



TAIWAN

April 16-24, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Taiwan offers some rather easy birding (out of the car on good roads) along with great food and some truly stunning scenery. Even though the birding is easy, some of the birds can be quite tricky to find – the good roads and not being sucked dry by leaches helps you focus on where your attention should be! The promise of a (usually) great meal at the end of the day also helps! And sometimes, when the birds are a bit thin on the ground, the scenery on the mountains can provide a welcome distraction. Taking advantage of the pre Spring migration lull in Korea, we spent a week in Taiwan attempting a “cleanup” of the currently recognized endemics. The logistics of the trip were arranged by Richard Chen of Birding@Taiwan (<http://www.birdingattaiwan.com/>). Richard proved to be very pleasant company and the trip was organized well. We also had the chance to stay in some very nice locations – especially in Alishan, thanks to Richard.

April 16

The short 2.5hr flight from Incheon to Taipei was delayed by about 40mins. We touched down in Taoyuan as the rain clouds loomed ominously over the city. The first birding location after checking into our hotel was the Botanical Gardens. The highlights were a pair of very tame **Malayan Night Heron** and a **Taiwan Scimitar Babbler**.



Malayan Night Heron

Back in the hotel, I was surprised to discover that there was a ballet school right opposite my window! Went to bed early after a sumptuous dinner.

April 17

This was essentially a driving day as we hugged the coastal road along the northern shores of Taiwan and headed for Hualian. Along the way, we stopped at a road-side rice field where the long staying **Siberian Crane** attracts lots of photographers. We found a few interesting waders including a **Curlew Sandpiper** (almost in breeding plumage), 2 **Sharp-tailed Sandpipers** and a **Red-necked Stint**. Later in the afternoon, after checking into a very nice hotel, we went to the Taroko National Park office amidst continuous drizzle and quickly picked out 2 **Styan's Bulbul** feeding on a tree near the office. The trees also had a **Grey-capped Woodpecker**.

April 18

This was also largely a driving day as we ventured inwards from the coast via the Wuling Pass. The day started rather slowly in the Swallow Grotto Trail – where the highlights were multiple

Plumbous Water Redstarts and **Taiwan Whistling Thrushes** feeding along the river at the base of the gorge. The magnificent scenery made up for the very few birds. Later in the day, we climbed higher towards the pass, as clouds began to close in. But there were quite a few productive stops. Seen from the road were circling **Crested Serpent Eagles**, perched **Crested Goshawks**. At one of the stops we found a pair of **Black-necklaced Scimitar Babblers**. Unlike their cousin, they proved to be notoriously difficult to photograph (and remained only one of the 2 endemics which evaded being photographed – respect!) At the pass, visibility was down to a few feet. It was a real struggle to figure out the birds. We encountered **Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler**, **Taiwan Rosefinch**, **Flamecrest**, **Collared Bush Robin** and **White-whiskered Laughingthrush**. Our search for Alpine Accentors in the rain proved futile. We returned to the car, cold and wet as we drove down towards Cingjing farm. The clouds gradually disappeared as we descended. At the Cingjing homestay, we dropped off our bags and quickly got to work – picking up **White-eared Sibia**, **Steere's Liocichla**, a migrating **Brown-headed Thrush** along with a flock of **Eyebrowed Thrush**. Even though the actual number of species observed that day were very few, we picked up no less than 10 endemic lifers. The steamed fish tasted especially good that evening!



Taiwan Rosefinch

April 19

Next morning, right behind the homestay we found a pair of **Taiwan Bamboo Partridge**, **White-tailed Robins**. Later in the morning on a nearby trail, a few **Yellow Tits**, **Black-throated Tits** and 2 **Vivid Niltavas** were observed. After lunch, we further descended towards Aowanda. We found a **Little Forktail** near the waterfall and a flock of **Taiwan Blue Magpies** behind the hotel.



Little Forktail



Taiwan Blue Magpie

April 20

After a very quiet morning, we started moving up towards Anmashan – Taiwan's premier birding destination. At the 23K parking lot, we encountered **Swinhoe's Pheasant** and **Taiwan Hill Partridge**. After dinner, we found a few **White-faced Flying Squirrel**.



