

South Korea 20 April – 1 May 2009



Eocheong-do – village and harbour.

I travelled to South Korea in April 2009, with the primary purpose to spend some time on Eocheong-do watching East Palearctic migrants. Eocheong-do is just one of several interesting Korean islands situated off the West Coast in the Yellow Sea, which attracts tired migrants, in much the same way as it's European counterparts like Helgoland and Fair Isle. The island is 40 km off the mainland, and being only 2x2,5 km in size is easily covered. For more information on Eocheong-do and other islands, as well as birding news from Korea, **the** site to visit is www.birdskorea.org.

I arrived on 20 April in Incheon International Airport, and caught a bus going straight from the terminal to Gunsan (several daily/16.000 KRW). It's probably a good idea to change money at the airport, as the maximum-limit on ATM's here is much higher than in ATM's in stores, such as Family Mart. The exchange rate was 1 EUR ~1694 KRW or 1 USD ~1242 KRW

In Gunsan there are several motels (30-50.000 KRW) near the bus terminal, where one is bound to stay at some point, as the ferry to Eocheong-do usually leaves at 9 in the morning. The ferry is often cancelled due to bad weather, which happened on 3 days during my stay, which delayed my arrival by one day. Instead I tried birding in Wolmyeong Park, which is an area of forest-covered hills near the center of town. The area around Gunsan is also famous for waders, but without a car and local knowledge, is a little difficult to access. The mudflats are huge and so is the tidal difference.

A taxi to the ferry terminal was 10.000 KRW (the bus coming back was 1100 KRW), and the ferry to the island cost 21.000 KRW and took just about 3 hours for the 70 km trip. Initially the boat passes along mudflats on the northern side, until open waters are reached after an hour. Shearwaters and murrelets are often seen on the latter part of the ride, but I had no such luck.

On Eocheong-do birders stay at Yangji Shikdang's minbak (guesthouse) near the harbour, where good, local seafood is served. The charge is 30.000 KRW/night and meals come at 6000 KRW.

I had a full day in Seoul going back, and went to visit a couple of forest sites north of the city. Gwangneung Tomb and the Korean National Arboretum lie close together about 90 minutes travel by public transport from downtown Seoul. The way to get there is to take the number 1 subway line to Uijeongbu Station, take the east exit, and get on the number 21 bus on the main street, which goes to the National Arboretum. Both sites only open at 9 am, so some time might be spend birding from the main road, despite heavy traffic. The National Arboretum get's lots of visitors, tour groups and school classes, whereas the Gwangneung Tomb is more quiet. In retrospect I might have visited the Dobongsan area in Bukhansan NP, just north of Seoul instead, as it would have given me a chance of an earlier start, and perhaps fewer people, at least on a week-day.

With the recent publication of **Birds of East Asia** by Mark Brazil, there is now a very good field guide to the area, and the bird-list below, follows this book.

I want to thank local birder Robin Newlin for help with my initial inquiries about birding in South Korea, and for help with my stay on Eocheong-do. I'll be sure to come back and enjoy this and other islands in the future.

For further information and questions feel free to contact me on my email

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Bird-list:

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus karpowi*) – 3 males near Gunsan ferry terminal, 3+ males in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan (both 21.4), and 1 male heard at Gwangneung Tomb 30.4. Great to finally be able to tick genuine birds.

Mandarin Duck (*Aix galericulata*) – on Eocheong-do one male was present around the reservoir 22-27.4, at the National Arboretum 1 pair and 2 males were along the river 30.4.

Eastern Spot-billed Duck (*Anas zonorhyncha*) – one bird on Eocheong-do on 22.4 and 4 at National Arboretum on 30.4.

Long-tailed Duck (*Clangula hyemalis*) – 1 pair seen from the ferry approx. 10 km east of Eocheong-do on 28.4.

Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) – a single bird in the bay at Eocheong-do 23-27.4.

Striated Heron (*Butorides striata amurensis*) – one bird on Eocheong-do 25-27.4.

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – one seen over Gunsan 21.4, and 1-3 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) – up to 4 birds were present on Eocheong-do 22-25.4.

