

Tropical Birding Tours

Taiwan: Formosan Endemics and Migrants Custom BWC 2024



Tour Guide: Ben Knoot



Tour Introduction

"Hey Ben, wana go to Taiwan?" ... that's how this fun adventure started for me...for two of the guests, it started with a weeklong visit with family but on the 19th, three guests and I along with our local guide embarked on a pretty epic custom sojourn across Taiwan, looking to photograph migrants and as many endemics as we could find.

The tour STARTED with an overnight ferry to the wonderful little island of Dongyin. We spent a few days on this island catching migrants seeking refuge in the first bit of green they see after crossing a vast and expansive oceanic plain. Here we were hit with some tough weather but overall, some decent migration activity, especially on one of the mornings. We then boarded another ferry, this time to Nangan. On this much larger island we actually only needed a few days as well so after scouring the island for all we could find, we got organized and boarded an air bound vessel (I like these better than the ones that float on the water - hahaha) and took off towards the mainland for the rest of our tour.

Once we arrived in Taipei we had a quick stop in Yeliou for a rather interesting interesting location, a geopark that specialized in odd sandstone structures...whacky...but very cool! After a nice morning there we returned to Taipei, picked up our final man and thus, the main tour began. Our 10-day trip across mainland Taiwan took us to some remarkable locations and habitats. I have to say...I have never had a tour with so much rain. I think we had rain most days and when it rained, it poured. Despite this however, the guests attitudes remained high spirited courtesy of our great local guide, fun dining experiences and the overall beauty of this country. Our goal with this tour was to photograph as much as possible and I think I can speak for all of the guests when I say that I thought we did incredibly well. We were able to see and photograph many of the Taiwan endemics as well as a handful of migrants and other asian specialties. Some day I hope to get back to this country and explore more of what it has to offer but for now I can say for certain that Taiwan was an incredible experience.

Itinerary

April 20th	Arrival in Taipei/Overnight Ferry to Dongyin
April 21st.	Dongyin
April 22nd.	Dongyin
April 23rd.	Dongyin to Nangan by Ferry
April 24th	Nangan to Taipei by Flight/END Extension
April 25th.	Yeilou to Taiyuan/START Main Tour
April 26th	Tainan Area
April 27th	Alishan
April 28th	Wushe/Chingjing
April 29th	Wushe/Chingjing
April 30th	Dashueshan
May 1st	Dashueshan
May 2nd	Dashueshan
May 3rd	Huben/Douliou
May 4th	Huben to Taipei/END of Tour



Tour Summary

<u>Days 1-3 (April 20th - 23rd): Overnight Ferry to Dongyin and Dongyin Island</u>

Today we had one mission, catch our overnight ferry to our first island, Dongyin. After a fun local dinner by the ferry terminal, we boarded our accommodation for the night (that sounds funny but was actually quite fun), settled in and woke up to a stunning sunrise scene over Dongyin. Over the course of our time in Dongyin, we would visit several spots numerous times during the day and then the same spots again on different days. For the sake of ease, the locations we visited were:

- The Playground
- The Pond/Reservoir below "the Playground"
- Vegetable Farm
- Dongyin Lighthouse
- Triangle Park
- Visitor Center
- The Northern Frontier

During multiple days and numerous visits to these sites, we were able see an amazing number of birds. We also managed to enjoy a bit of Taiwan island culture and history visiting several wartime bunkers and gunner posts as well as a few currently active military posts. Most of the time, we were dodging rain and clouds but despite this we still had some great luck, especially on our second morning where I could literally see 10's of birds at one time for many minutes at a time migrating... I love that! During our time in Dongyin, we saw; Chestnut, Yellow-browed, Blackmasked, Little and Yellow-breasted Buntings, Black Drongo, Narcissus and Yellow-rumped Flycatcher, Chinese Pond Heron, Gray Heron, Black-capped Kingfisher, Chestnut-winged and Oriental Cuckoo, Javan and Crested Mnya, Red-billed, White-shouldered, Daurian and Chestnutcheeked Starling (in the same tree...how fun?!?), Brown-headed Thrush, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Amur Stonechat, Black-winged Cuckooshrike, Brown and Long-tailed Shrike, American, Pechora, Olive-backed and Richards Pipit, Eastern Yellow Wagtail, Oriental Pratincole, Grayheaded Lapwing, Dusky Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Light-vented Bulbul, Eastern Buzzard Ashy Minivet, Oriental Magpie, Dollarbird, Pacific and House Swift, Peregrine Falcon, Chinese and Japanese Sparrowhawk, Eurasian Moorhen and Coot, Eastern Cattle Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, and the adorable Little Grebe. How's that for a list?!?!?! Enjoy some photos below.





