

Taiwan – Endemics & Winter Birds

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 – 2 Depart London, arrive Taipei, and explore lowland farmland

Day 3 – 5 Dasyueshan Forest

Day 6 Dasyueshan Forest to Budai Wetland

Day 7 Southwest Coast Wetlands, Budai & Guantian

Day 8 – 9 Alishan/Yushan National Park

Day 10 Fly to London

Departs

January, March & November

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code TWN01)

Grading

A. Birdwatching day walks

Focus

Birds

Highlights

- 32 endemic and 52 endemic subspecies.
- Many other resident, passage and wintering East Asian birds.
- Excellent scenery, varied habitats, flora and butterflies.
- Interesting culture and good food, supplemented and explained by resident UK guide.
- Good infrastructure, comfortable, safe and clean.



From Top: Taiwan Yuhina © Alex Kozlenkov, Miakdo Pheasant, Taiwan Cupwing



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Introduction

Taiwan not only has great avifauna, but a host of other winning points that make it a wonderful destination for a comfortable birding trip. With the East-Asian Flyway, 28 endemic species and many endemic subspecies due for upgrading, there is a lot to look forward to. Taiwan is located 100 km east of the coast of China, south of Japan and Korea, and north of the Philippines. Less than 400 km long and 150 km wide with rugged central mountains and deep valleys, it boasts high biodiversity, in a very manageable package.

This tour focuses on the endemics and other East Asian specialities in its well protected forests. Most of our time will be spent in the mountains, but we will allow some time in the lowlands and coast looking out for wintering wetland birds. When circumstances allow, we will make time for the other aspects of nature, the fascinating human culture and chasing any reported notable vagrants. Weather should be generally dry and pleasant, but with a chance of showers and cold at higher altitudes. There should be plenty of good opportunities for photography.

The Taiwanese are very friendly and welcoming. They have blended the best parts of unspoiled, traditional Chinese culture with the influence of colonial Japan, and the native Austronesian culture. Taiwan is free and democratic, has good infrastructure and is considered safe.

Dasyueshan Mountains



Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Itinerary

Day 1

In flight

We depart London today on an evening flight overnight to Taipei.

Day 2

Taiwan Lowlands

Arriving in Taipei, we make the most of the remaining daylight with an introduction to Taiwan's lowland birdlife in coastal farmland near the airport. This evening will help us to become familiar with common species such as Chinese Bulbul, Red-collared and Spotted Doves, Long-tailed Shrike, Black Drongo, Oriental Skylark, Plain and Yellow-bellied Prinias, Japanese White-eye, and Oriental Magpie. Starling flocks may hold the more localised Crested Myna, while nearby wetlands could produce our first wintering and passage waders as well as the possibility of encountering the local subspecies of Crested Serpent Eagle.

We then transfer by road (approximately two hours) to a comfortable, family-run hotel set just inside Dasyueshan Forest, where we stay for the next three nights.

Overnight: Dasyueshan Forest

Days 3 – 5

Low to mid to high elevation Dasyueshan Forest

We will spend several days exploring the superb elevational range of Dasyueshan, one of Taiwan's premier birding sites. Beginning in lower elevations of orchards, bamboo and secondary growth, we gradually work our way into mature broadleaf forest and higher montane habitats.



Taiwan Barbet



Collared Finchbill © Alex Kozlenkov

The lower slopes are rich in birdlife, with species such as Collared Finchbill, Oriental Turtle-Dove, Taiwan Barbet, Grey Treepie, Striated and Pacific Swallow, Taiwan Hwamei, Bronzed Drongo, Black Bulbul, Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler, Grey-capped Woodpecker, Scaly-breasted Munia, and Rufous-capped Babbler, while quieter corners may reveal more elusive species such as Lesser Coucal, Bull-headed Shrike, Dusky Warbler, Yellow-browed Warbler, Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler, Manchurian Bush-Warbler, Japanese Bush-Warbler, Malayan Night Heron, Crested Serpent-eagle, and Striated Heron.

Along streams and side roads, species such as Brown Dipper and Plumbeous Redstart can often be found alongside Grey-chinned Minivet, the wintering Daurian Redstart, Grey-cheeked Fulvetta, Striated Prinia, and White-rumped Munia.