Eastern Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus coromandus*) – on Eocheong-do 2 birds on 22-24.4 and 1 on 28.4.

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea jouyi*) – 1-4 birds daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4, and 1 at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Great White Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) – a single bird at the reservoir on Eocheong-do on 24.4.

Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) – on Eocheong-do 1 bird on 22-24.4 and another on 26.4 .

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) – one flying north past Eocheong-do on 25.4 and another at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Temminck's Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax capillatus*) – 4-7 birds seen daily around Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*) – what seemed to be a smaller and all dark cormorant was roosting with a few Temminck's Cormorants off Eocheong-do on 24.4, but because of the distance I'm not fully convinced of the ID.

Eurasian Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) – a single bird was seen from the bus between Gunsan and Seoul on 29.4.

Northern Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) – on 25.4 a single bird flew east past the lighthouse on Eocheong-do.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) – 1-2 adult birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4, and might breed on the cliffs on the NE-coast (race *F. p. japonensis* ?).

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) – one flew east at Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4 and another was seen a few times along the north coast on Eocheong-do on 24.4.

Japanese Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter gularis*) – a single male (same ?) was seen 22-27.4 on Eocheong-do with 3 migrating on 28.4.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – on Eocheong-do a female bird 23-24.4.

Grey-faced Buzzard (*Butastur indicus*) – 2 birds seen daily 26-28.4 on Eocheong-do, with a few migrating north immediately.

Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) – a single bird seen around the reservoir and stream 23-26.4 on Eocheong-do.

Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*) – one bird on the beach on Eocheong-do 22-23.4.

Grey Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – 2 birds on the pier on Eocheong-do on 25.4.

Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) – a single bird (*C. m. mongolus/stegmanni*) on Eocheong-do on 26.4.

Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultia*) – on Eocheong-do 1 bird 22.4 and 2 23-26.4.



Lesser Sand Plover, Great Knot and Red-necked Stints 26.4.

Latham's Snipe (*Gallinago hardwickii*) – on 23.4 1 or 2 possible birds were watched feeding in tall grass at the upper end of the drain. They were hard to see well, but differed from a Common Snipe nearby, by being overall paler colour, without the warm tones of Common, fewer markings on the breast, and rather dark markings on the back. As they were in a private yard (with dogs!), I didn't enter to get closer looks.

Pin-tailed Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*) – 2-3 birds daily on Eocheong-do 23-28.4.

Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) – a single bird in the drain 22-25.4.

Eastern Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa melanuroides*) – one bird seen at the dump near the entrance to the harbour on Eocheong-do 27.4.

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus variegatus*) – heard migrating after dark 24.4, and up to 6 seen 26-28.4 on Eocheong-do.

Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*) – 1-2 birds seen daily on Eocheong do 22-27.4.

Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*) – a single bird 24-27.4 on Eocheong-do.

Green Sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) – one bird 23-24 and 27.4 on Eocheong-do, and 2 at the National Arboretum 30.4.

Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) – 3-4 birds daily on Eocheong-do 22-27.4, with a flock of 21 migrating 28.4.

Grey-tailed Tattler (*Tringa brevipes*) – on Eocheong-do there were 2 birds 24-26.4.

Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) – 2 birds daily on Eocheong-do 22-27.4.

Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) – 1-3 birds daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) – a single bird was present on Eocheong-do 22-26.4.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) – up to 9 birds daily on Eocheong-do 22-27.4.

Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*) – a single bird seen on Eocheong-do 22-26.4.

Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (*Calidris acuminata*) – 1-3 birds 22-27.4 on Eocheong-do.



Sharp-tailed Sandpiper (27.4) and Black-tailed Gull (22.4).

Black-tailed Gull (*Larus crassirostris*) – the most common gull, seen in Gunsan, from the ferry to Eocheong-do, and on on Eocheong-do with 40-65 daily, except 225 on the windy 25.4.

Mongolian Gull (*Larus mongolicus*) – less numerous than Black-tailed Gull, but seen at the same sites, with a maximum of 110 on Eocheong-do 25.4.

Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) – one bird seen from the bus between Gunsan and Seoul 29.4.