Chinese Pond Heron - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Red-billed Starling - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Brown Shrike - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





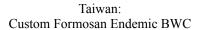
Black-masked Bunting - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Amur Stonechat - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Chestnut Bunting - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot











Light-vented Bulbul - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Eastern Buzzard - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Little Bunting - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Yellow-breasted Bunting - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Days 4-5 (April 23rd & 24th): Dongyin to Nangan/Nangan Island to Mainland Taiwan

Nangan is a strategic stop as well as a birding destination for us. Nangan has a much more reliable airport so we choose to fly back to the mainland from here rather than Dongyin but also, we have a couple of fun birds to try and find on Nangan. Like Dongyin, this tiny island greeted us with lots of rain and mist but we made the most of what we had to work with. We used a similar strategy to our time on Dongyin. We had much less time on Nangan but the locations we visited numerous times were;

- Nangan Ruwo Village
- Jinsha Reservoir
- Nangan Vegetable Farm
- Houma Reservoir

During our time on Nangan, we saw many of the same birds and added a few new goodies like; Black Bulbul (a different race than the one on the mainland), Oriental Magpie Robin, White-cheeked Starling, Great Coucal, Oriental Greenfinch, Taiwan Grosbeak and Spotted Dove. Not too much new but that's mainly because we did so well on Dongyin.



Chinese Sparrowhawk - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Black Bulbul - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

The afternoon was spent in a lovely place called Da'an Forest Park. I always love seeing incredible city parks like this in different countries and this one was awesome. We unfortunately got rained out pretty quick into our walk but even in thee hours or so that we had there we managed some great new birds right off the bat. Birds like; Black-collared Starling, Gray Treepie, Taiwan Barbet, Malayan Night Heron, a huge colony of Black-crowned Night Heron and Eastern Cattle Egret, some poor but confirmative views of Crested Goshawk and Oriental Turtle Dove. We then proceeded to get trapped in a shelter for a solid 30-minutes while the sky absolutely opened up on us. We were kept company by a Malayan Night Heron who despite the crazy rain seemed relatively unbothered by both it and us. Each small break in the weather we were contemplating a mad dash to the car until finally it let up just enough to where I made the decision to go for it. We ran to the car, only getting mildly wet but with our time in the park now over, we decided to call it a day.







Malayan Night Heron (juvi) - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Malayan Night Heron - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Oriental Magpie Robin - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Black-collared Starling - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Eastern Cattle Egret - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Barbet - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 6 (April 25th): Taipei to Yeliou

After a nice first night on the mainland, we set out for Yeliou which is home to a pretty amazing little piece of land called the GeoPark. Here the sandstone has been shaped by years and years of wind and water erosion but the statues created have some very odd shapes like "the Queens Head". This area is definitely a migrant trap but our big hike only really saw one migrant and unfortunately, I was the only one to see it, the Red-breasted Flycatcher. The rest of the birds seen on the hike were birds we had seen already with an outstanding number of them being Swinhoe's White-eye, Light-vented Bulbul and Black Bulbul.

Towards the beginning of the walk we were treated to a new bird, the Yellow-bellied Prinia which sat up nice for us and we all caught up with a bird that kept evading us on the islands, a stunning Blue Rock Thrush! I have been getting beaten by this bird since I first saw one in Portugal so for me this was also a huge personal win!