Swinhoe's Pheasant



Taiwan Hill Partridge

April 21

We spent the early morning waiting at the 47K point on the road for Mikado Pheasant but none were to be found. Later in the morning, we went up to the summit and had very close views of **Taiwan Rosefinch** and **Grey-headed Bullfinches** being fed by photographers. A pair of **Eurasian Nutcrackers** were seen from the road. Near the summit pond, we had absolutely cracking views of a **Taiwan Bush Warbler** – singing its heart out! After lunch, we birded the stretch of the road between 37K and the entrance. We tried at multiple places for the laughingthrushes. At one point, a pair of **Rusty Laughingthrushes** came close to the road but only Marco was able to get very short views. At about 3pm, we went back to the 47K mark and this time was rewarded by stunning views of a **Mikado Pheasant**. (The cover photo)



Taiwan Bush Warbler

So far, we had birded in a rather relaxed pace (relatively late start and stopping for a nice lunch at midday) and had picked up most of the endemics that are more or less easy to find. The remaining ones were either unpredictable or difficult to find. The following day was all about discipline and focus.

April 22

Started at the crack of dawn but there were very few birds of note. We decided to skip breakfast and walk along the road, stopping regularly to check the gullies and the undergrowth. After about a couple of hours, we had success in form of a small flock of **Taiwan Barwings** (endemic

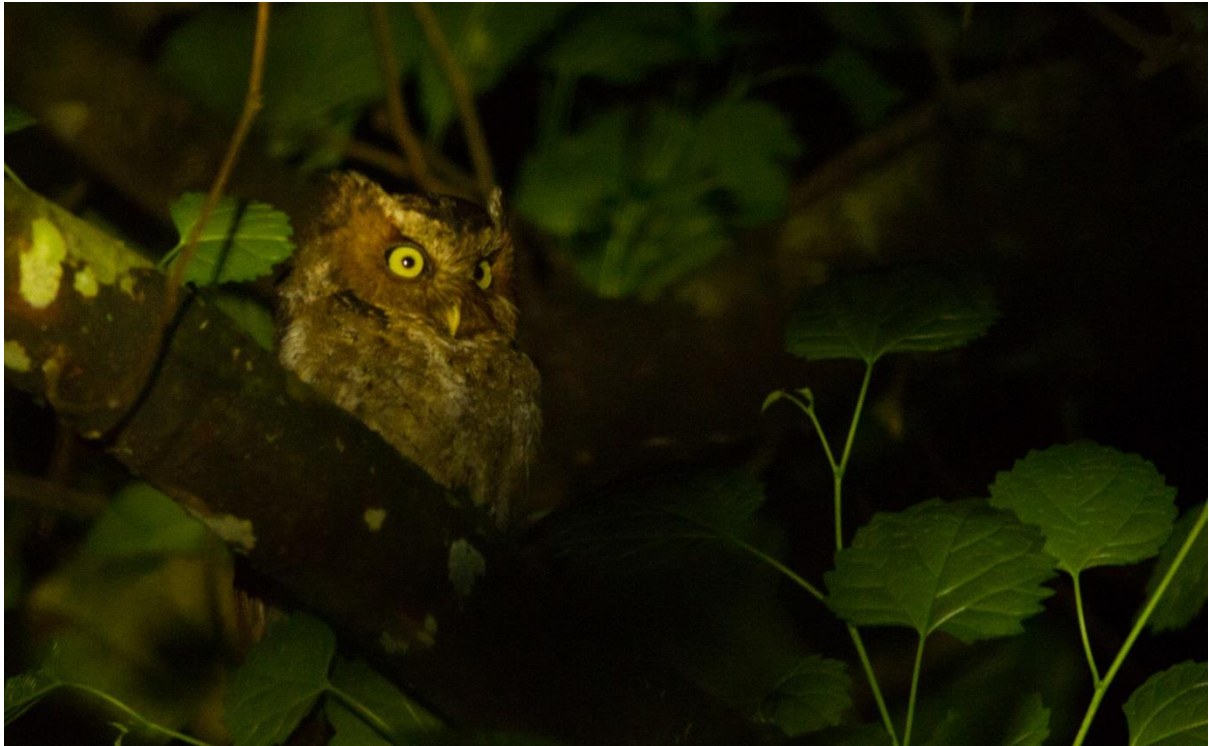
number 23). Within minutes, standing at the same spot, we encountered a small flock of **Silver-backed Needleetails** and an **Ashy Woodpigeon** in flight. Buoyed by the success, we doubled our efforts in search of the 2 remaining laughingthrushes. Luckily at one stop with lots of fallen mossy logs, we came across a **Taiwan Wren Babbler** (as it collected nesting material). It was an enormous relief – to be able to score a difficult bird with relative ease. 4 more endemics to go for the “cleanup”. At this point, a White-browed Shorting started calling and seemed very close. But even after half an hour of trying, we failed to get a visual of the bird. At one point, the bird flew across the road but it was just a blur.