Oriental Turtle Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) – seen at most wooded sites, with 6+ in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, 5-8 daily on Eocheong-do and 6 at National Arboretum 30.4.

Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*) – a female was seen on Eocheong-do 26-28.4.

Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*) – two birds were calling on Eocheong-do 28.4 and another was heard at the National Arboretum 30.4.

Brown Hawk Owl (*Ninox scutulata*) – one bird was flushed from a roadside tree near the lighthouse on Eocheong-do on 25.4, but settled again quickly, allowing good views.

Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus jotaka*) – one male was flushed on Eocheong-do on 26.4.

Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) – seen daily with 1-2 birds on Eocheong-do, except 3-4 birds on 27.4.

Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) – on Eocheong-do one bird at the lighthouse on 23.4 and one bird around the school 27-28.4.

Eurasian Wryneck (*Jynx torquilla*) – 1 bird on Eocheong-do on 24.4 and another 4+ on 27.4.

Japanese Pygmy Woodpecker (*Yungipicus kizuki*) – one bird in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, 2 at Gwangneung Tomb and 3 at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Great Spotted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopus major japonicus*) – 3 birds at the Gwangneung Tomb on 30.4.

Grey-headed Woodpecker (*Picus canus*) – 1-2 males at the National Arboretum 30.4.

Ashy Minivet (*Pericrocotus divaricatus*) – on Eocheong-do 1-2 birds heard 24-26.4, 4+ on 27.4 and 6+ on 28.4.

Bull-headed Shrike (*Lanius bucephalus*) – one male on Eocheong-do on 23.4 and another male at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*) – one male on Eocheong-do on 24.4.

Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*) – one bird on Eocheong-do on 27.4 was followed by another 6 the following day.

Eurasian Jay (*Garrulus glandarius brandtii*) – 1 bird in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4 and 2 at both Gwangneung Tomb and the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Common Magpie (*Pica pica sericea*) – only seen on the mainland, where common.

Large-billed Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) – one bird seen at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Eastern Great Tit (*Parus minor*) – 5 birds at Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4 and same numbers at both Gwangneung Tomb and National Arboretum on 30.4.

Yellow-bellied Tit (*Periparus venustulus*) – on Eocheong-do a female was seen on the NE peninsula on 27.4 and the following day a male came in off the sea at the lighthouse. A Chinese endemic, until the first sighting in South Korea in 2005, and only seen a few times since.



Yellow-bellied Tit 28.4 at the lighthouse.

Coal Tit (*Periparus ater*) – 2 birds in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4 and 3 at both Gwangneung Tomb and National Arboretum on 30.4.

Varied Tit (*Poecile varius varius*) – 2 were seen at Gwangneung Tomb and 5+ were at the National Arboretum on 30.4.

Marsh Tit (*Poecile palustris*) – on 30.4 3 were seen at the Gwangneung Tomb and another 5 at the National Arboretum. The call of these eastern birds have sounds much like Willow Tit!

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) – 3 birds at Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, and on Eocheong-do 5-15 birds were seen 22-28.4, except 50 on 26.4 and 35 on 27.4.

Northern House Martin (*Delichon urbicum*) – on 26.4 3 birds were found on Eocheong-do roosting with large numbers of other swallows in the morning near the school. First seen in South Korea in 2003 (on Eocheong-do), but is apparently a regular but scarce migrant.



One of 3 Northern House Martins on 26.4.

Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) – on Eocheong-do seen daily peaking with 65 in the evening of 24.4, 600+ on the morning of 26.4, with 85 still remaining on 27.4.

Longtailed Tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) – in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan 7+ seen on 21.4 (incl. juveniles), and on 30.4 there were 2 at Gwangneung Tomb and 5 at the National Arboretum. All birds were of the darkheaded race *A. c. magnus*, except one bird at National Arboretum which was *A. c. caudatus*.

Brown-eared Bulbul (*Microscelis amaurotis*) – seen at all wooded sites, with 6 at Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan 21.4, 6-11 daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4, 5 at Gwangneung Tomb and 8 at National Arboretum 30.4.

Asian Stubtail (*Urosphena squameiceps*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do, most days up to 4-6 birds but 13+ on 26.4.