Blue Rock Thrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Yellow-bellied Prinia - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Once we were done here, it was time to head back into town towards our hotel, meet our last guest and grab some lunch. We opted for lunch at the hotel which was delicious and most importantly, fast. Once everyone was done eating, we set out for our first location of the main tour. Our goal for the first afternoon was to try and photograph a few of the big targets...and I mean that figuratively and literally. Our first stop was Shimen Reservoir where in just a few minutes we were on our target, in fact, we were on about FIVE of them! Very cool to watch a group of Taiwan Blue Magpie feeding naturally on a papaya tree. We also managed to have a pretty sweet photoshoot with the mainland race (gray-winged) of Black Bulbul and a Black Drongo. It then started to rain again so we tried another spot, the Xinzhuang Sports and Recreation Park where we quickly moved towards our sole target, the Collared Scops Owl. We found two roosting in a tree after a hot tip. Very cool! After a bit of waiting in another part of the park for a nesting pair of Taiwan Barbet, we eventually called it a day when the light got too time for any quality shooting. We all agreed we were quite content with the first afternoon of the main tour and indeed the entire day!



Black Bulbul - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Blue Magpie - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Black Drongo - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Barbet - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Collared Scops Owl - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 7 (April 26th): Taipei to Tainan

This was a tough day for sure. Nearly the entire morning of searching for wading, water and shorebirds was done in the rain, wind and just down right chilly conditions. Not ideal for bird life or photography but of course, we did the best we could. We hit several hotspot locations to find as many large waders as we could but only really managed some shots around the Wanggong Yongxing Tidal Lands of a few birds like; Kentish Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Common Greenshank, Common Redshank, Black-faced Spoonbill, Black-winged Stilt, Marsh Sandpiper, Whiskered Tern, Plain Prinia, Common Kingfisher, and some distant but decent shots of Curlew Sandpiper in nearly full breeding plumage...pretty cool! The late morning was spent trying to find a good photo opportunity of a very cool bird and by the side of the road, we did just that. Two stunning Pheasant-tailed Jacana gave us quite the show along with a female Black-naped Monarch and Little Grebe. We also ran into a few more Black-faced Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night Heron and while the guests were trying to get closer to the spoonbills, I spent a few minutes photographing a Chestnut-tailed Starling I found in someone's backyard...don't worry, I photographed it from the road. A solid day even though we struggled weather wise!





Kentish Plover - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Plain Prinia - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Pheasant-tailed Jacana - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Chestnut-tailed Starling - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 8 (April 27th): Alishan

The morning was geared towards seeing if we could hit more wetland birds but once again we were doused by incredibly poor weather so the morning was mostly a travel day up to our next hotel in the more mountainous region of Alishan. The road up was long, and twisty but we did have a really cool local lunch at a hot pot restaurant. I will say and I think all of the guests will agree with me on this...Bao, our guide did an exceptional job at picking out restaurants and indeed our food. Most of the time we'd sit down and we have an amazing 7-courses brought out to us not 10-minutes later...always delicious, fast, and friendly so a seriously big A+ for Taiwan hospitality there!

Once we arrived at our next hotel, we met the owner for a traditional 3:30pm tea time...which honestly, was quite special...and then he took us up a very steep and bumpy road in his... uhm...small "truck"...to a make shift blind that he had up in the forest. Here we managed to see and photograph some cool stuff like Swinhoe's Pheasant, White-tailed Robin, Morrison's and Dusky Fulvetta and we had a fly over Black Eagle. The photo opps at this blind weren't all that great but luckily this was not our main spot for the pheasant, still, a fun experience for sure!



White-tailed Robin - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 9 (April 28th): Wushe/Chingjing

Well guess what...haha yep, rain. Another rainy morning but we tried to find and photograph what we could along the grounds of our hotel. Here we found; Taiwan Whistling Thrush, Collared Finchbill, Rufous-capped Babbler, the ever present Black Bulbul and we the guests had another fun shoot with a Swinhoe's White-eye.