As we move higher, the forest becomes cooler and more atmospheric, and a new suite of species comes into play. Highlights may include Taiwan (Vivid) Niltava, White-bellied Erpornis and hopefully White-backed or Grey-faced Woodpecker. Wintering thrushes and flycatchers are often present, including Red-flanked Bluetail, Pale Thrush, Brown-headed Thrush. Other species may include Taiwanese Macaque and the first few butterflies emerging by mid-morning.

Scenic roadside stops and picnic breaks provide opportunities to watch for Swinhoe's Pheasant, as well as White-tailed Robin, Steere's Liocichla and the ever-present White-eared Sibia. With luck, we may also encounter Taiwan (Island) Thrush, Taiwan Partridge, Black-throated Tits, and Taiwan Yuhina, as well as chance glimpses of the Silver-backed Needletail and Mountain Hawk-Eagle.



At higher elevations, typically between 1,500 and 2,300 metres, we focus on key montane specialties, including the magnificent Mikado Pheasant. These forests also hold White-whiskered Laughingthrush, White-browed (Taiwan) Bush-Robin and the very smart Collared Bush-Robin. Southern Nutcracker, Yellow-bellied Bush-Warbler, Taiwan Bush-Warbler and Taiwan Shortwing are all possible here, with the tiny Flamecrest is always a sought-after highlight. Mixed flocks will hold the local crested version of Coal Tit, Green-backed Tit, Yellow Tit, Black-throated Tit, the cute Rufous-faced Warbler, Collared Owlet, and Fire-breasted Flowerpecker. The excitement often attracts familiar birds such as Eurasian Nuthatch, Eurasian Wren and Snowy-browed Flycatcher.

The scenery throughout is spectacular, with expansive views and, on clear days, distant glimpses of Yushan, Taiwan's highest peak. Mammals such as Formosan Serow, Reeve's Muntjac and several squirrel species are also possible. Evenings offer opportunities for nocturnal wildlife, including Collared and Mountain Scops Owls and Giant Flying Squirrel.

Overnight: Dasyueshan Forest

Day 6



Dasyueshan Forest to Budai Wetland

Today we will spend most of the day at high elevations, with visits to the best place for Ashy Wood Pigeon, the local sub-species of Eurasian Jay, Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush and Brown Bullfinch.

A local waterfall is home to Little Forktail, and Asian House-Martin can often be found nesting under a bridge close by. Towards the end of our time here, we explore additional side roads and valleys for species such as Taiwan Blue Magpie, Chestnut-bellied Tit and a range of raptors including Crested Goshawk and Black Eagle. Depending on recent sightings, we may also visit nearby grassland and riverine habitats for additional species including Golden-Headed Cisticola, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, White-rumped Shama as well as Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler and maybe a Crab-eating Mongoose.

Once we are content with the days birding, we will head south to the coastal town of Dongshi, near the Budai Wetlands, with opportunities to search for notable species or vagrants en route. We hope to arrive by evening and enjoy an evening meal in a comfortable hotel.

Overnight: Dongshi

Day 7

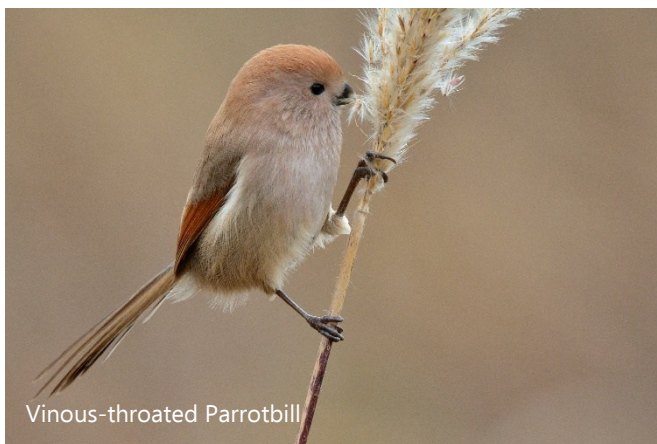
Coastal Lagoons, Budai Wetland, Farmland

Today is devoted to the rich wetlands of Taiwan's southwest coast. The extensive network of lagoons, salt pans, aquaculture ponds and estuaries supports an impressive diversity of wintering and migratory waterbirds.

