

BIRDING IN TAIWAN

ENDEMIC, BLACK-FACED SPOONBILL, and LANYU ISLAND

March 14–28, 2012

SPECIAL TOUR FOR BCFO MEMBERS; *23 endemic species*



Formosan Magpie

J.A. MacKenzie

To Portuguese sailors in the 16th century, it was *Ilha Formosa*, “Beautiful Island,” because of its lush forests and the jagged peaks of its mountainous spine.

The island we now know as Taiwan, situated approximately 175 km (110 miles) off the coast of China, has diverse habitats; from tidal estuaries, cultivated fields, wetlands, lowland mixed forests, to montane deciduous broadleaf and coniferous forests.

The island still has beautiful forests and mountains, where 23 **endemic** species (*The Clements Checklist of Birds of the World*, updates to Dec. 2010; some authors recognize up to 29) reside: **Taiwan Partridge**, **Swinhoe’s Pheasant**, **Mikado Pheasant**, **Taiwan Barbet**, **Styan’s Bulbul**, **Flamecrest**, **Formosan Whistling-Thrush**, **Taiwan Bush-Warbler**, **Collared Bush-Robin**, **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush**, **Rusty Laughingthrush**, **Taiwan Hwamei**, **Steere’s Liocichla**, **White-whiskered Laughingthrush**, **Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler**, **Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler**, **Taiwan Wren-Babbler**, **Taiwan Barwing**, **Taiwan Fulvetta**, **White-eared Sibia**, **Taiwan Yuhina**, **Yellow Tit**, and **Formosan Magpie**.

Although more than 500 species of birds have been recorded, about 300 can be considered to occur regularly, including more than 60 endemic subspecies. Perhaps 10 of these subspecies are candidates for full endemic species status. Seeing the pheasants, partridge and quail requires some luck, especially for **Taiwan Partridge**. The blue, white and red male **Swinhoe’s Pheasant** is unforgettable, as is the sleek blue-black male

Mikado Pheasant, “King of the Mist.” The shy and secretive **Taiwan Bush-Warbler** will be singing in March, and perhaps not so difficult to see. We will be alert for the fairly common **Taiwan Barbet** and uncommon **Taiwan Hwamei**.

The main focus of the tour is on the resident endemic species and subspecies of Taiwan, and wintering Black-faced Spoonbill. Secondary emphasis is on migrating species, perhaps rare ones. The tour offers the best chance for the most birds in a limited time.

Taiwan is a safe, welcoming country, with good infrastructure, a strong conservation movement, classic mountain scenery, friendly people, wonderful food and much to offer visitors.

LEADERS: SIMON LIAO, Honourary Chairman, Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan.

SUMMARY:

- 3 to 8 participants
- Price includes return Vancouver-Taiwan flights;
- Major habitats of the west coast, central mountains, Taroko Gorge and the southeast;
- Moderate pace;
- Mostly easy to moderate walking; some hilly terrain but no strenuous, rough hiking;
- Accommodation with private bathrooms;
- Chilly at high elevations, especially at night; warm to hot and humid at low elevations;
- Spring weather can be unsettled; adjustments to the itinerary may be necessary.



ITINERARY

15 March (Thursday), Day 1

Fly EVA Air at 1:45 **a.m.**, from Vancouver to Taipei. It will be necessary to be at Vancouver International Airport by 11:30 p.m. on the evening of **March 14**, for flight check-in.

16 March (Friday), Day 2

Arrive Taiwan Taoyuan (formerly Chiang Kai-shek) International Airport (situated 40 km west of Taipei, in Taoyuan County), at 5:45 a.m. Despite the early arrival hour, this will be an easy day. After clearing the arrival formalities and collecting our luggage, will transfer to our vehicle, drive south to wetlands, where we will look for shorebirds, long-legged waders, pipits, wagtails and other species of open country. We will visit Lugang, the

second-oldest city in Taiwan, and the Matsu Temple, dedicated to Matsu, goddess of the sea. After lunch, we will drive to the hawk-watch station on Bagua Mountain to get our first look at migrating Gray-faced Buzzards as they pass overhead. Night at Formosa Hotel, Changhua.

17 March (Saturday), Day 3

Morning drive up to Bagua Mountain on the outskirts of Changhua city to experience the colourful and busy Gray-faced Buzzard Bird Fair. The hawks migrate by the thousands along the mountain ridge, to Japan and beyond, some singly, some in large flocks. The Fair, in celebration of the spring return of the hawks and other birds, is the major event of the year of BCFO's partner, the Changhua Wild Bird Society. We are assured of a warm welcome. In the afternoon, drive to Huisun Forest Reserve, 770 m (2530 ft.) elevation. Birding in the Reserve for the rest of the day, looking for **Formosan Magpie**, **Taiwan Barbet** Gray Treepie, Gray-chinned Minivet, Gray-capped Woodpecker. Night in Huisun Forest Reserve.

18 March (Sunday), Day 4

Early morning birding at Huisun; watch for Malayan Night-Heron which often forages on the lawn. Try for **Formosan Magpie** and Maroon Oriole near the station entrance. Leaving Huisun after breakfast, we backtrack somewhat, then continue eastward through Puli, the geographic center of Taiwan, and climb again through Chingjing, elev. 1750 m (5740 ft.) to the Hehuanshan Forest Recreation Area, elev. 3275 m (10,750 ft.), the highest elevation of the tour, just inside the western edge of Taroko National Park. (*"Shan," means "mountain" or "hill" in Mandarin; in this case, "mountain."*) We will look for **White-whiskered Laughingthrush**, **Flamecrest**, **Yellow Tit**, **Taiwan Bush-Warbler**, Alpine Accentor, Vinaceous Rosefinch, and Coal Tit *Periparus ater ptilosus*, the crested Taiwan endemic sub-species. Drive down and eastward through Taroko. Night in the park at the Leader Taroko Village Hotel in the Buluowan valley, elev. 485 m (1592 ft.)