Taiwan Whistling Thrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

We continued to travel towards our main location for the morning, Yushan National Park. Here we got our first sighting (absolutely packed in with fog) of a Mikado Pheasant and Taiwan Rosefinch. We tried a quick shoot with our first Taiwan Yuhina and Green-backed Tit but again, the fog was making this extremely difficult. During that shoot we did get a quick break in the fog right as a female Mikado Pheasant made her presence known so we were able to get some pretty decent shots of her. More birds seen and photographed in the park (in-between the fog and rain) were; White-whiskered Laughing Thrush, Taiwan Fulvetta, Collared Bush Robin, Gray-chinned Minivet, Coal Tit, Yellow-bellied Bush Warbler, Steer's Liocichla and though we tried and tried, we could never really quite get on those stubborn Flamecrest (though we saw one). My personal highlight came in the form of a Taiwan Macaque family that posed well for our cameras!



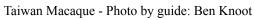
Mikado Pheasant - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Coal Tit - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot









White-rumped Shama - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Maroon Oriole - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



The rest of the afternoon was spent traveling towards our next night of accommodation. We had one last stop at the very cool Puli Dizang Temple where we saw some cool birds like; Maroon Oriole, Taiwan Barbet, White-rumped Shama, Grey Treepie, Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Barn and Striated Swallow and some very quick views (luckily to be improved upon better) a pair of Taiwan Scimitar Babblers. With the sun now starting to set and us still being about an hour away from our hotel, we hit the road and grabbed a nice dinner on the way in, called it a night and prepped for our next morning.

Day 10 (April 29th): Wushe/Chingjing

We started the morning off really well, nailing a White-eared Sibia right from the parking lot of our hotel. We then continued up to Taroko NP where we enjoyed some higher elevation birds. We had several targets during our morning on the mountain and I am happy to say, we got most of them! We found; Collared Bush Robin, White-whiskered Laughing Thrush, Taiwan Rosefinch, Large-billed Crow, Alpine Accentor, Taiwan Bullfinch, Oriental Cuckoo, Asian House Martin, Taiwan Bush Warbler and a Eurasian Wren. We then settled in for a nice lunch on the top of the mountain.



White-eared Sibia - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Taiwan Bullfinch - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Collared Bush Robin - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Rosefinch - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





White-whiskered Laughing Thrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Our afternoon was spent in a pretty cool place. I will say Taiwan had some really engaging activities that allowed people to get outside and do something unique. We visited a long boardwalk that allowed visitors to see the sheep that make this part of Taiwan famous. Here we actually had some of our best shooting and definitely some of the most cooperative birds. While walking down the boardwalk, I found a nice place to try a little playback and with the help of the local guide, we managed to call in some great birds and get some great pics of birds like; Taiwan Yuhina, Green-backed Tit, Steer's Liocichla, Taiwan Vivid Niltava, Oriental Turtle Dove and the fly-by Asian House Martins were a lovely challenge for those looking to test their metal with some flight photography.

The last part of the afternoon was spent in the trails behind the our hotel, the Chingjing Guest House. Here we had a fun shoot with a Black-throated Tit, Collared Finchbill, Taiwan Scimitar Babbler, and we had a really close call photographically with a Fire-breasted Flowerpecker but unfortunately, it just never made the final decision to come all the way down. After a very successful day, we hit the hay and got some sleep for the next day.









Collared Finchbill - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Oriental Turtle Dove - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



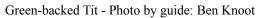
Taiwan Yuhina - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Black-throated Tit - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot









Taiwan Scimitar Babbler - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Vivid Niltava - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

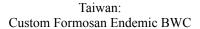


Days 11 - 12 (April 30th - May 1st): Dashueshan Area

Dashueshan is a near legendary place among birders in Taiwan. Upon arrival, it was easy to see why. The area was stunning, the birds were plentiful and the people were incredibly accommodating. Our time in Dashueshan was very dark...and what I mean by that is that due to the weather events (which included a severe hail storm), and the surrounding environment, we were forced into really dark shooting situations for our two days in this area. Over the course of our time here, we visited many of the same areas again and again which were usually designated by the "km" marker posts on the road...very interesting but for ease in this report we're just going to say "Dashueshan Hotspots". Birds we managed to see in this area were far more than we were able to photograph but even still, we added; Swinhoe's and Mikado Pheasant, Taiwan Yellow Tit, Rufous-crowned Laughing Thrush, Eurasian Nutcracker, Snowybrowed Robin, Taiwan Partridge, White-whiskered Laughing Thrush, Rufous-faced Warbler, Oriental Cuckoo, some very quick views of the sneaky Taiwan Cupwing, Morrison's Fulvetta and an incredibly cute and feisty Eurasian Nuthatch.

