Full Detailed Itinerary - Taiwan: Formosan Endemics

Day 1: Arrival

The tour begins at Taoyuan International Airport. We'll spend one night in a nearby hotel. No birding is planned for today.

Day 2: Shimen to Tainan

We start the day by exploring the lowlands and relatively developed west coast. A stop at Shimen may reveal the electric blue Formosan Whistling-Thrush and the impressive Taiwan Blue Magpie, before we head farther south to the coastal wetlands of Tainan. By this afternoon we will be enjoying the stunning spectacle of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl near Tainan. Our main quarry will be late Black-faced Spoonbills that may still be hanging around. The spoonbill is not the only rare bird here. Other migrants that we will look for include Red-throated Pipit, Oriental Reed Warbler, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Spot-billed Duck, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Tufted Duck, Hen Harrier, Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser and Greater Sand-plovers, Pacific Golden Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Asiatic Dowitcher, Gray-tailed Tattler, Red-necked Stint, Long-toed Stint, Dunlin, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Great and Red Knots, and Common and Spotted Redshanks. The night will be spent in Tainan.

Day 3: Tainan to Alishan via Pingtung County

After more coastal and wetland birding, we will head north to Alishan County. In the afternoon we go to an incredible blind that regularly delivers both Swinhoe's Pheasant and Taiwan Partridge. After dark – if the weather is good and energy levels permit – we might do a night-walk for owls and flying-squirrels, as this area is great for both. We have one night in Alishan.

Day 4: Alishan to Wushe via Yushan NP

We'll depart early so that we can be at the magical Yushan National Park at the crack of dawn. Although this will be our first time in the mountains, and there will be loads of new birds, our main quarry this morning will be the incredible Mikado Pheasant. Other wanted specialties here include Golden Parrotbill and the distinctive local owstoni form of Gray-headed Bullfinch. After the morning is complete, we will head through to the Chingjing area of Wushe township and visit one of a myriad of sites that should deliver us some mid-altitude birds. Exactly where we go will depend on what we have seen already, but Ao Wan Da or Huisun forest reserves are good options.

Day 5: Wushe area

Today we have a full day to explore this wonderful area. We will go over the highest road pass in Taiwan, looking for high altitude endemics, including the White-whiskered Laughingthrush and Collared Bush-Robin. The pass also holds Alpine Accentor and Taiwan Rosefinch. We'll then continue down into the scenic Taroko Gorge to see the endemic Styan's Bulbul and admire the scenery. After lunch, we'll bird our way back to Wushe, stopping to look for birds like Taiwan Bush-Warbler, Taiwan Yuhina, the moustached White-eared Sibia, the tail-less Taiwan Wren-Babbler, Steere's Liocichla, and Taiwan Barwing. Joining the endemics in the mixed species parties are Taiwan Vivid Niltava, Black-throated Tit, and Brown Bullfinch.

The newly split endemic Taiwan Thrush, with its snow-white head, will be another target, but it is always a tricky bird to find.

Day 6: Wushe to Dashueshan

After a final morning exploring the Wushe area, we head to the impressive Dashueshan, which literally means ‘Big Snow Mountain’. This area is also one of the best general birding areas in Taiwan. We will enjoy three nights here.

