detour was made to the Qingshui Wetlands near Jinshan to see the lone, endangered Siberian Crane who showed up in December of 2014 - now in adult plumage. Our second rarity of the day- it flared dark underwing tips to flush Spot-billed Ducks from its feeding area while the usual assortment of Herons and Egrets kept their distance from this giant. An adjacent pond provided opportunities to study Intermediate Egret and a bobbing Eastern Yellow-wagtail; Barn Swallows swirled and a Black-eared Kite flew off in a hurry into misty skies.

This much celebrated bird is one of only about 4,000 in the world today and the first record for Taiwan



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Day 2: October 25, 2015 – Hualien and Taroko National Park

After a very comfortable night's sleep, in early dawn light a Tyto Owl streaked across our Hualien guest house yard for several early risers. We pieced together that it was an Eastern Grass Owl (*Tyto longimembris*) on a late run. We had first sightings for the trip of the endemic Styan's Bulbul and Red-collared Dove before a wonderful breakfast including home grown bird friendly coffee. Our energy stores renewed, we set off for the famous marbled Taroko Gorge with a first stop in the Buluowan area. Immediately we were on a large mixed flock moving through a row of trees which included Gray-capped Woodpeckers, a female Black-naped Monarch, Varied, Green-backed and at least 4 endemic and very handsome Yellow Tit. A Black Eagle soared overhead and then a female or juvenile Brambling was discovered plus an assortment of Bulbul and a small flock of Taiwan Yuhina. A hotspot of activity! Eventually the flock moved on and we moved up to the Visitor's Center area to admire the fantastic mountain views. A short while later we joined another mixed flock of local birders and birds including White-eared Sibia, Barbet and three Gray-chinned Minivet chasing each other at surprising speed.

Varied Tit (*Poecile varius castaneiventris*)



Yellow Tit (*Parus Holsti*)



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A hike along the Taroko Gorge is simply not-to-be-missed when visiting Taiwan. The word “gorgeous” was likely coined to describe this place.



The sheer marble sides of the steep canyons are awe inspiring. Plus, you get to wear these amusing blue hard hats (as if that would help in a marble boulder slide ;).

Plumbeous Redstarts are common along the Lushui River deep below us and this was our first opportunity to hear and see Taiwan Whistling thrush. A few participants had distant but very nice looks at Little Forktail. Both Pacific and Barn Swallows chattered from the cliff sides above us.

Taiwan Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus insularis*)

Plumbeous Redstart (*Phoenicurus fuliginosus*)



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Higher up, above the tributary Liwu River, butterflies were abundant on flowers, Crested Goshawks flew overhead and we saw the first Macaques of the trip. Bulbuls at this altitude are most likely endemic Styan's Bulbul although hybridization with Light-vented Bulbuls occurs so you have to check carefully. We enjoyed better looks at White-eared Sibia in this area as well.



Styan's Bulbul (*Pycnonotus taivanus*)



White-eared Sibia (*Heterophasia auricularis*)

Our last stops of the day took us to the highest elevation we would reach during the trip (3,275 meters or ~ 10,750 feet) – the very popular Alpine hiking areas at Hehuanshan (Mt. Hehuan). Here we were able to see species acclimated to these heights including endemic White-whiskered Laughing Thrush, Collared Bush Robin and Taiwan Rose Finch. The heather-like vegetation surrounded by conifers is fantastic here as well. We enjoyed wonderful looks at a bold Brambling as it hiked along the trail ahead of us as well as Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler and a brief look at a Winter Wren.

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Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*)



Taiwan Rosefinch (*Carpodacus formosanus*)

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Day 3: October 26, 2015 - Cingjing Farm, Rueiyan River to Huisan

A Taiwan Whistling-Thrush whistled loudly from our balcony at the Cingjing Farm – certainly a more pleasant way to wake than our alarm clock. A pre-breakfast hike along a muddy mountain trail to listen for Taiwan Hill Partridge, Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler and Taiwan Barwing in the Rueiyan River Major Wildlife Habitat was on the pre-breakfast menu. The trail's footing was difficult in parts as a result of the recent typhoon torrents and the dozens of water system hoses along the soggy path. Birds inside the forest were skulking more than hoped for and were generally quiet but eventually we got glimpses of Babbler, Barwing, flocks of Yuhina and a Winter Wren popped up momentarily. Hill Partridge were calling and seemingly close but none were seen through the dense foliage. We had better luck along the paved road which opened the canopy. A pair of Oriental Honey Buzzards buzzed the tree tops and we had fun picking out species in a gregarious mixed flock: Green-backed Tit, a male and then a female of Fire-breasted Flowerpecker. Finally saw instead of just hearing Rufous-capped Babbler, Japanese White-eyes and Steere's Liocichla were in the mix as well.