19 March (Monday), Day 5

We will bird the eastern end of Taroko National Park, looking for **Styan's Bulbul**, Chinese Bamboo Partridge, Maroon Oriole, Dusky Fulvetta and owls near our hotel. We will visit the spectacular Taroko "Swallow Grotto." The Taroko gorges are among of the scenic wonders of Asia, created by immense tectonic forces combined with erosion by the Liwu River. We will watch for Brown Dipper, Little Forktail, and Fork-tailed Swift among the hundreds of House Swifts. Second night at Buluowan.

20 March (Tuesday), Day 6

Early morning birding in the Buluowan area, looking for migrant species. We will exit through the Taroko Park's

East Gate, turn south to Hualien and drive along Taiwan's scenic east coast, crossing the Tropic of Cancer to Taitung city with birding stops along the way. Near Chihshiang, we will look for the endemic Taiwan subspecies of the native Ring-necked Pheasant. Migrant pipits and Oriental Skylark are also possible. Night near Taitung city.

21 March (Wednesday), Day 7

Morning birding in the Taitung area, then drive south to Kenting with birding stops in Kenting National Park, in Taiwan's tropical "far south". Night at Masalu Hotel, Kenting.

22 March (Thursday), Day 8

Birding in the Kenting area, including Long Luan Tan (Lake), looking for Ruddy-breasted Crake, White-breasted Waterhen and other wetland species. Endemic **Styan's Bulbul** is easily found in the Kenting area. Distinctively-shaped Taichienshan (mountain) is the first height of land that northward-bound migrants see as they approach Taiwan; we will watch for both common and unusual species. Night in the Tainan/Chiku area

23 March (Friday), Day 9

We will spend the morning in wetland habitat. Black-faced Spoonbills winter in the Tainan-Chiku wetlands. In April, they will begin to depart for their breeding areas in Korea. We will also look for Great Knot, Common Greenshank, Redshank, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt and Curlew Sandpiper among the many shorebirds present.

We will continue north to the Kwantien Pheasant-tailed Jacana Reserve where in addition to the jacanas, we may also find Chinese Pond-Heron, Cinnamon and Yellow Bitterns, Greater Painted-Snipe and perhaps a transient Swinhoe's Snipe which we have found here twice previously. In the late afternoon, we will re-cross the Tropic of Cancer, turn east and begin to climb the lower slopes of Alishan, stopping in Kwanghua village, elev. 1,000 m (3,300 ft.). This is an area of private property where one land owner has established a viewing station for **Swinhoe's Pheasant** and **Taiwan Partridge**. The partridge is the most shy and difficult of Taiwan's gallinaceous birds to find, but we have an excellent chance of seeing it from viewing blinds at dusk. **Rusty Laughingthrush**, **Black-necklaced** and **Taiwan Scimitar-Babblers** can also be found in the area. Night in Kwanghua.

24 March (Saturday), Day 10

Descend to lowlands, then drive north and begin to climb to Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area, in the Anmashan mountain range, with birding on Mt. Tahsueh Road along the way. Arriving at Dasyueshan, walk Trail 210, elev. 2000 m. (6600 feet) looking for

Mikado Pheasants, Collared Bush-Robin, Green-backed Tit, Brown Bullfinch, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Varied and Black-throated Tits. Night in Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area.

25 March (Sunday), Day 11

Early morning birding at higher elevation, Hsiaolaishan (Shiaosyueshan), 2600 m (8,530 ft.); look for **White-whiskered Laughingthrush, Taiwan Fulvetta, Vinaceous Rosefinch, Gray-headed Bullfinch** and other species of high mountains. Second night in Dasyueshan National Forest Recreation Area. Return to lowlands; bird our way north. Night in Taipei.

26 March (Monday), Day 12

Morning birding in Dasyueshan, then return to Taipei for the night.

27 March (Tuesday), Day 13

Drive to Yeliou Geopark, a headland on the northeast coast of Taiwan. Spring migration will be underway, and the vegetated areas of Yeliou constitute a “migrant trap” where unusual species on their way to Japan and Siberia might be found. After lunch, we will continue east to the Yilan area, where Slaty-legged Crake can often be found, as well as migrants headed north. Night at Yilan Traditional Arts Center, Yilan. (This day and the next will be somewhat flexible, if there is word of any super-rarities that we may want to chase.)

28 March (Wednesday), Day 14

After breakfast, more birding in Yilan or Yeliou area, then drive west toward the airport. If we still have not found **Formosan Whistling-Thrush** or Brown Dipper, there is one more place to look. Supper. Continue to Taiwan Taoyuan International Airport to await our EVA Airways departure at 11:55 p.m., to Vancouver; arriving at 7:25 p.m. the same day.



Included in price: Guiding; air tickets, land transportation; vehicle and driver, gas, meals, accommodation, entrance tickets, tips except as noted below, Taiwan bird checklist.*

*Not included in price: Personal items, any snacks, or alcoholic beverages that you order, *tip for driver if driver is an additional person (we suggest NT\$152 or C\$5.00 per person per day). In Taiwan, it is customary for participants to tip the driver at the end of the trip. Our leaders do not expect to be tipped.*

COST PER PERSON,
From Vancouver, BC, Canada: 14 days
\$4590 (sharing); \$5040 (single)

DEPOSIT: \$500

 **For further information, please contact:**

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