

Taiwan Trip Report 15 May - 25 May 2016

To be honest this was really a birding trip with three mates (all birders) to try and see as many of the Taiwan endemics, near endemics and other interesting bird species found on the Island. However, as usual when I'm on a birding trip I always try and put as much time in to find mammals as I can - but inevitably compromises have to be made. Nevertheless, I had a very enjoyable trip and as far as the birding was concerned we more or less cleaned up and I'm pleased to say saw a few good mammals into the bargain.

Taiwan isn't noted for its mammal watching (no trip reports on Mammalwatching.com for example) and although Clouded Leopards, Leopard Cats and Asiatic Black Bears still inhabit the Island they are rare and endangered and apparently very rarely seen. In fact the Clouded Leopard might be extinct. Simple internet searches such as 'Mammals found on Taiwan?' gives a list of what is on the Island and in some cases the current status of the animal. For example as well as the above mentioned species it also has two species of civet, two species of otter, Yellow-throated Marten, Sika and Samba Deer. Including the cetaceans and rodents there are around 70 mammal species recorded for Taiwan. You no doubt would see more mammals than I did if you devoted a whole trip to looking for them. However, mammals aside Taiwan is a superb birding destination, the people were friendly and helpful and in the main conservation minded with a number of national parks/reserves. What I was also pleasantly surprised about was just how much forest still exists albeit mainly on the steep slopes of the hills/mountains. All of which provides a large area for the native flora and fauna. Although we didn't actually meet any Taiwanese with binoculars actively wildlife watching we did come across groups of them all with very expensive cameras/telephoto lenses participating in the very popular pastime of bird photography - even if they didn't always know what species they were photographing. So be aware the weekends can be quite crowded with photographers at certain favoured locations.

Taiwan: Once known as Formosa. Taiwan is North to South 394km (244.8 miles) and East to West 144km (89.5 miles). The road system is extensive and very good, the road signs are in Chinese. The capital Taipei is modern and crowded like all big cities around the world. Plenty of cars on the street but also thousands of motor bikes and scooters which is the preferred mode of transport it seems particularly for the younger generation. That probably has something to do with the very high price of cars in Taiwan compared to the price of motor bikes/scooters. Everyone has mobile (cell) phones which are in constant use! Very few people spoke English. The Taiwanese currency is the New Taiwan Dollar. Although Taiwan is a part of the Chinese Republic the Taiwanese see themselves as being an independent free country!

Travel: We didn't have to drive ourselves as we pre-booked a driver/guide who spoke English, was a great companion and a very good birder. His name Kuan-Chieh Hung better known as 'Chuck' and comes highly recommended from all four of us. He can be contacted at: helapiz@gmail.com or info@taiwanbirdguide.com. For the British birders amongst you Chuck can be found on the Taiwan stand at the Rutland Bird Fair. He had all our accommodation sorted out and led us through the menus in the restaurants in the evenings. Personally I'm not that fond of Chinese food (I love Indian food) and I suppose being a vegetarian didn't help with my diversity of food - basically I lived off rice, boiled vegetables and eggs! But I've done it before and no doubt will do it again. Mind you there are

plenty of 7-11 stores which seem to open all night anyway so I could always buy snacks - biscuits, crisps and such like if feeling peckish or just wanted a change of food.

Flights: I flew Malaysian Air from London Heathrow to Taipei via Kuala Lumpur. At the end of the trip my friends flew home but I flew to Kota Kinabalu in Sabah (Borneo) and onto Sandakan where I met up with Richard Webb and Phil Telfer for a dedicated mammal watching trip. See respective trip reports written by Richard Webb on mammalwatching.com: *Sabah (Sepilok, Kinabatangan River & Deramakot) 25th May - 4th June 2016 and Sumatra (Gunung Kerinci and Tapan Road) 6th - 11th June 2016.*

Weather: June to October is the typhoon season in Taiwan, with July to September being the dryer and more pleasant time to visit for the casual visitor. The months with the most rain are in May and June while thunder and showers mostly come in the afternoons in summer. The winter months can be quite cool but are relatively mild and often foggy. It rained, sometimes heavy, at some point every day of our trip! But in between it was usually warm and humid. We went mid May to ensure we saw Fairy Pitta which arrives on Taiwan in small numbers from its wintering grounds in the last week of April but is easier to find in May when settled on their breeding territories.

Books: I took the following to Taiwan: A field guide to The Mammals of South-East Asia (Francis). Birds of East Asia (Brazil). Although I didn't take A guide to the Mammals of China (Smith et al) it would be useful.

Itinerary: Note the itinerary followed a well known birding route to maximise the chances of seeing most of the endemic bird species plus other avian specialities.