Steere's Liocichla (*Liocichla steerii*)



Green-backed Tit (*Parus monticolus*)

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Returned to the farm for a hearty breakfast and then we hiked the grounds



and surrounds. The warming day provided early thermals - we were treated to the best swift and swallow show of the trip. Swifts included Silver-backed Needletail, Pacific and House; four species of swallows mixed in the swirls including Barn, Pacific, Striated and Asian House Martin. Fantastic looks of three Oriental Honey Buzzards (left) who soared low and slow for several minutes directly above us.

The township of Puli is an important crossroads surrounded by hundreds of small agricultural plots of rice and other staples of the diverse Taiwanese diet. We birded in a private area outside of town where we saw Black-naped Monarch, flocks of Black Bulbul, Barbets and first looks at Taiwan Scimitar Babbler. Some had a glimpse of a male Maroon Oriole. After arriving at Huisan Forest Reserve we enjoyed many views of a male Swinhoe's Pheasant feeding in fern with two hens.



Swinhoe's Pheasant (*Lophura swinhoii*)

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Day 4: October 27, 2015 Huisan – Alishan

As we gathered for hike before breakfast we heard a commotion and were rewarded with a gathering of a group of nine (!) Formosan Magpies. At one point 5 landed on a light pole at the hotel where we stayed. Two members of our group had an identifiable recording of a Mountain Scops-owl they had heard pre-dawn. A steep downhill hike revealed Grey-headed woodpecker, White-tailed Robin, Sibia and we heard both Scimitar Babblers species but it was relatively quiet. After breakfast we dropped down about 200 meters in elevation to an open meadow surrounded by forest where we had nice looks at a female Vivid Niltava, a very high soaring Mountain Hawk-Eagle plus many butterfly species fluttering by and nectaring on many flowering bushes.



Sun Moon Lake is a beautiful stop on to way to Yushan National Forest and the architecturally striking Visitor's Center is definitely worth a brief stop. Continuing towards Yushan we quickly began gaining elevation we stopped at Guanfen Scenic Point for a picnic with a wonderful view. Only a few bird sightings but White-bellied Green Pigeons were whistling from the hillside. At Takaka there is a long boardwalk trail that winds its way along the roadway where we've always had good luck. Usual birds here are Large-billed Crow, Eurasian Nutcracker and White-whiskered Laughingthrush which are over-acclimated to people as they beg for food. On this visit we added great looks at Taiwan Fulvetta to the trip list as well as Gray-headed Bullfinch (by a few) and also viewed Liocichla, Black Throated Tits, Eurasian Nuthatch, Collared Bush-Robins and Flamecrest.

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Day 5: October 28, 2015 - Alishan National Scenic Area to Tainan

Most first time visitors to the Alishan area will wake up at 4:00 AM to take the popular and historic Alishan Forest Railway to celebrate the sunrise over Zhushan (Jhushan) from the last and highest rail station. This provides an excellent opportunity for early birders to hike the well trailed grounds and forest area before the crowds return for breakfast.

On this morning we were rewarded with great views of Taiwan Fulvetta and Taiwan Wren Babbler (a.k.a. Cupwing), a species that is usually difficult to see. Many of the more common high elevation endemics that are now becoming familiar were present including Yuhina, Sibia, Liocichla, Barwing, Collared Bush-Robin and Rosefinch. One of our keen observers discovered a couple of Olive-backed Pipits in the trees that we all saw well; Eurasian Jay landed close to us while a Crested Serpent Eagle called nearby.