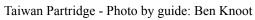


Swinhoe's Pheasant - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot











Eurasian Nuthatch - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

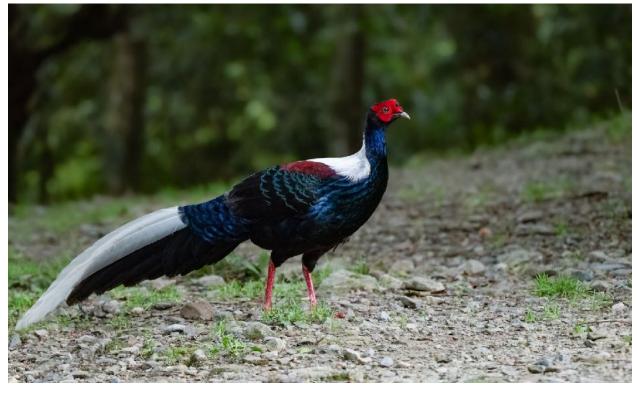


White-whiskered Laughing Thrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Rufous-crowned Laughing Thrush - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Swinhoe's Pheasant - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 13 (May 2nd): Dashueshan to Taichung

Most of our morning was much like our time before. As we ventured towards our next stop, we stopped off in Hengliu Creek. Upon arrival we narrowly missed a Common Kingfisher with a fish, which was a serious bummer but we did manage some great photos of Plumbeous Redstart hanging out in the middle of the creek. Nearby we also managed a nice Gray-chinned Minivet and some nice views of a new bird, a Pacific Swallow.

The afternoon was spent rather triumphantly in Dongshi Forestry Culture Park. Here we enjoyed a nesting pair of Little Grebe and most importantly...we FINALLY caught up with some great Common Kingfishers. Cooperative and stunning birds allowed us to nail some photos...finally...such an awesome little bird that none of us wanted to leave Taiwan without getting so huge win for the afternoon. We called it an evening shortly there after.



Gray-chinned Minivet - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

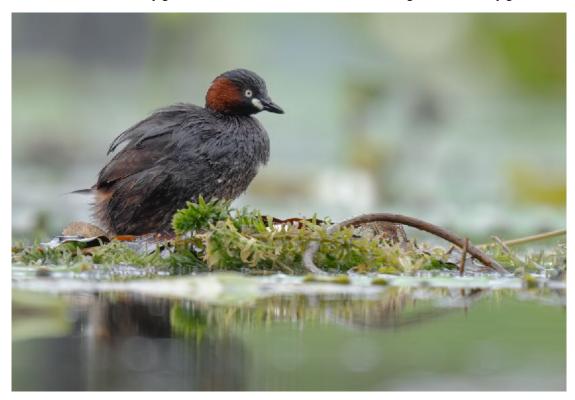




Plumbeous Redstart - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Common Kingfisher - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Little Grebe - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Common Kingfisher - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

Day 14 (May 3rd): Huben & Douliou

The morning was spent in absolute heaven in my mind. The Sun-Link-Sea area was one of the serious highlights of this tour for me. A beautifully manicured yet somehow totally wild feeling park running in parallel to a river was a fantastic way to spend a morning. Better yet, we had no rain, wind, fog and a slight overcast...all perfect conditions for walking, birding and photography...excellent. We walked about 2km of forest trails, road and just "random" places within the confines of the park to see what we could photograph. We also enjoyed the incredibly stunning rock overhang with a glorious waterfall and pool below...honestly felt like a fairytale dreamland. Birds we added were; Little Fork-tail, Brown Dipper, Steer's Liocichla, Taiwan Yellow Tit, Large Hawk Cuckoo, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker, Eurasian Jay, Mandarin Duck and Ferruginous Flycatcher. I honestly didn't want to leave this place but right around noon it was time to head off for lunch and onward towards our last main area for the tour.