Korean Bush Warbler (*Cettia canturians*) – a single bird was seen in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, and on Eocheong-do 4-7 birds were seen (or more often heard) daily, except 10 on 27.4

Oriental Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus orientalis*) – a single bird on Eocheong-do on 23.4.

Dusky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*) – on Eocheong-do 2-5 birds seen daily 22-24.4 and 4-10 25-28.4.

Pallas's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus proregulus*) – up to 5 birds were seen daily on Eocheong-do 23-28.4.

Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*) – one bird seen in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan 21.4, and daily on Eocheong-do with 4-6 birds 22-25.4, 10-13 26-27.4 and peaking with 40+ on 28.4. A single bird was also seen at Gwangneung Tomb on 30.4.

Pale-legged Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus tenellipes*) – 2-6 birds were seen/heard daily on Eocheong-do 23-28.4, with a peak of 9 on 24.4.

Sakhalin Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealoides*) – on Eocheong-do a possible bird was seen on 23.4. Compared to Pale-legged Leaf Warblers seen, the colours of, and contrast between the ashygrey head and more green of the back, were quite obvious. Unfortunately the bird was silent.

Eastern Crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus coronatus*) – 3 birds were in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4 and on Eocheong-do 2-4 birds were seen daily 22-28.4, except 10 on 24.4 and 6 the following day.

Vinous-throated Parrotbill (*Paradoxornis webbianus*) – a single bird in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, 2 at Gwangneung Tomb and 6 at National Arboretum on 30.4.

Japanese White-eye (*Zosterops japonicus*) – 4-8 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 23-28.4

Eurasian Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea amurensis*) – seen only at Gwangneung Tomb with 3 birds on 30.4.

Red-billed Starling (*Sturnus sericeus*) – a female was seen on Eocheong-do on 22.4.

White-cheeked Starling (*Sturnus cineraceus*) – only seen on Eocheong-do with one on 23.4 and 2-3 on 26-28.4.

White's Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) – a single bird in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan on 21.4, and seen daily on Eocheong-do, where several birds could be found feeding in the open around the village and harbour, and at the lighthouse. 8-15 birds were noted daily, with low turnover, as most of the birds were seen in the exact same locations every day. Probably 20+ birds present the whole period 22-28.4.



Scaly Thrush at the lighthouse 27.4.

Grey-backed Thrush (*Turdus hortulorum*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do with 1-3 birds 22-26.4, 35 on 27.4 and 20 on 28.4.

Japanese Thrush (*Turdus cardis*) – on Eocheong-do birds were seen daily 22-28.4, and as with White's Thrush there seemed to be little turnover, as the same birds could be found in the spots on several days in a row. Around the school there was a 2cal. male and 2 female, 1 male near the pagoda, and 1 male and 1 female at the lighthouse.

Eye-browed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*) – 2-6 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Pale Thrush (*Turdus pallidus*) – 10-20 birds noted daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4, except 50+ migrating/roosting birds on 27.4.

Brown-headed Thrush (*Turdus chrysolaus*) – 3-4 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Naumann's Thrush (*Turdus naumanni*) – a female-type bird was seen on Eocheong-do on 24.4, but one or two possible hybrids with Dusky also seen during my stay.

Dusky Thrush (*Turdus eunomus*) – daily on Eocheong-do 15-20 birds noted daily 22-28.4 except 85+ on 27.4.

Siberian Rubythroat (*Luscinia calliope*) – 1-2 males seen on Eocheong-do 22-26.4 with 3 males and one female present on 27.4.

Siberian Blue Robin (*Luscinia cyane*) – apart from 8 birds on 23.4 and 11 on 24.4 only 1-4 birds seen daily 22-28.4 on Eocheong-do, mostly males.



Siberian Blue Robin (23.4) and Red-flanked Bluetail (25.4)

Red-flanked Bluetail (*Luscinia cyanura*) – on Eocheong-do seen daily 22-28.4 with 10-15 birds, almost all females.