Taiwan Cupwing (Wren Babbler)

After another couple of hours of hit and miss, we finally stumbled upon a flock of **Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush**. Riding on our run of good luck, we also picked up a **Taiwan Hwamei** and the endemic form of the **Varied Tit** in quick successions. It was a the most satisfying session of birding of the trip – hard work yielding results! After 7 hours of birding without food and having bagged most of our targets, we celebrated with a sumptuous lunch.

Our destination for the day was Kwanghua. This was the only day when we tried night birding. We had good views of a **Mountain Scops Owl** (though another one eluded us even though it was calling within a few feet from us). This marked the end of a 15 year wait for Marco to get a visual of this bird. We also had glimpse of a **Collared Scops Owl**.



Mountain Scops Owl

April 23

Another early morning start for a bird that has eluded us so far. After trying at a couple of different places, we finally had good views of a **Rusty Laughingthrush**. Though it was a brief view, the birds were seen very well. This left only one endemic to be found – the end was finally in sight. We drove up the Alishan highway, along with hundreds of busloads of tourists headed for the park. Luckily we left them behind as we turned off towards Taraka. The view all around was stunning. Our last target proved quite a bit more difficult than expected. It was noon and after having searched for it for about 3 hours, we were yet to find a Fulvetta. A bit dejected and waiting outside the parking lot toilet, we spotted a mixed flock in the trees behind. Scanning the flock for about 5 minutes revealed nothing more than **Taiwan Yuhinas** and **Black-throated Tit**. And then suddenly a bird popped into by view – “There it is ... 2 o’clock, moving left!”, I yelled out. “Yes, I’m on it!”, there was a great sense of relief in Marco’s voice. The **Taiwan Fulvetta** soon separated from the flock as it fed on a small bush right next to the road.

That day we also had great looks at a **White-browed Bush Robin**, finally had a visual on the endemic race of the **White-browed Shortwing** and came across a fruiting tree with **White-bellied Green Pigeons**, **White-eared Sibias** and **Taiwan Barwings** (finally got photos of them ... leaving only 2 endemics that I couldn’t photograph)

April 24

We tried for Fairy Pitta near Huben but didn't have any luck. Best bird that day were a pair of **Taiwan Bamboo Partridges**.

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES

Description of observation is included only for selected species.

ANSERIFORMES: Anatidae

Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*

GALLIFORMES: Phasianidae

Taiwan Partridge *Arborophila crudigularis*

A single individual was seen feeding near the 23K parking lot Anmashan.

Taiwan Bamboo-Partridge *Bambusicola sonorivox*

2 were seen crossing the road early in the morning behind the homestay in Cingjing. 2 were also seen by Subhojit in Huben.

Mikado Pheasant *Syrnaticus Mikado*

Memorable views at the 47K mark of Anmashan.

Swinhoe's Pheasant *Lophura swinhoii*

A single individual was seen feeding near the 23K parking lot Anmashan.

PELECANIFORMES: Ardeidae

Gray Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Malayan Night-Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*

A couple of very tame individuals in the Taipei Botanical Gardens.

ACCIPITRIFORMES: Pandionidae

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

ACCIPITRIFORMES: Accipitridae

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

A few were encountered during the drive on day 1.

Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*

A single individual was seen well on the road to Kwanghua.

Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela*

Multiples seen perched and circling. One individual was seen displaying.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malaiensis*

Seen from afar on 2 occasions in higher elevation.

Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

Multiples seen perched along the road or circling.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans*

GRUIFORMES: Rallidae

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Eurasian Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

GRUIFORMES: Gruidae

Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*

The long staying individual in a rice-field on the northern coast.

CHARADRIIFORMES: Recurvirostridae

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

CHARADRIIFORMES: Scolopacidae

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper *Calidris acuminata*

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

COLUMBIFORMES: Columbidae

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*

Ashy Wood-Pigeon *Columba pulchricollis*

One was seen in flight in Anmashan. Another suspected bird was seen perched distantly for a brief period while driving down from Alishan.

Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*

White-bellied Pigeon *Treron sieboldii*

Very good views of a flock feeding on a roadside fruiting tree on the way back from Alishan.

CUCULIFORMES: Cuculidae

Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus optatus*

Heard only.

STRIGIFORMES: Strigidae

Mountain Scops-Owl *Otus spilocephalus*

Heard in Aowanda (just behind the hotel). Multiples heard in Kwanghua with one seen well.

Collared Scops-Owl *Otus lettia*

Seen briefly in Kwanghua

Collared Owlet *Glaucidium brodiei*

Heard only in Anmashan.

