

TAIWAN , SOUTH KOREA AND JAPAN 2016

After a winter trip in Japan 10 years ago I wanted to return in this country in spring to see different birds and more mammals. But by the end I added South Korea to see Finless Porpoise and Taiwan for Serow, Pitta and pheasants. To avoid the rainy season (summer) I decided to start in Taiwan, then to go to South Korea and by the end Japan (end of May being good in Hokkaido for the birds, earlier might be too cold).

The problem was where to spend the Golden Week (first week of May) which is every year one of the worst time to travel in this part of the world. A lot of people at this time are on vacations: parks are crowded, as the roads, and it is difficult to find transport or accommodation. By the end I chose South Korea, thinking it was the best or the less bad.

The 3 countries are expensive but people are very helpful especially in Japan and Taiwan. It is unbelievable in a western country to see what these people can do to help you. The security is good. And especially in Japan people respect the road of the rules. It is not the same in the rest of the world (I won't say which countries are the worst.). I enjoyed this trip and want to go back next year.

As often I used MAMMALWATCHING to prepare my trip. For the first time I also used Birdquest trip reports. It seems that now this company is more open to include information about mammals.

I-TAIWAN

I arrived in Taiwan the 19th of April and left the 30th. The weather was mostly fine except one morning with huge amount of rain. I hired a car in Taipei and visited the following places:

DASYUESHAN FOREST RESERVE, HUISUN FOREST RESERVE, KENTING NATIONAL PARK, TAROKO GORGES and HUBEN.

1-DASYUESHAN

This reserve is east of Fengyuan and Taichung. It protects an old mountain forest. In the upperparts the trees are huge with plenty of holes good for birds and flying squirrels. I had never seen so easily flying squirrels. Birdwatching is excellent, including Swinhoe and Mikado Pheasants. Spotlighting along the road is nice because there is no traffic by night. The upperpart of the forest is closed by night, but if you want you can sleep inside this part of the forest called Alishan. I didn't. There is an entry fee for this part. I went only once in this part and by daylight. I spotlighted always below the gate and at different altitudes. They are rocky slopes below the gate.

Species seen:

-TAIWAN or FORMOSAN SEROW

I got them mostly by night and once at dusk and early morning (8 the first day, 0 the second day (the night was misty and I spotlighted lower down), 3 the third day and 2 the last night. They were always below the gate where are the rocky slopes.

-REEVE'S MUNTJAC

Five seen (males and females) mostly by night. Heard often by night.

-SIBERIAN WEASEL

1 found by night. Pished it came close to my feet.

-PALLAS'S SQUIRREL

1 at km 23 and 2 at km 30. Never seen eating the seeds provided to the pheasants at km 23.

-PERNY'S LONG NOSED SQUIRREL

3 at km 23 and 4 at km 47. At both places come to eat the seeds provided for the pheasants.

- MARITIME STRIPED SQUIRREL

5 at km 47 at the feeding place for Mikado Pheasant.

-RED AND WHITE GIANT FLYING SQUIRREL: Seen every nights; 16 sightings.

-INDIAN GIANT FLYING SQUIRRELS or subspecies of RED GIANT FLYING SQUIRRELS

(See Squirrels of the world of Thorington and al). Twice 3 together at 2 different places.

-TAIWAN MACAQUE: seen regularly at different altitudes.

-CHINESE HARE: 1 above the last village on the road to the park.

Species not seen: ASIATIC BLACK BEAR (rare), MASKED PALM CIVET(said to be the most commonly seen small carnivore), CHINESE FERRET-BADGER (said to be seen sometimes near the restaurant), LEOPARD CAT.

2-HUISUN FOREST

This reserve or recreation area is 2 or 3 hours (on very narrow roads) south of Dasyueshan.

When I arrived on Saturday afternoon it was crowded. By night I heard 1 Reeve's Muntjac and saw:

-CHINESE FERRET BADGER: 1 close to the headquarters.

-CRAB EATING MONGOOSE: 2 or maybe the same close to the river.

And by day:

- PALLAS'S SQUIRREL: 1 only.

-TAIWAN MACAQUES: several groups.