Days 7-8: Dashueshan

Local photographers have done an incredible job of making some of Taiwan’s most spectacular yet normally skittish birds remarkably easy to see here. First and foremost among these are the spectacular pheasants. The white-backed Swinhoe’s Pheasant is regular at stakeouts along the road. The pheasants are called “the kings of the mist” in local parlance, a celebration of their elegant plumage and secretive nature. The birds themselves are bold and unafraid, and you will not likely find easier pheasants anywhere in the world to photograph and enjoy at leisure. The common but shy Taiwan Partridge is also frequently heard and often seen along this road. Although the game birds are the stars, we have the opportunity to search more many of the interior forest species including some recently split taxa such as the noisy Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, furtive Taiwan Shortwing, scarce and stunning Taiwan Thrush, dapper little Taiwan Cupwing, inquisitive Taiwan Fulvetta, spectacled Flamecrest, and stunning Steere’s Liochichla, as well as a bevy of tits, babblers, drongos, and other flock species. The mixed broadleaved forests ought to reveal some garrulous laughing-thrushes including hopefully Rufous-crowned and Rusty Laughingthrushes. Night drives here can be interesting, and as well as owls, we will search for Red-and-white Giant Flying Squirrel, Taiwan Serow and maybe even a Hog-nosed Ferret-Badger.

Day 9: Dashueshan to Huben

On last morning in Dashueshan will give us another shot at any montane endemics we may still be missing; the stunning surroundings of this magnificent area make it a pleasure to explore. The day draws to a close in the western lowlands of Daoliou County.

Day 10: Huben to Taoyuan

Our main quarry this morning is the spectacular Fairy Pitta. Other species occurring here include the secretive Malayan Night Heron, Rusty Laughingthrush, Black-necklaced Scimitar Babbler, and many more. After a morning in this area, we head back to Taoyuan International Airport, where the tour draws to a close. We’ll arrive by late afternoon, in time for most international connections.

Tour Extension 1

Day 1: Arrival

After arrival in Taipei (arrival at Taoyuan before 5 pm required) we will make our way through to Keelung Port where we will eat dinner and board the ferry for the Matsu archipelago, located along the migrant-laden coast of mainland China. We overnight in comfortable cabins on the ferry, which arrives at the two square km Dongyin Island the following morning (sometimes it makes a stop at another island en route). Migration birding can be fickle, but we hope for good conditions during our stay.

Days 2-3: Dongyin

With two full days to explore Dongyin we will hit all the main spots hoping for some great birds. The variety of buntings can sometimes be amazing, with Little, Black-faced, Chestnut, Japanese Yellow, Yellow-breasted, and Yellow-browed all possible. The scrubby hillsides hold potential for Narcissus, Gray-streaked, and Asian Brown Flycacthers, Common Rosefinch, Oriental Greenfinch, and if we are lucky, perhaps a rarer Mugimaki or Yellow-rumped Flycatcher. Shorebirds can also be found: Little Whimbrel, Red-necked Stint, and Terek Sandpiper are frequent visitors, and while targeting those, we'll keep our ears and eyes out for other migrants. We overnight on the tiny islet where we may see the spectacular blue bioluminescence that makes the rocky coastline sparkle by night.

Day 4: Dongyin to Nangang

Today we take a two hour ferry journey from Dongyin to the larger Nangang island. With additional shorebird habitat and some slightly different habitats we hope to find some different birds.

Day 5: Nangang to Taipei

After some last minute birding, we transfer from Nangang to Taipei's Songshan Airport in downtown Taipei via a short flight. We will swing over to the Botanical Gardens where we hope to catch up with the resident Malayan Night-Heron, Light-vented Bulbul, and Japanese White-eye, as well as our first endemic, Taiwan Barbet. The city parks may be holding thrushes or other good passage migrants. We head over the hills north of Taipei for the night, where we enjoy an evening of Dim-sum, and maybe some of the unique Taiwanese dumplings.

Day 6: Yehliu to Taoyuan

We will spend the morning birding the Yehliu Peninsula which is the best migrant trap on mainland Taiwan. What may be around is impossible to guess, but over the years Yehlui has hosted many unusual birds, and is a regular stopover for for Siberian Rubythroat, Asian Stubtail, and more. We have some other spots to try depending on how our luck holds at Yehliu, before heading to Taoyuan International Airport, where we meet up with those joining our main tour.

Toll free from the USA & Canada: (800) 348-5941

International number: +1-409-515-9110

Toll free from the UK: +0800-046-5654

Email: info@tropicalbirding.com