Fire-breasted Flowerpecker - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Steer's Liocichla - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



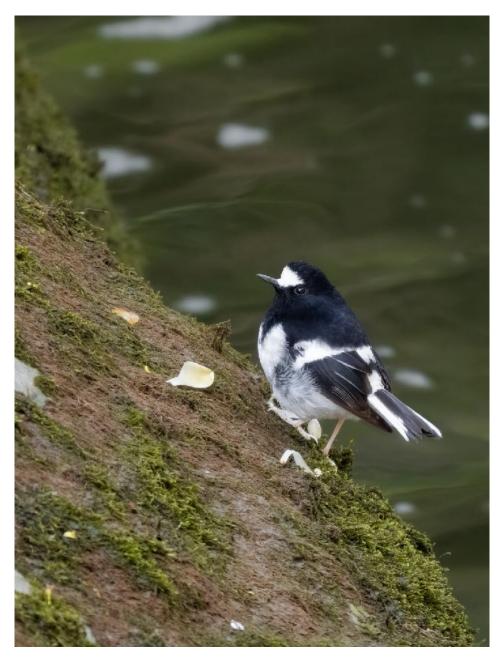


Brown Dipper - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Yellow Tit - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Little Forktail - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

The afternoon was spent looking for our last big (only figuratively) target of the tour. We checked several areas in Huben, chiefly the Longkuomai Forest Trail. Though we didn't find exactly what we were looking for, in this area and in the immediate surrounding area we actually hand another pretty amazing few hours of shooting. We scored big time with; Taiwan Barbet, Black-naped Monarch, Gray-capped Woodpecker, White-bellied Erpornis, Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, Taiwan Scimitar Babbler, Light-vented Bulbul, White-rumped Munia, Asian Emerald Dove, White-rumped Shama and Bronze Drongo. We still had our main target to find but luckily, that was literally THE GOAL for tomorrow morning so, no one was overly worried. We hit the sack and prepped for our last day on tour tomorrow.





Gray-capped Pygmy Woodpecker - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



White-rumped Shama - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Bronze Drongo - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Taiwan Barbet - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Scimitar Babbler - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





White-bellied Erpornis - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Taiwan Bamboo Partridge - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Day 15 (May 4th): Huben to Taipei and Departures/END OF TOUR

The morning had one goal. A migratory bird that comes to this part of Taiwan to breed and for many guests, was their first of this terrific family. We started off the morning searching the same set of Longkuomai Forest Trails. Here and there we managed mere glimpses and auditory responses from the bird but nothing even remotely satisfactory. We did have a lovely photo shoot with a Dusky Fulvetta before leaving to try a different location.



Dusky Fulvetta - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

When we arrived at the next location, a stunning Crested Serpent Eagle was circling overhead so that's always awesome when you first arrive and get right on a bird. After a short walk and a bit of slippy accent up a dried up river bed, we arrived at a blind! Wild...it turned out to be the blind of a local who has been feeding our quarry. We were told to wait about 20-minutes and sure enough, a little more than 20-ish minutes of waiting, a stunning adult Fairy Pitta came down to the feeder and graced our group with its presence, the last big target for this tour. The feeder wasn't great photographically so we decided to wait for another visit and this time, the pita landed on the ground where we could at least get a semi-decent natural image. I also had a bit of fun and created an image and "put" the Fairy Pita on a log I had photographed on the property. The image of the bird on the ground is 100% natural and below that you will find the photoshopped file I created using a photo of the pita and a log I photographed next to the feeder...just for fun!



In any case, thrilled with this last target, we decided to end the tour on a high note. We traveled back towards our hotel and after saying goodbye to the guests, I went off to the airport to catch my flight. A great tour thanks to some world class guests, great food and accommodation and a fantastic local guide. A big thank you to Taiwan!



Fairy Pitta - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot





Crested Serpent Eagle - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot



Fairy Pitta - Photo by guide: Ben Knoot

April 20th - May 4th, 2024

Species Account

Our local guide was kind enough to eBird everything for us so if you would like a full species account with the where and when for each of the species, please copy and paste the following link your favorite web browser;

https://ebird.org/tripreport/231437?welcome=true



Guest Top 5 Images























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