



Meet the Taiwan Barbet

A Full English translation is available.

遇見五色鳥：探查育雛保衛戰的林間散步

Author: Chiu Chen-Tsung **Illustrator:** Chiu Chen-Tsung **Publisher:** Commonwealth Education

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BFT2.0 Translator: Catherine Yu

While walking through the forest, two brothers stumble upon an extraordinary scene—a Taiwan Barbet family in the midst of a fierce parenting defense. As the scene unfolds, the brothers must constantly adjust to find the best vantage point while carefully staying hidden so as not to disturb the birds. Will the barbet family make it through unscathed?

The Taiwan Barbet, a common sight in forests and city parks, takes center stage in this richly researched picture book. Drawing on three years of meticulous fieldwork, including observation of 17 nests, daily positioning at 7 a.m., and over 3,000 photographs, the author transforms scientific precision into a vibrant visual narrative that soars from page to page.

This is more than a rare glimpse into a hidden moment of wildlife—it's an invitation to begin conservation at home. By recognizing this endemic species, respecting life, and protecting habitats, readers join in the mission to sustain biodiversity.



Author Chiu Chen-Tsung

Born in 1954, Chiu Chen-Tsung graduated from the Tokyo College of Photography in Japan. He served as Chief Photographer for *Children's Daily News* before founding Red Tomato Publishing. His work has twice been selected for the Bologna Children's Book Fair Illustrator Exhibition and recognized on the White Ravens list by the International Youth Library in Germany. He has received numerous prestigious honors, including the Golden Tripod Award, the Taipei International Book Exhibition Grand Prize, the Openbook Best Book of the Year, and the China Times Openbook Top Ten Children's Books of the Year.

With over 30 years of creative work, Chiu continues to explore new perspectives and refine his artistic techniques in every project. What remains constant is his deep connection to nature and his compassion for life—qualities reflected in every book he creates.

Meet the Taiwan Barbet: Encountering Taiwan's Brilliant Picture Book Artist Chiu Chen- Tsung

by Charlene Lai
(originally published on OKAPI)

The Taiwan Barbet (*Psilopogon nuchalis*) is a bird species found only in Taiwan. When people hear “woodpecker,” they often imagine the noisy ones in American attics. But the Taiwan Barbet is a far more polite neighbor. It perches on trees, patiently watches insects pass by, and selects its next meal with quiet precision. These birds are surprisingly disciplined: scrupulously monogamous, they require no legal contract. They also embrace gender equality, taking turns incubating eggs and raising chicks until the young are ready to leave the nest.

The book *Meet the Taiwan Barbet* offers readers a rich visual experience:

full-body shots, close-ups, side views, action scenes, and even hidden moments of the barbets' daily life—feeding, guarding, cleaning, observing. The bird is always the clear subject of each illustration, while the backgrounds remain softly blurred, echoing the feel of professional wildlife photography.

Yet, these images aren't photographs. Illustrator Chiu Chen-Tsung, who once studied photography, uses his brush to create what cameras cannot. His paintings capture moments that would never happen at the same time in real life, offering a hyper-realistic yet surreal view into nature. These birds and insects

become actors on a carefully directed stage. Chiu is more than an illustrator—he is a master of blending ecological storytelling with consummate artistry.

The idea for this book began in 2018, when Chiu observed a young Taiwan Barbet regularly. Their bond grew as the chick became more comfortable and even seemed to pose for him. One day, as Chiu stopped his scooter to watch the bird, he noticed an unusual stillness. No chick peeked out from the tree hollow. A passerby eventually informed him that a chick had been hit by a car and placed in a roadside ditch. That moment of unexpected loss inspired the making of this book.

Taiwan Barbets are secretive nesters. Instead of perching their nests on branches, they carve them into tree trunks—always on the shady side to avoid overheating. One unique illustration in the book requires readers to rotate the page vertically; it shows a cross-section of a tree trunk, revealing the nest's interior, with parents and chicks residing in their hidden world.

Today, Taiwan Barbets face growing challenges. Dead trees, their preferred nesting sites, are harder to find. Their excavations can destabilize the trees, and predators like squirrels also