Taiwan Cupwing (*Pnoepyga formosana*)



Taiwan Fulvetta (*Fulvetta formosana*)

We dropped down to the lowlands via the tea growing Tefuyeh region and spotted raptors along the way including Black Eagle, Eurasian Kestrel and a perched Crested Serpent Eagle. At a hotel rest break with a shop that specialized in exquisite lacquer ware we could hear Gray-headed Bullfinch calling from the shrubbery.

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After yet another delightfully epic lunch we continued to the threatened habitat of the Pheasant Tailed Jacana at the wonderfully designed [Jacana Ecological Education Park](#) near Tainan. Before we exited the bus one of our birders spotted a Long-tailed Shrike perched close but obscured by vegetation that we able to scope. The ponds at the preserve held many herons, egrets, a count of 32 Moorhen but few ducks compared to a visit last spring. A flock of Scaly-breasted Munia bounded about, Light-vented Bulbuls were abundant. We counted at least 24 Jacana of various ages and plumages in the preserve but none retained the impressively long Pheasant-tail of the adult's alternate plumage. The surrounding rice fields held shore birds but, with no convenient pull outs to scope from, it was primarily birding in motion. We did see many Black-winged Stilt, Calidris peeps too far out to identify and at least one Wood Sandpiper closer to the road. Missed birds but had to move on.

Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)



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The Black-faced Spoonbill Center in Qigu (a.k.a. Cigu) is another not-to-be-missed birding hotspot - a governmental effort too. We decided to optimize our chances of seeing the rare Spoonbills by visiting twice. When we first arrived, about 50 young, exuberant students and their chaperones on a field trip were at the observation platforms. The tide was good for shore birding but the sun was low and most all of the birds were very backlit. Did I mention it was loud!? Not ideal conditions for birding but entertaining to watch the excited youngsters giving the scopes a workout and a real tone change from the last few quiet days in the mountains. This birder, for one, was a bit relieved when the large group gathered and headed for the buses a while later. We counted at least 95 of the Spoonbills out on the mudflat and there were many new opportunities to work on shorebird identification. The sun in-the-eyes was not helpful for the mudflat to the west but there were many closer birds too, some east of the platforms. Kentish and Gray Plover, Common Sandpiper, Redshank, three Marsh Sandpiper near enough to Greenshank to make the identification, about a dozen Dunlin. More distant was a Curlew we were able to work out to Eurasian and there were four Godwit but too distant and backlit to safely ID. An Osprey stirred things up for a bit and a Striated Heron spooked up along the near shore. The common herons and egrets were well represented; Two Sacred Ibis were on the edge of the Spoonbill flock. Gulls are surprisingly scarce in Taiwan and we had our only two of the trip here: both Black-headed Gulls. Good numbers and variety of Tern species by comparison including Caspian, Little, Common and Whiskered Tern.



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Day 6: October 29 Zengwen River Estuary to Dasyueshan

Refreshed after a comfortable stay at an elegant hotel in Tainan we returned for morning views at the Spoonbill Preserve at Qigu and were not at all disappointed. Much better light conditions although many of the birds were now further out with the tide. Many of the same species, same individuals likely, but now we were able to work out Little Ringed and (a) Greater Sand Plover; the Godwits turned out to be Bar-tailed and Red-necked Stints were now with the Dunlin. Another bonus was a Black-winged Kite seen well.



Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*)

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The middle of the day was spent in transit from the lowlands back to the mountains. At a rest stop along the way amongst the other columbids we noticed a Eurasian Collared-Dove, an introduced species which has spread throughout the southern U.S. in short order and breeds regularly at our hometown of San Francisco. The eBird filters flagged the entry as unlikely for this area in Taiwan but our guide and others believe they are now common here too.

Brown Dipper habitat outside of Dongshi



Brown Dipper are decidedly not common here, or at least, not at many accessible sites. But we had luck again at a small water fall area outside of Dongshi where we also picked up Collared Finch Bills, White-rumped Munia and our first Gray Wagtail of the trip. On to Dasyueshan National Forest.

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The endemic Swinhoe's Pheasant is a primary target species for birders visiting Taiwan and for good reason. The male of the species are fantastically plumaged creatures! You can feel the love in this excerpt from Mark Brazil's "Birds of East Asia": "large, dark, steel blue with white nuchal crest, large red facial wattle; large white upper-back patch and long white central retrices. Scapulars maroon and wing-coverts fringed metallic blue-green; blue-black back and rump scaled silver- blue, whilst neck has silver grey streaks."