Key species may include Black-faced Spoonbill, Saunders' Gull, Great Knot, various snipe & godwits, Long-toed Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, and Eastern Curlew. Also to be watched for are White-winged, Black, and Gull-billed Terns, Intermediate Egret, Chinese Egret, Greater and Siberian Sandpipers, Terek, Marsh and Broad-billed Sandpipers. Surrounding farmland can produce Pacific Golden Plovers, Greater Painted Snipe, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, White-breasted Waterhen, Yellow and Cinnamon Bitterns, Eastern Curlew, Red-necked Stint, Chinese Pond-heron, Ruddy-breasted and Slaty-breasted Crake. Raptors such as Osprey, Black-shouldered Kite, Eastern Buzzard or Eastern Marsh-Harrier are regularly seen hunting over the wetlands. With favourable conditions, we may also search for regional rarities such as Baikal Teal, Asian Dowitcher and Baer's Pochard.

Scrubby embankments can hold Zitting Cisticola, Golden-headed Cisticola, Vinous-throated Parrotbill, Ring-necked Pheasant (real ones!), Oriental Magpie-robin, and Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Wintering starlings could include Red-billed, White-shouldered, Chestnut-cheeked, Common, and White-cheeked. There should also be good opportunities to witness Gray-throated Martin and Red-rumped and striated Swallows.

In the evening we travel inland to forested low hills that regularly serve up several key birds - and often a few interesting surprises. The distinctive subspecies of Maroon (Red) Oriole never disappoints, Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, Emerald Dove, White-bellied Pigeon and occasionally Taiwan Whistling Green Pigeon. Other things commonly encountered are Arctic Warbler, Black Kite, Plain Flowerpecker, Ashy Drongo, cuckoo-shrikes, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Black-naped Oriole and Olive-backed Pipit. Butterflies and dragonflies are a frequent bonus addition.



Vinous-throated Parrotbill



Maroon Oriole © Alex Kozlenkov

Overnight: Alishan

Days 8 – 9

Alishan, Yushan National Park

We rise early in the mornings and drive to the higher parts of the Alishan area and into Yushan National Park at around 2,300 meters. These areas provide excellent opportunities to catch up with key endemics we may have missed in Dasyueshan, such as Taiwan Barwing and Flamecrest, while Mikado Pheasant may occasionally be seen feeding along quiet roadside stretches. Other species of interest include Taiwan Cupwing, White's Thrush, the possibility of Grey-faced Buzzards migrating along the ridges.

In the Tataka area, juniper and rhododendron habitats hold Taiwan Rosefinch and Taiwan Fulvetta. Gentle walks through these high-elevation landscapes may produce Grey-headed (Taiwan) Bullfinch, Golden Parrotbill, Collared Owlet and Taiwan Bush-Warbler, while mammals such as Yellow-throated Marten or Sambar Deer are also possible. At slightly lower elevations, famous for tea plantations, scenic railways and sweeping views, we look for species such as Black-faced Bunting, Siberian Rubythroat and Rusty Laughingthrush. Evenings here are particularly atmospheric, with calling owls and the possibility of Red and White Giant Flying Squirrels.

Overnight: Alishan

Following our final morning in the mountains, we return to Taipei for our evening departure back to London.

Day 10

Arrive back in London.

Tour Grading

This is a traditional fast-paced birdwatching tour with a moderate amount of walking on good surfaces, at a daily average of 5-9 miles.

To make the most of the tour, days are generally full, often beginning early and finishing later in the evening to take advantage of peak wildlife activity. While this maximises our chances of seeing as much as possible, there will still be opportunities to relax. All activities are optional, and where practical you are welcome to take time out and enjoy the comfort of the hotel if preferred.

Food & accommodation included in the price

All meals included starting with dinner on Day 2 and ending with lunch on Day 9. Mostly excellent Chinese but supplemented by lots of familiar food, snacks and refreshments.

Throughout the tour, accommodation is clean, comfortable and well suited to the locations visited, providing a welcoming base after each rewarding day in the field.

Extra expenses

Please note that we do not include all items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry etc. in the cost of this holiday.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.

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