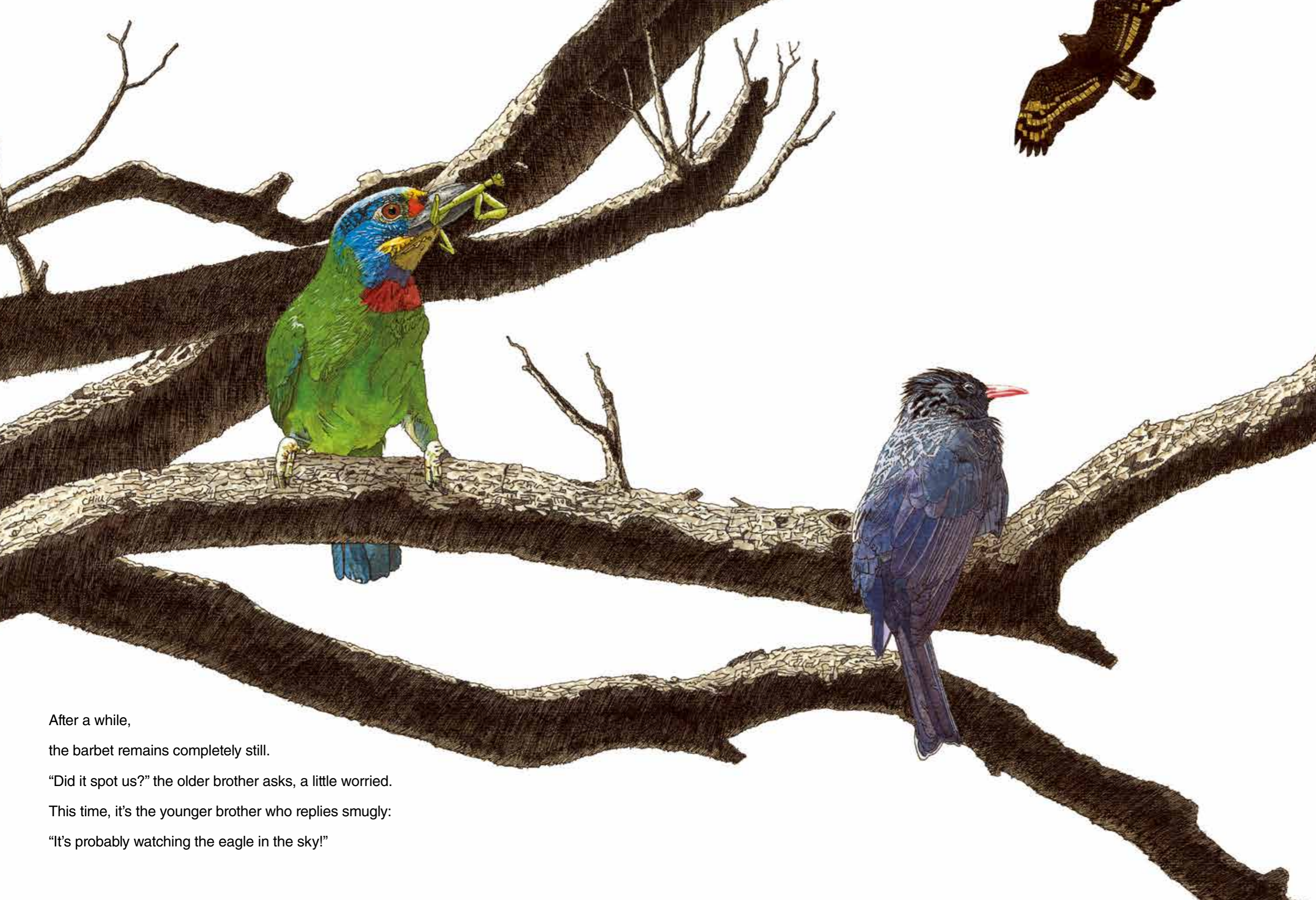
threaten their safety. Simply finding a safe home is an increasing struggle.

Chiu gained insight into their nest structure from a rare chance encounter with a fallen, hollow log that revealed their secret world. If you ever hear their distinctive call in the city, know that a Taiwan Barbet is nearby.

Besides the barbet, this book also features many of its neighbors—Japanese White-eyes, Taiwan Blue Magpies, Crested Serpent Eagle, butterflies, beetles, mantis nests, cicada shells, and more. Even if readers forget the names of these insects and birds, they'll surely remember one thing: the Taiwan Barbet, and the gifted picture book artist who brought it to life—Chiu Chen-Tsung, a true original of Taiwan.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

Charlene Lai, a writer and picture book critic, became involved in picture books through reading with her children. She promotes picture book reading by organizing groups, writing columns, planning events, facilitating international exchanges, and supporting local creators in connecting globally.



After a while,
the barbet remains completely still.
“Did it spot us?” the older brother asks, a little worried.
This time, it’s the younger brother who replies smugly:
“It’s probably watching the eagle in the sky!”



“Ah, another bird just flew here,” whispers the little brother.

“Quick, crouch down—that’s the parent bird keeping watch nearby,”
the older brother says, pressing a hand on his brother’s shoulder.

The two of them hide in a little bush.

“It’s flying!” the brothers exclaim together.

All around them, the air buzzes with the cries of *Pomponia yayeyamana* cicadas.

But the older brother, listening closely with the little brother,
can still hear the soft sound of the barbet flapping its wings.