3-KENTING NATIONAL PARK

This park is in the far south of the island. When I arrived at the headquarters asking where to see:

-SIKA DEER (Taiwan subspecies reintroduced here) I was told it was very difficult and to go on a tour. Of course I didn't accept and found them easily at a clearing near a car park in the park but also at the meadows bordering the forest: I saw 105 (with a lot of nice males with antlers) by night and 0 by daylight.

-TAIWAN MACAQUES were common.

I found a freshly dead GIANT BAMBOO RAT on the road and a PALM CIVET (I suppose MASKED PALM CIVET, the only civet on the island).

4-HUBEN

This place close to Linnei is famous for Fairy Pitta that I saw easily. It is at low altitude. I saw:

-TAIWAN MACAQUES and PALLAS's SQUIRRELS.

5-TAROKO GORGES

I wanted to spotlight at the campings, but arrived too late and didn't see anything . The road to reach the campings was closed by night. It is a pity because the following morning when I reached the camping completely empty I saw that an animal had inspected the rubbish.

II- SOUTH KOREA

From Taiwan I flew to Beijing, then to BUSAN, arriving there the 1st of May. I spent only 8 full days in South Korea. In fact I had chosen to look for FINLESS PORPOISE at NAMHAE BRIDGE, LARGHA SEAL at BAENGNYONGDO and to spend time at SEROAKSAN NATIONAL PARK rich in birds and mammals including LONG TAILED GORAL (my target species in this country). As it was the Golden Week and that a car was not necessary for what I wanted to do I travelled by bus.

The 2nd of May I reached NAMHAE BRIDGE by bus, but until 3pm I had not seen any FINLESS PORPOISE. Fortunately at this time I saw one perfectly from the bridge. Contrary of what the tourist office told me the bus driver can drop or pick you up at the bridge. Even I don't speak any Korean I managed to explain that to the driver.

I had booked at my hotel the crossing to where there are during spring and summer Largha Seal (cf JON HALL trip report). When I arrived at Incheon harbor there was a very strong storm. The following day the trip was cancelled. Not too loose time I decided to go immediately to SEROAKSAN NATIONAL PARK and to spend more time there. I first enjoyed that. But using the metro from Incheon and Seoul center was very long (I managed to get a map of the metro in Korean only). The bus to Sokcho was faster.

In Sokcho it was not raining but the wind was very strong. It was even dangerous to walk. I nevertheless caught a bus to the entrance of the park. I found a park closed for security reason: plenty of branches or broken trees were on the road. To stay close to the park I camp right near the gate of the park (well hidden and in a secure place in case of falling trees). The day after early

morning the wind was less strong but the park was not open. By 9 am it was, but I learnt that most of the park was closed until the 15th of May to prevent fires, as it is every year (thanks to the Lonely Planet!). Three short walks were open and I walked them during 3 days entering the park the following days by 5h30am when it is empty of people. I saw a lot of SIBERIAN CHIPMUNSK including one swallowed by a snake and a RED SQUIRREL (in fact black) said to be rare in SOUTH KOREA, but no other mammals. I nevertheless scanned a lot the cliffs. I was told that the Gorals are in the center of the park. Except early morning by day the park was invaded by several thousands of tourists! Don't travel there during the Golden Week.

Just outside of the park where I camped I saw twice an Eurasian Otter leaving its den at dusk, a SIBERIAN WEASEL crossing the river by midday, 2 WILD BOARS next to my tent and I heard by night a SIBERIAN ROE DEER. There were also Mandarin ducks. I saw more outside of the park.

III- JAPAN

-KYU SHU

The 10th of May I flew from BUSAN (SOUTH KOREA) to FUKUOKA (JAPAN) on KYU SHU island. As there was a very strong earthquake in the center of KYU SHU when I left home I had bought a flight from FUKUOKA to KAGOSHIMA. The 11th of May I reached FUKUOKA and then by car MI IKE PARK. I spent 4 and a half day at this place.

Each night I saw:

-JAPANESE BADGER (7 seen-including 2 young ones at the entrance of a den) and a fresh killed one. They were not very shy and you can approach them easily by walking. In fact I had chosen to come here because Birdquest saw one here but also because I found on the net a paper indicating that this species is especially common in AOMORI and MIYAZAKI prefectures.

I got also:

- JAPANESE MARTEN thrice: 1 very shy by daylight and 1 by night (first very shy and coming close by after a lot of pishing) and a dead one.