Photography does not capture the magical presence of a Swinhoe's Pheasant (*Lophura swinhoii*)...but that doesn't keep us from trying :) This one at the 23KM marker on the Dasyueshan road.

The Dasyueshan Forest road begins in Dongshi at an elevation of 230 meters and continues 50km rising gradually but steadily to Siaosyueshan at 2600 meters. The park entrance gate is at 35km. Due to the high density of endemism and habitat diversity Taiwanese consider this forest road and adjacent trails the most important bird area of Taiwan and is perhaps the most likely area to encounter other birders outside of the cities.

大雪山

國家森林遊樂區導覽圖 Guide Map of Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area



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Day 7 & 8: October 30 & 31, 2015 Dasyueshan National Forest

“Nocturnalizing” at Dasyueshan (okay, I made that word up)

One of the many bonuses of this region is a higher concentration of animals that are primarily nocturnal - mammals and nocturnally active birds. Each evening, flashlights in hand, it wouldn't take us too long to hear and then see our first Red & White Giant Flying Squirrels. As the reader can guess by the name, these aren't those little flying squirrels of North America that Rocky was named after. Oh no, at over one meter in length and weighing nearly 2 kg these animals are huge by comparison and quite colorful too.

We had luck with owls too. Each evening repeated consistently in the not too distant forest we could clearly hear three consistent hooo-hoo-hew-oooh of a Brown Owl (*Strix leptogrammica*). On one outing we caught the eye shine of a Collared Scops Owl who remained cooperative enough for a photo and then one of our participants exclaimed “I've got something” and indeed she did getting her lamp on a Least Weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) that froze for a few seconds. Sleep pattern disruption is expected on trips like this. One benefit can be hearing owls outside your room. Note at 3:15 AM: Collared Scops Owl duet followed 15 minutes later by a Collared Owlet calling for over 5 minutes.



Collared Scops-Owl (*Otus lettia*)

Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel (*Petaurista alborufus*)

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One of the more amusing, seemingly random, encounters occurred on our second evening of nocturnalizing. We had already been out for about an hour, returning to our rooms when an excited young man ran up and waved us to come check out a squirrel they had in a powerful beam of light. It was a better look than we had before and he and his gregarious friend insisted that we follow them to see another animal they referred to as a wild goat. We knew immediately they were referring to Taiwan Serow, we happily accepted and were off on a fast trek back up the hill we had just came down. Our new friends explained that they were living in the area working in forestry conservation as an “alternative to military service”. Half km turned into another half and our group was having some difficulty keeping up with the fit young men but they kept up a constant chatter of enthusiasm and kept saying “just a little bit further”. As we neared the focal area we gathered, caught our breath and quietly approached...the powerful lamp swept a cliff side and one Serow bolted but another stayed in the light for us to get wonderful looks at what to us seems a rather strange looking creature but perfectly adapted for the mountains of Taiwan.



Taiwan Serow (*Naemorhedus swinhoei*) as seen in March at left and in October at night at right

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Day 7 & 8: October 30 & 31, 2015 Dasyueshan National Forest

Daytime hours we visited a large variety of habitats taking short hikes along trails and the roadway itself. The scenery is magnificent particularly at the higher elevations and, during the few times birding went slow, provided opportunities to look around and appreciate abundantly amazing views.

At the top: the road ends at the 50KM mark at an altitude of 2600 meters and is a lovely area to visit for a few hours which we did twice on this trip. This is the limit of private vehicle travel except with special permission. Maps refer to this as Siaosyueshan but eBird gives the location as Xiaoxueshan. Naturally, there is much variance in English spellings but generally easy to figure out.



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Our visits were relatively quiet here compared to prior trips but we enjoyed much better looks at species already seen such as Flamecrest, Taiwan Fulvetta, Yuhina, Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler, Liocichla and Rosefinch. Coal Tit and Dusky Fulvetta were “trip birds” and we had several large raptor flyovers including Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) or Eastern Buzzard (*Buteo japonicus*) depending on which list you are using. Still working on another Buteo photo which looks good for Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*). Laughingthrush gregariously approached for attention and mixed flocks of beautiful Black-throated and Green-backed Tits were wonderful eye candy.