Day 1 Arrived in the capital Taipei late afternoon, o/n Taipei

Day 2 Taipei, Wulai, Dayshueshan

Day 3 Dayshueshan

Day 4 Dayshueshan, Basharshan and Wushe

Day 5 Hehuanshan, Huben

Day 6 .Huben

Day 7 Chigu, Kenting

Day 8 From Kenting took ferry to Lanyu Island. Lanyu Island is approx a 2.5 hour ferry trip off South East Taiwan.

Day 9 Lanyu Island and return ferry to Kenting, o/n Xintou

Day 10 Xintou and then o/n near Airport

Day 11 Early morning taxi to airport and flight to Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

Map of Taiwan



Geographical position of Taiwan





Mammal List - 14 species

All photographs by Vince Kinsler.

Formosan Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus monoceros*). Endemic. One in an out building at the Fairy Pitta Cafe, Huben.



Formosan Lesser Horseshoe Bat

Formosan Rock Macaque/Taiwan Macaque (*Macaca cyclopsis*). Endemic. I thought I'd see more of this species than I did - maybe I was just unlucky - but they were incredibly shy of humans in the areas we were in at least - so no photos unfortunately. They primarily occupy the mountainous areas in the north-eastern and south-western parts of the island. Although the species is thought to have once been associated with coastal areas, it is now largely confined to inland hills because of human activity. First of all on a very wet and foggy afternoon high up in the Dasyueshan Forest we heard a group calling from a very dense woody and scrub covered slope close to the track we were on - we never got to see them. We saw a large adult male around our accommodation at the

Dasyueshan Forest recreation area one early morning but it very quickly sprinted for tree cover as soon as it saw us. Again one beat a hastily retreat out of a small tree when it saw us, in the Huben forest area. Finally one was watched in forest trees not far from our accommodation at Firefly Lodge in the Alishan National Scenic Administration area. I was pleased to see this species as only a month early I had seen the North African endemic Barbary Macaque in the Rif Mountains of Morocco - my post on the Mammal Watching Forum of 29th April 2016 refers.

Siberian Weasel (*Mustela sibirica*). Dasyueshan Forest Reserve. One seen briefly but close and well by two of my friends who gave a detailed description of what could only have been this species. I missed it by seconds!

Crab-eating Mongoose (*Herpestes urva*). One gave decent views as it crossed the road one late afternoon in the Alishan National Scenic Administration area whilst en route to Firefly lodge, near Guanghua village.

Risso's Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*). A pod of 15 - 20 seen on our return sailing from Lanyu Island. Apparently this is one of the commonest cetacean species seen in Taiwan waters. There might have been a smaller species of dolphin amongst the pod but we couldn't be sure as they may just have been young Risso's.



Risso's Dolphin



Risso's Dolphin



Risso's Dolphin

Blainville's Beaked Whale (*Mesoplodon densirostris*). A pod of 5 or 6 with a couple of them breaching, seen from the ferry as we were approaching Lanyu Island.



Blainville's Beaked Whale



Blainville's Beaked Whale



Blainville's Beaked Whale

Reeves's Muntjac (*Muntiacus reevesi*). Dasyueshan Forest Reserve. One heard barking at night and then one seen the following morning by the side of the road.

Formosan (Taiwan) Serow (*Capricornis swinhoei*). Endemic to Taiwan, formerly considered as a subspecies of the Japanese Serow (*C. crispus swinhoei*) - per *Bovids of the World* (Castello).
Dasyueshan Forest Reserve: A great spotlighting session from the vehicle which started out as a short drive to look for owls, but with me pushing to stay out longer to look for mammals, ended up as an enjoyable 2.5 hours drive. We saw 8 Serows some of which gave very good views.



Formosan (Taiwan) Serow

Pallas's Squirrel (*Callosciurus erythraeus*). Relatively common being seen in Dasyueshan Forest, the forest area near Guanghua Village (Alishan Region), and the forest at Xintou (Xeitou) Nature Education Park, Nantou County.

Perny's Long-nosed Squirrel (*Dremomys pernyi*). At least 5 of these entertaining little squirrels were at the highest point of the Dasyueshan Forest reserve (near the Wuling Pass) on the one day we visited the location.

Maritime Striped Squirrel (*Tamiops maritimus*). At least 3 of these squirrels were at the same location at the same time as the previous species and 1 or 2 around our accommodation at the Dasyueshan Forest recreation area a few kilometres lower down the road.

Indian Giant Flying Squirrel (*Petaurista philippensis*). Although a relatively common species in Taiwan we only saw one (we heard others) as we only did one (short) night drive for this species along the lower road in the Dasyueshan Forest Reserve, at an altitude of about 1000 metres. This species is usually found at lower altitudes than the next species.

Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel (*Petaurista alborufus*). The largest of the giant squirrels and certainly a magnificent creature. We saw 12 of these fabulous squirrels on the same night drive as the Serows drive. This species tends to be found at a higher altitude than the previous species. We didn't see any Indian Giant Flying Squirrels along this part of the road but they do overlap in some places at middle range altitude. Both species can be found together for example in the forests around Firefly Lodge near Guanghua village (we heard both species at night) in the Alishan region.



Red and White Giant Flying Squirrel. Above and both photos below. Bottom photo of squirrel looks black but I think it's just shadowing and angle as photo taken at night while the squirrel was spot lit.



Brown Rat (*Rattus Norvegicus*). One seen on Lanyu Island.

Birds

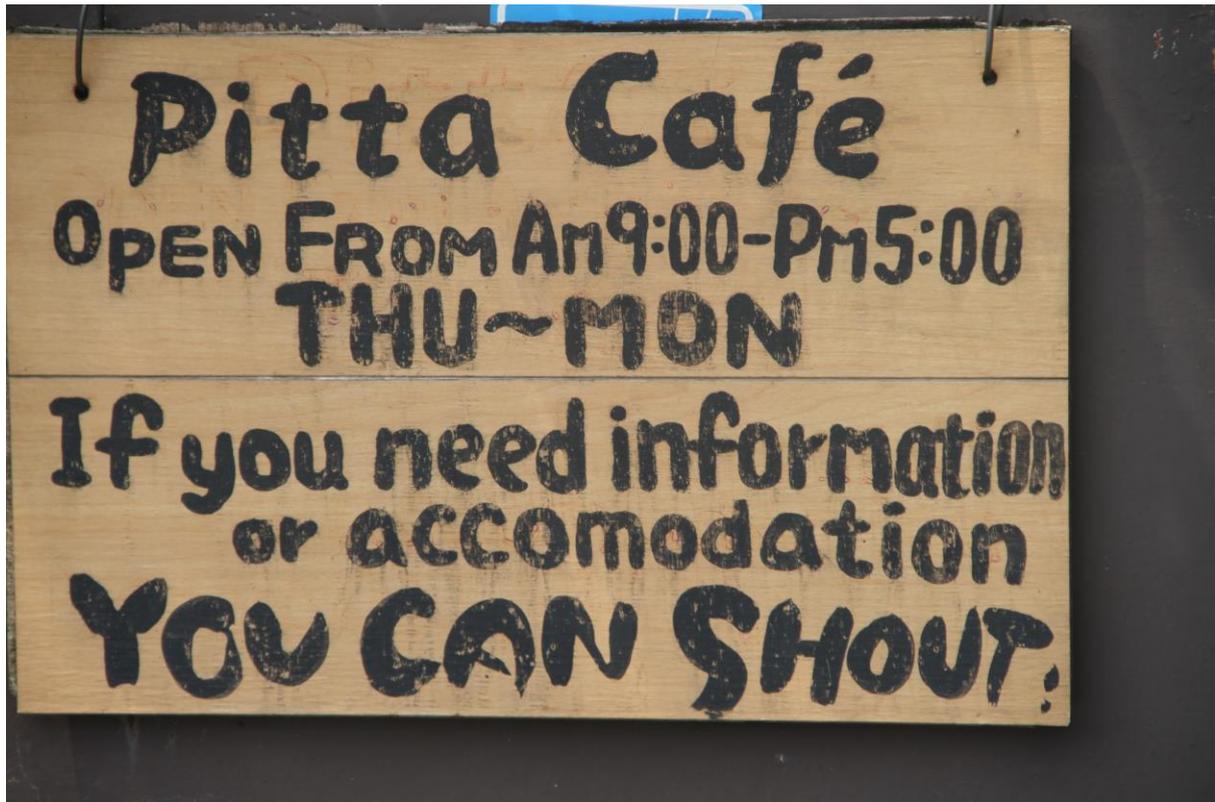
We saw 190 species with many highlights but of note: Malaysian Night-Heron, Mikado and Swinhoe's Pheasants, Taiwan Bamboo Partridge, Tahiti Petrel, Black-faced Spoonbill, Himalayan Owl, Ryukyu Scops-Owl, Fairy Pitta, Taiwan Blue Magpie, Flamecrest.

Reptiles and Amphibians

Common Sun Skink, Taiwan Alpine Skink, House Gecko, Long-tailed Skink, Swinhoe's Tree Lizard, Komai's Slug Eating Snake, Swinhoe's Frog, Central Formosa Toad.



Central Formosa Toad



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