APODIFORMES: Apodidae

Silver-backed Needletail *Hirundapus cochinchinensis*

A small flock seen near the police station in Anmashan.

Pacific Swift *Apus pacificus*

House Swift *Apus nipalensis*

CORACIIFORMES: Alcedinidae

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

PICIFORMES: Megalaimidae

Taiwan Barbet *Psilopogon nuchalis*

Seen almost daily with altitude ranging from sea-level to the entrance of Anmashan.

PICIFORMES: Picidae

Gray-capped Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus*

White-backed Woodpecker *Dendrocopos leucotos*

FALCONIFORMES: Falconidae

Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

PASSERIFORMES: Campephagidae

Gray-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris*

PASSERIFORMES: Laniidae

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*

PASSERIFORMES: Vireonidae

White-bellied Erpornis *Erpornis zantholeuca*

PASSERIFORMES: Dicruridae

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus*

PASSERIFORMES: Monarchidae

Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*

PASSERIFORMES: Corvidae

Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*

Taiwan Blue-Magpie *Urocissa caerulea*

A large group was seen behind the hotel in Aowanda while one was seen in flight in Dongshi just before commencing the climb to Anmashan.

Gray Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Eurasian Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Multiples seen at the highest points of both Anmashan and Alishan.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

PASSERIFORMES: Hirundinidae

Gray-throated Martin *Riparia chinensis*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Pacific Swallow *Hirundo tahitica*

Striated Swallow *Cecropis striolata*

Asian House-Martin *Delichon dasypus*

PASSERIFORMES: Paridae

Coal Tit *Periparus ater*

Quite striking looking with a very prominent crest. Seen well in the middle and higher sections of Anmashan.

Varied Tit *Sittiparus varius*

The very distinctive form was seen well at a location when coming down from Anmashan.

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*

Yellow Tit *Machlolophus holsti*

Encountered twice. Once in the 'pipe trail' near Cingjing and then again on the last day at Anmashan.

PASSERIFORMES: Aegithalidae

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*

PASSERIFORMES: Sittidae

Eurasian Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*

PASSERIFORMES: Pycnonotidae

Collared Finchbill *Spizixos semitorques*

Styan's Bulbul *Pycnonotus taivanus*

2 “pure” individuals were seen well near the ticket office of the Taroko National Park.

Light-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus sinensis*

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*

PASSERIFORMES: Regulidae

Flamecrest *Regulus goodfellowi*

PASSERIFORMES: Pnoepyidae

Taiwan Cupwing *Pnoepyga formosana*

Very good views of this skulker in Anmashan was one of the personal highlights of the trip. The bird was carrying nesting material and even came close to us to inspect.

PASSERIFORMES: Cettiidae

Rufous-faced Warbler *Abroscopus albogularis*

Common. Surprisingly loud voice for its size!

Yellowish-bellied Bush-Warbler *Horornis acanthizoides*

PASSERIFORMES: Locustellidae

Taiwan Bush-Warbler *Locustella alishanensis*

Absolutely cracking views near the summit of Anmashan

PASSERIFORMES: Cisticolidae

Striated Prinia *Prinia crinigera*

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*

PASSERIFORMES: Paradoxornithidae

Taiwan Fulvetta *Fulvetta formosana*

Seen near the parking lot of Taraka, Alishan. Very good views

Vinous-throated Parrotbill *Sinosuthora webbiana*

PASSERIFORMES: Zosteropidae

Taiwan Yuhina *Yuhina brunneiceps*

Japanese White-eye *Zosterops japonicus*

PASSERIFORMES: Timaliidae

Rufous-capped Babbler *Cyanoderma ruficeps*

Seen on 3 occasions – behind the homestay in Cingjing, near the ‘pipe trail’ and in Anmashan.

Taiwan Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus musicus*

Very good views at the Taipei Botanical Gardens and along the road in Kwanghua.

Black-necklaced Scimitar-Babbler *Megapomatorhinus erythrocnemis*

Seen on multiple occasions but rather poor views. Prefers to stick to the thick tangles.

PASSERIFORMES: Pellorneidae

Dusky Fulvetta *Schoeniparus brunneus*

A suspected bird was seen at around the 42K mark of Anmashan.

PASSERIFORMES: Leiothrichidae

Morrison's Fulvetta *Alcippe morrisonia*

Taiwan Hwamei *Garrulax taewanus*

Seen near Dongshi after a failed attempt earlier.

Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla ruficeps*

2 flocks (maybe the same one) was seen in Anmashan.

Rusty Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla poecilorhyncha*

Seen poorly in Anmashan and very well near Kwanghua.