Mikado, the other pheasant endemic to Taiwan, is much sought after and generally more difficult to see than the Swinhoe's. We knew this going in but hope springs eternal and after our Swinhoe's luck, why not? Arising for pre-dawn drives was admittedly a more blurry experience after our late evening rambles but the group held tight and stayed motionless focusing on areas where at any moment a Mikado might pop out. 20 minutes go by, then another and the focus drifts a bit to other sounds and movement in the early light - Laughing Thrushes, Large-billed Crows playing a game, a large flock of Green-backed Tits moves through, a pair of Gray-headed Bullfinch feed on the side of the road...and then another 20 and then we agree to one more 20 minute wait and then, and then...nothing...no Mikado and no breakfast. Breakfast we could fix and went off to do so but we never did see Mikado on this trip despite hours of patient and impatient waiting...always something to come back for...



Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler (*Horornis acanthizoides*)



Flamecrest (*Regulus goodfellowi*)

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In addition to the excellent nocturnal experiences to be had, day birding around the Dasyueshan Visitor's Center can be very good and we casually birded the area individually and in groups in between outings. On our last morning one in our group was led to a Collared Owlet by a mixed flock of noisy mobsters they had discovered during the day. It was inspired to move on before the rest of us could get on it but another sighting of Reeve's Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*) a.k.a the Barking Deer was discovered by one lucky hiker.

On the way downhill we made several rewarding stops. Hiking along the road at about 1800 meters altitude a couple or three Black-necklaced Scimitar Babblers perched for a moment and then we came on a large assortment of Tits and Yuhina and at least two Rufous-capped Babblers. The flock surrounded us for over five minutes. Butterflies were again prominent especially in the vicinity of the park gate (~1500m) where Yuhina and Tits were present along with a few Sibia and Barbets and an Ashy Wood Pigeon bolted through an opening in the canopy. One last stop before the lowlands at the 23KM marker resulted in a last look for the trip of a Swinhoe's Pheasant, Barbet, Green-backed and Yellow Tit. Goodbye Mountains, hello lower-lands.



Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler (*Megapomatorhinus erythrocnemis*)

Taiwan Yuhina (*Yuhina brunneiceps*)

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Day 9: November 1, 2015 Guguan Hot Springs

At 800 meters, Guguan was the alternate chosen from our original plan to re-visit the more popular birding destination of Wulai whose infrastructure was decimated by not one, but two Category 5 Typhoons over the summer.

Bummer about Wulai but Guguan did not disappoint us especially from the cultural tour aspect. We arrived in the afternoon of the 31st as an aboriginal people's festival was starting up which we attended and greatly enjoyed. Despite the festival sounds reverberating off the river gorge walls, the birding was still good. There were a series of swinging wire rope bridges to cross from one side of the river to the other and at one point we could see a Macaque using it as well. The river itself had a number of birds we were now familiar with such as Gray and White Wagtails, Whistling Thrush, Little Egrets, Plumbeous Redstarts and a much better look at a Striated Heron.

We crossed one of the bridges to a wild ravine area where a group of five Taiwan Bamboo-Partridge (recently listed as a Taiwan endemic) ran across a dry portion of the creek bed. Formosan Magpie and Treepie noisily foraged along one gorge wall while Bronzed Drongo, Barbet and Varied Tit perched in trees on our side of the creek. It was busy with festival goers and locals and a group of performing youth gently asked if they could take pictures with us.



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Day 9: November 1, 2015 Guguan to the Hsinchu Coast and Jincheng Lake

Guguan: A second, much quieter morning visit on the Shaolai Trail added a few nice sightings including good looks at White-bellied Green Pigeon, a close Black-naped Monarch plus another 20 species already mentioned.



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After breakfast we loaded up the Magic Birding Bus during a fast drizzle and headed to the coast to gradually clearing skies. Grabbed a picnic lunch at one of the over five thousand 7-11 stores in Taiwan (Not at all like the American version) so as not to be interrupted during the birding session ahead.