Daurian Redstart (*Phoenicurus aureus*) – 2-3 female birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Siberian Stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*) – 20-25 birds noted daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do where 5-8 birds were seen 22-28.4. All male birds were of the red-bellied race *M. s. philippensis*.

Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) – on Eocheong-do a single bird was seen 24.4 and at Gwangneung Tomb a bird was singing on 30.4.

Yellow-rumped Flycatcher (*Muscicapa zanthopygia*) – a male was seen on Eocheong-do on 22.4 and a female was found on 28.4.

Narcissus Flycatcher (*Muscicapa narcissina*) – a single male was seen 23-24.4 on Eocheong-do.

Blue-and-white Flycatcher (*Cyanoptiola cyanomelana*) – on Eocheong-do 1-3 males were seen 22-25.4, and 1 male and 1 female 26-28.4. On 30.4 there were 1 singing male at Gwangneung Tomb and 2 singing at Nationale Arboretum.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) – only seen on the mainland, where common.

Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) – 1-4 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4 were all **Manchurian**-type birds *M. t. macronyx*. A single male **Green-headed**-type *M. t. taivana* was at the reservoir on 25.4.

Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) – up to 3 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-27.4. Single birds were also seen at Gangneung Tomb and National Arboretum on 30.4.

White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) – 5-8 birds of the **East Siberian**-type *M. a. ocularis* were seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4. Two birds of the **Amur**-type *M. a. leucopsis* were seen 23-24.4.

Richard's Pipit (*Anthus richardi*) – on Eocheong-do 1 bird seen 23 and 24.4, with 5 on 27.4 and 8 on 28.4.

Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) – noted daily on Eocheong-do with 20-25 birds, except 35 on 27.4. A single bird was also seen at National Arboretum 30.4.

Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) – daily on Eocheong-do in small numbers, 2-5 birds 22-28.4, except 8 on 27.4.

Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do with a peak of 7 on 23.4, otherwise 2-3 birds.

Brambling (*Fringilla montifringilla*) – on Eocheong-do 25-35 birds seen daily 22-28.4 with a peak of 70 on 27.4.

Oriental Greenfinch (*Carduelis sinica*) – 1-3 seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4.

Eurasian Siskin (*Carduelis spinus*) – up to 10 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do, except 45 on 26.4. Also heard at both Gwangneung Tomb and National Arboretum 30.4.

Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) – on Eocheong-do a female was seen 24.4 and 27.4, and a male was heard singing on 26.4, all birds noted near the school.

Hawfinch (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*) – 1-2 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do.

Chinese Grosbeak (*Eophona migratoria*) – a single male was on Eocheong-do on 22.4.

Tristram's Bunting (*Emberiza tristrami*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do with 3-7 birds, except 15 birds on 24-25.4. Also 2 birds at Gwangneung Tomb on 30.4.

Chestnut-eared Bunting (*Emberiza fucata*) – on Eocheong-do a female was seen on 22.4 and male on 26.4.

Little Bunting (*Emberiza pusilla*) – seen daily on Eocheong-do 22-28.4 with 4-10 birds.



Little Bunting (26.4) and Yellow-browed Bunting (23.4).

Yellow-browed Bunting (*Emberiza chrysophrys*) – 1-4 birds seen daily on Eocheong-do 23-28.4.

Rustic Bunting (*Emberiza rustica*) – a male was found on Eocheong-do on 25.4.

Elegant Bunting (*Emberiza elegans*) – 2 birds seen in Wolmyeong Park, Gunsan 21.4, daily on Eocheong-do with 2-5 birds 22-28.4, and 2 birds seen at both Gwangneung Tomb and National Arboretum 30.4.

Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*) – a single male seen on Eocheong-do on 27.4.

Black-faced Bunting (*Emberiza spodocephala*) – a fall had probably occurred on Eocheong-do in the days prior to my arrival, as 100+ were seen 22-23.4, after which numbers decreased daily, so only 25 were noted on 28.4.

Pallas's Reed Bunting (*Emberiza pallasi*) – on Eocheong-do a male was found on 23.4, and the next day a female was seen.



The lighthouse at the western end of the island, where the lawn and 'garden' held a nice mix of migrants – thrushes, pipits and buntings.