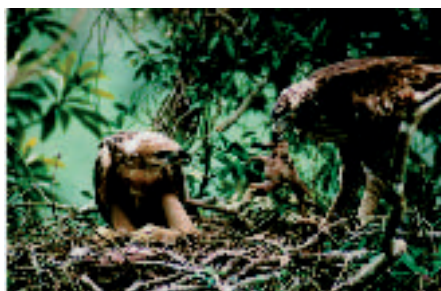




Birds of a feather

An ex wild boar hunter and bird-lover team up to document the life of the Mountain Hawk Eagle.



The Mountain Hawk Eagle, otherwise known as Hodgson's Hawk Eagle, is the largest bird of prey to inhabit Taiwan. While it breeds throughout southern Asia from India and Sri Lanka to China and Japan, the Hawk Eagle is nevertheless under threat from both hunters and local tribes.

The bird's majestic appearance makes it sought after by collectors. In addition, the feathers, which endow the wearer with high status can be worth anywhere up to US\$500 each. The birds inhabit coniferous forests between 3,000 and 11,000 feet above sea level and are extremely suspicious of humans.

The documentary was the inspiration of Chen Hsu-Huang, previously a well-known Chinese hunter who had a complete change of heart when he realized the magnificent Mountain Hawk Eagle was declining in numbers. "I couldn't just sit idly by and watch such a magnificent bird disappear," says Hsu-Huang. While looking for a suitable wildlife documentary maker, the ex-hunter saw several of Yen-Ming Liu's films on birds and other wildlife and sought him out to film *The Mountain Hawk Eagle*. Yen-Ming Liu has had twenty years' experience filming wildlife documentaries; his 1995 documentary *Taipei Tree Frog* won Best Cinematography at the Houston Film Festival and a Bronze medal for Best Cinematography at the 40th Asian Pacific Festival. The division of labor between the two men was simple, Hsu-Huang

located the birds and provided logistical support for Liu, while the cinematographer also acted as director and producer.

Filming began in mid-2001 and was completed a mere five years later! "There wasn't a lot of research on these birds when we began filming, so we were almost operating in the dark," says Yen-Ming. "It takes extreme perseverance to film this rare species, not to mention living in difficult conditions at the location. In addition to living in remote, mountainous forests, the Hawk Eagle builds its nest some 25 meters from the ground. The only way to film the eaglet in the nest was to construct a hide at the same height in another tree 60 feet away, and then stay there filming for weeks on end!"

Shooting in the 16mm format, Yen-Ming Liu used only two stocks, the KODAK EASTMAN EXR 50D 7245 and KODAK VISION 250D 7246. "Everything I shot was, of course, lit by the natural sunlight. I never considered using a tungsten-balanced stock with a correction filter. These two stocks intercut beautifully. I'd use the 7245 for sunny days and the 7246 for sequences occurring during the darker parts of the day, such as early morning and late afternoon. I've used these two stocks for all the wildlife documentaries I've shot. The 7246 has such great dynamic range, I can shoot in grey, gloomy weather and get great results." Yen-Ming Liu used an ARRIflex SR3 and a Bolex. His lenses were a series of Zeiss lenses, a 350mm, 12mm and a zoom.

Most of the footage for *The Mountain Hawk Eagle* was shot in Taimali Creek in Taitung County in eastern Taiwan and was financed by the Leofoo Development Group. The company was so impressed with the footage they have provided the funds for a blow-up from the original 16mm to 35mm for a cinema release. ■