Arriving at Jincheng Lake a little after 11a.m. we quickly scoped the area around the lake before lunch. It was breezy but warm with good light and a fair number of species but, save for Eurasian Coot, nothing new for the trip...yet.

After lunch we climbed the sea wall and Wow! Shorebirds were everywhere along the sand spits and herons and ducks were spread throughout the estuary.



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In the estuary a Garganey was spotted amongst the Spot-bills and Teal; a Purple Heron, lifer for almost everyone, lifted off several times out of the mangrove. A Eurasian Kestrel flushed up a large group of ducks and now we saw there were Mallards amongst them. Common Kingfisher landed close to us; a local birder pointed out a Black-faced Spoonbill way out with a group of Ibis – very uncommon here.

The vegetation along the levee held passerines including Brown Shrike and Plain Prinia. A single wing-barred *Phylloscopus* warbler was studied for at close range and determined to be a locally fairly common Arctic Warbler.

The big show though was the shore birders delight on the sand spits and all that lugging of scopes really paid off here. Plovers were especially well represented with six species including two new to the trip: Lesser Sand Plover and Pacific Golden Plover. Other newbies were a couple of Ruddy Turnstone, a single Terek Sandpiper and a smattering of Sanderlings.



A couple of “panorama” images of the sand spit at Hsinchu. Primarily plovers, also *Calidris* peeps and Turnstones

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We then birded from a road on the land side of the seawall between a series of shallow muddy ponds and Jincheng Lake. We puzzled over a *Calidris* sandpiper feeding alone in a pond near a Stilt. It was gray brown above with white extending into the face and rather prominent supercillium; white rump in flight, dark legs, primaries a little long for Dunlin but that can depend on posture. We considered Baird's but that would be rare here and the bill appeared too long and down curved. Finally dawned that it was a Curlew Sandpiper which also made sense by the muddy coastal wetland choice.

Another *Phylloscopus* warbler, also with a single wingbar, was observed in a row of mangrove but after reviewing photos the best we could get to was Arctic/Kamchatka Leaf/Japanese Leaf Warbler. Two Black-shouldered Kites put on a good show when an Osprey flew in. Outstanding birding altogether with 49 bird species, 19 of shorebirds for our 4 hour effort.



The Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) is small for a Grebe, but not the least in size.

That trait belongs to its New World cousin the Least Grebe (*Tachybaptus dominicus*)

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Evening 9: November 1, 2015 A Gaudi inspired dining experience

We spent the late afternoon traversing to Taipei where Richard had a fun surprise for us to end the day: dinner at the surrealistically inspired Five Dime Driftwood House restaurant in northern Taipei. The misty trip from our hotel in the central district was an opportunity to view some of the city views and architecture we would have missed otherwise. The restaurant architecture and interior Dali and Gaudi inspired interior was a real treat and the many dishes we shared were good to excellent. Everyone had a great time and recommend a visit to this unique dining experience when in Taipei.



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Day 10: November 2, 2015 – City Tour - Taipei Botanical Gardens

Natural phenomenon is one of the primary reasons to travel to far away and exotic places. Early this morning we added “Earthquake” to the list of natural phenomenon experienced while in Taiwan. A gentle rock, as they go, some expressed disappointment not be woken by it. (Being Californians, we woke up said, “earthquake” and, realizing it was not severe, went back to sleep.) By the time we gathered for breakfast, our traveling geologist had an epicenter (Yilan) and estimated magnitude (4.9). Richard missed it as well but then, he was already in motion on his way to meet us for the short trip to the Taipei Botanical Garden.

The exquisitely designed gardens are very popular for both people and birds. Along with the common parkland birds, migration may bring in unusual visitors. The garden is designed with many compact botanical themes and families: Palm, fern, succulents, aquatic plants, forbs, gymnosperms, plants related to Buddhism and the Zodiac, etc. This effect provides a more diverse habitat than would typically be found in nature so avian diversity tends to be high as well.

We entered between the National Historic Museum and the Forestry Research Institute to the Lotus Pond as four Formosan Magpie lit on the decorated edifices. Barbet fed in palm trees and a Common Kingfisher zipped around the pond fishing from bridges and low branches. The usual waders were present including an amusing young Malaysian Night-heron performing an undulating throat dance. A pair of Oriental Magpie Robin boldly foraged the grounds and we found Black-naped Monarch flycatching at eye level.