White-whiskered Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron morrisonianum*

White-eared Sibia *Heterophasia auricularis*

Steere's Liocichla *Liocichla steerii*

Taiwan Barwing *Actinodura morrisoniana*

PASSERIFORMES: Muscicapidae

Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*

Gray-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*

Ferruginous Flycatcher *Muscicapa ferruginea*

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*

White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus*

Vivid Niltava *Niltava vivida*

White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*

Taiwan Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus insularis*

Little Forktail *Enicurus scouleri*

White-tailed Robin *Cinclidium leucurum*

White-browed Bush-Robin *Tarsiger indicus*

Collared Bush-Robin *Tarsiger johnstoniae*

Snowy-browed Flycatcher *Ficedula hyperythra*

Plumbeous Redstart *Phoenicurus fuliginosus*

Blue Rock-Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

PASSERIFORMES: Turdidae

Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*

Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus*

PASSERIFORMES: Sturnidae

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Crested Myna *Acridotheres cristatellus*

PASSERIFORMES: Motacillidae

Gray Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*

Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni*

PASSERIFORMES: Emberizidae

Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala*

PASSERIFORMES: Fringillidae

Brown Bullfinch *Pyrrhula nipalensis*

Gray-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca*

Taiwan Rosefinch *Carpodacus formosanus*

PASSERIFORMES: Passeridae

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*



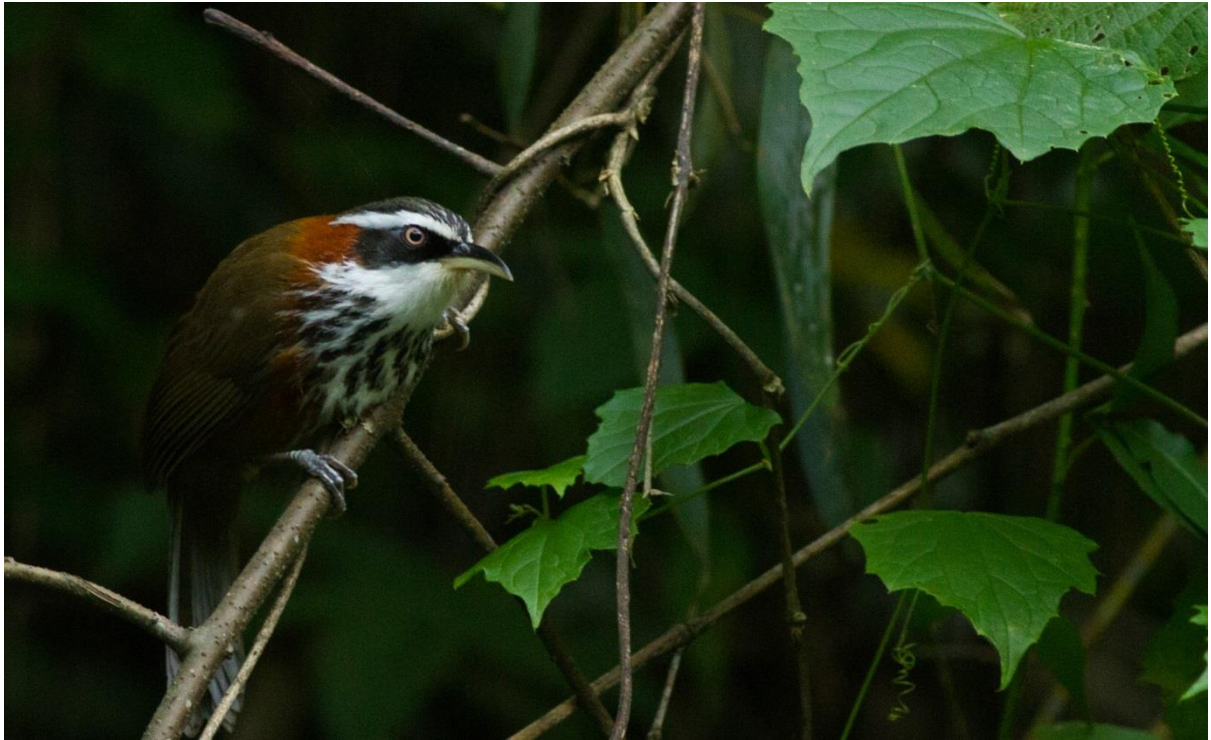
Collared Bush Robin



Rufous-crowned Laughingthrush



Taiwan Fulvetta



Taiwan Scimitar Babbler



Taiwan Whistling Thrush



White-browed Bush Robin



White-eared Sibia



White-whiskered Laughingthrush



Rusty Laughingthrush