-JAPANESE GIANT FLYING SQUIRREL: seen 3 times (their call is very different of the call of RED and WHITE GIANT FLYING SQUIRREL).

-WILD BOAR: 1 by day.

-SIKA DEER: a lot.

-JAPANESE HARE:1.

-AMAMI OSHIMA

I reached this island by plane and spent 2 days there. But after 1hour of my arrival it began to rain and rain a lot. The first night was very bad: it was pouring and the visibility was very bad. I got easily AMAMI WOODCOCK but after 5h spotlighting I had seen only the back of an AMAMI RABBIT. I had to

remove several times dead trees in the middle of the road. I had still 1 night, but the following day it was still raining in the morning. By 10am it improves. The afternoon and night were perfect: I saw at least 5 AMAMI RABBITS and several AMAMI WOODCOCKS. But I missed RYU KYU GIANT LONG TAILED RAT that I saw on OKINAWA during my first trip in Japan.

-HONSHU

The 18th of May I flew to Tokyo and reached KARUIZAWA by train. I stayed 4 days there. First I was looking for:

-JAPANESE SEROW and I saw 6 on the trail (lower one) to Mount ASAMA.

I got also:

-ASIATIC BLACK BEAR: 1 immature near Naka Karuizawa.

-RED FOX: 1 at Naka Karuizawa, an adulte and a young at Mt Asama.

-MASKED PALM CIVET: 1 at Naka Karuizawa.

-JAPANESE SQUIRREL: 1 at Shirebotsu onsen. I can't explain how I managed.

-SIKA DEER: 12 near a pass on road 299 south of KOMORO.

-JAPANESE BADGER: 1 at 2m from the car on the same road.

-JAPANESE MACAQUES: a group in lower part of road 299.

In fact I prospected road 299 south of Komoro looking for JAPANESE LESSER FLYING SQUIRREL (called MOMONGA). Close by there is a lodge at YATSUGATATE MOUNTAIN where feeders attracts them and also JAPANESE DORMOUSE. It I open only during weekends. Here is the phone number: 090 5446 1205. I have the name of this place only in Japanese.

-MIYAKE JIMA

I took the night ferry from Tokyo leaving by 10pm and arriving by 5am. This island is well known for its birds and a terrible volcanic eruption. When I arrived it was too early to get a car that I had not booked in advance so I dropped my bag at the airport and visited the area. In 1 hour I had got all the endemic birds + 3 weasels (in fact I came here to see weasels). During my full stay I saw a total of 6 weasels. They are easy to see by pishing, even if you have not seen them first. The weasels introduced on this island are said to be JAPANESE WEASELS, called locally ITATSI which it the scientific name of Japanese Weasel. It didn't see any difference with the SIBERIAN WEASELS I saw during this trip in SOUTH KOREA AND TAIWAN. Both are very similar and sometimes said to be conspecific. To add confusion: SIBERIAN WEASELS have been introduced in JAPAN at many places.

Without predators these weasels have become very common and some birds and a lizard have decreased. But what is never mentioned as a reason of the decreasing of the local fauna is the number of feral cats. I have never seen so many cats. You can even see them in groups.

After returning the car, I flew to TOKYO and the following morning to KUSHIRO on HOKKAIDO.

-HOKKAIDO

I spent 4 days and a half on Hokkaido prospecting north of KUSHIRO to the SHIRETOKO PENINSULA and a little part of AKAN NATIONAL PARK.

I saw:

-RED FOXES: they are very common. They stay on the roads were local feed them.

-SIKA DEERS: very common everywhere.

-BROWN BEARS: 10 including 2 babies seen from a boat along the SHIRETOKO PENINSULA; 3 in the evening on UTORO road and 3 again the following morning (probably the same). Like for the Foxes people like to feed them along roads which is forbidden. I enjoyed far more to see bears at this place than at the crowded Yellowstone.

-LARGHA SEAL: 1 NEMURO, 5 KIRITAPPU, 7 UTERO.

-HARBOR SEAL: 1 probable UTERO.

-DALL'S PORPOISE: common along the SHIRETOKO PENINSULA.

-MOUNTAIN HARE: 1 south ABASHIRI.

I drove by night looking for SABLE but without luck. There are several lodges where they come at feeders but I was told only from November to March. I will try again.

Dominique BRUGIERE

brugiere.dom@sfr.fr