Birding Formosa – October, 2015

This morning we puzzled through two more Arctic Warblers until we were satisfied they were not something less common. As we entered a relatively open area Noreen glimpsed an unusual flycatcher but after a few minutes of waiting for it to reappear we were urged on to see another sighting.

Reluctance was quickly replaced with delight at the sight of a Collared Scops-Owl perched in the mouth of a tree cavity nearby. The kind couple who alerted us to the owl now waved us back to where we had just been as they were now on an Asian Brown Flycatcher. “A migrant” they shared. Fun to think about this tiny ½ ounce relatively plain old world flycatcher perhaps making its way across the 110 mile Taiwan Strait or, just as likely, island hopping thousands of kilometers from Siberia or Korea and through the Japanese archipelago. What a feat!



Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*)



Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*)

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And on that lovely note we ended the official “birding” portion of the tour and moved on to some of the cultural highlights planned for the trip.

All this birding works up an appetite so the next stop on the Taipei City tour was a welcome gustatory delight. One of the world’s premiere dumpling houses, Din Tai Fung in Taipei 101, is Michelin Guide rated, a TripAdvisor “Travelers Choice” amongst additional awards and all well-deserved. The artful dishes and impeccable service were topped only by the deliciousness of it all. Afterward we spent time watching the master dumpling wranglers at work through the glass walled dumpling arena and had plenty of time to explore the art, foody galleries and high end shops of the Taipei 101 mall.



After a brief break, the ultra-modern Taipei MRT whisked us to the historic Wanhua district for a visit to the famous sites of Longshan Temple, Old Bopilao Street, Herb Alley and the Huaxi Street Night Market. No visit to Taipei is complete without sampling the street food. After the epic lunch we enjoyed some lighter fare: Bubble Teas, skewers and a rice cakes filled with red-bean, chocolate, cream. Yummy!

Birding Formosa – October, 2015

November 3 & 4, 2015 – The Taipei Extension

We spent the next two days primarily using the MRT and our feet to explore, shop and eat our way through Taipei. Even if you are in Taiwan for the nature, we highly recommend setting aside a day or three to visit a few of the many historical, unique and fascinating sites in Taipei and sample the tasty foods.

On this visit we included:

- Chang Kai Check Memorial: plan to spend ½ day here checking out the fascinating exhibits and beautiful grounds
- Mayors Residence Art Salon: delicious lunch in an historic building
- National Palace Museum: One of the finest museums in the world and a very nice restaurant on the grounds (Silks)
- The Confucius and Baoan Temples (UNESCO heritage site) in Datong are well worth a visit

A fun, delicious cultural whirlwind to end the adventure. One more shuttle to the airport at Taoyuan and 12 hours later we were back in San Francisco (before we even left thanks to the dateline), a little dazed, but all of our collective pieces and parts made it home especially memories of many amazing critters and good times with a great group of new and old friends.

The following list includes the 150 species of birds we documented on the trip. **Endemic in bold**, *endemic sub-species in italics*. ♪ = Heard only

Birding Formosa – October, 2015

Oct 24 - Nov 2, 2015

ANSERIFORMES

 Mallard

_____ Eastern Spot-billed Duck

_____ Garganey

_____ Green-winged Teal (Eurasian)

PHEASANTS, GROUSE

Taiwan Partridge

Taiwan Bamboo-Partridge

Swinhoe's Pheasant

GREBES

_____ Little Grebe

HERONS, EGRETS, AND BITTERNS

_____ Gray Heron

_____ Purple Heron

_____ Great Egret

_____ Intermediate Egret

_____ Little Egret

_____ Cattle Egret

_____ Striated Heron

_____ Black-crowned Night-Heron

_____ Malayan Night-Heron

IBISES AND SPOONBILLS

Sacred Ibis (Egyptian)

Black-faced Spoonbill

OSPREY

Osprey

HAWKS, EAGLES, AND KITES

Black-shouldered Kite

_____ Oriental Honey-buzzard

Crested Serpent-Eagle

Mountain Hawk-Eagle

Black Eagle

 Crested Goshawk

Black-eared Kite

Common Buzzard

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Birding Formosa – October, 2015

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RAILS, GALLINULES, CRANES

White-breasted Waterhen

Eurasian Moorhen

Eurasian Coot

Siberian Crane

STILTS AND AVOCETS

_____ Black-winged Stilt

PLOVERS

Pacific Golden-Plover

Black-bellied Plover

Lesser Sand-Plover

Greater Sand-Plover

Kentish Plover

_____ Little Ringed Plover

JACANAS

Pheasant-tailed Jacana

SANDPIPERS AND ALLIES

 Terek Sandpiper

Common Sandpiper

Common Greenshank

Marsh Sandpiper

_____ Wood Sandpiper

Common Redshank

_____ Eurasian Curlew

Bar-tailed Godwit

_____ Ruddy Turnstone

Red-necked Stint

_____ Sanderling

Dunlin

GULLS, TERNS, SKIMMERS

Black-headed Gull

Little Tern

_____ Caspian Tern

Whiskered Tern

Common Tern

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Birding Formosa – October, 2015

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PIGEONS AND DOVES

_____ Rock Pigeon

_____ Ashy Wood-Pigeon

_____ *Oriental Turtle-Dove*

_____ Eurasian Collared-Dove

_____ Red Collared-Dove

_____ Spotted Dove

_____ White-bellied Pigeon

BARN-OWLS

_____ *Australasian Grass-Owl*

OWLS

_____ *Mountain Scops-Owl*

_____ *Collared Scops-Owl*

 Collared Owlet

_____ Brown Wood-Owl

SWIFTS

 Silver-backed Needletail

_____ Pacific Swift

_____ *House Swift*

KINGFISHERS

_____ Common Kingfisher

BARBETS

Taiwan Barbet

WOODPECKERS

_____ Gray-capped Woodpecker

FALCONS AND CARACARAS

_____ Eurasian Kestrel

_____ Peregrine Falcon

_____ Amur Falcon

MINIVETS

_____ Gray-chinned Minivet

[illegible]

Birding Formosa – October, 2015

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[illegible]

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WRENS

Eurasian Wren

DIPPERS

_____ Brown Dipper

BULBULS

Collared Finchbill

 Styan's Bulbul

_____ *Light-vented Bulbul*

Black Bulbul

KINGLETS

Flamecrest

WREN BABBLERS

Taiwan Cupwing

(AKA T. Wren Babbler)

BUSH-WARBBLERS

_____ Rufous-faced Warbler

Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler

PHYLLOSCOPUS WARBLERS

_____ Arctic Warbler

CISTICOLAS / PRINIAS

 Plain Prinia

FULVETTAS / PARROTBILLS

Taiwan Fulvetta

YUHINA / WHITE EYES

Taiwan Yuhina

_____ Japanese White-eye

BABBLERS

_____ *Rufous-capped Babbler*

Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler

Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler

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Birding Formosa – October, 2015

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FULVETTA

_____ *Dusky Fulvetta*

HWAMEI / LAUGHINGTHRUSH, ETC.

_____ **Gray-cheeked Fulvetta**

_____ White-whiskered Laughingthrush

 White-eared Sibia

Steere's Liocichla

_____ Taiwan Barwing

FLYCATCHERS / NITALVAS

_____ Asian Brown Flycatcher

 Vivid Niltava

_____ Taiwan Whistling-Thrush

_____ *Little Forktail*

_____ *White-tailed Robin*

 Collared Bush-Robin

Plumbeous Redstart

Daurian Redstart

_____ Oriental Magpie-Robin (I)

STARLINGS

_____ Crested Myna

_____ Javan Myna

_____ Common Myna

FLOWERPECKERS

Fire-breasted Flow

WAGTAILS AND PIPITS

_____ Eastern Yellow Wagtail

_____ Gray Wagtail

_____ White Wagtail

_____ Olive-backed Pipit

FINCHES

_____ Brambling

_____ *Gray-headed Bullfinch*

Taiwan Rosefinch

OLD WORLD SPARROWS

_____ Eurasian Tree Sparrow

ESTRELIDS

_____ White-rumped Munia

----- Nutmeg Manikin

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