Soaring Eagles on Bagua: The Rebirth from Hunting Ground to Sanctuary

Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area, Taiwan
Tri-mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters
Local Destinations (including villages, cities, municipalities, islands)
Nature & Environment

Summary of Good Practice Story
Baguashan in Taiwan, a key stopover on the East Asian–Australasian migratory flyway, was until the early 1990s a hunting ground where nine of every ten thousand migrating Grey-faced Buzzards were killed. Recognising that enforcement alone could not change entrenched hunting culture, the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters, Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency and Wild Bird Society of Changhua invested in environmental education instead — opening Taiwan's first Grey-faced Buzzard Environmental Education Center in 2014 with AR/VR experiences, launching an "Environmental Education Train" to reach rural schools, and supporting former hunters like Chin-Fa Ho to become conservation patrol volunteers through the community-based Forest and Eagle Protection Team. Combined with 33 years of the "Soaring Eagles on Bagua" festival, buzzard numbers recovered from roughly 10,000 to over 51,000 by 2025, illegal hunting has nearly disappeared, and eagle-watching visitors grew from about 4,000 in 2015 to over 10,000, generating NT$17.76 million in economic value. The core lesson: lasting conservation requires trust and shared value, built through education and cross-sector collaboration rather than regulation alone.

Setting the Scene: Destination & context
Range is a landscape of rolling hills, tea plantations, and forested ridges. Despite its tranquil appearance, it lies along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, one of the world's most important migratory bird routes.

Every spring and autumn, tens of thousands of Grey-faced Buzzards pass through Baguashan, creating spectacular kettles in the sky. For generations, local communities have lived alongside this seasonal migration, making the birds an enduring part of the region's identity.

This close relationship also gave rise to a difficult history of hunting that once threatened the very species that made Baguashan unique. The transformation from a former hunting ground into one of Taiwan's best-known raptor conservation destinations reflects the evolving relationship between people, place, and nature.

The Turning Point: Why change was needed
By the early 1990s, Baguashan faced a growing crisis. Driven by the demand for raptor specimens, migratory birds were widely hunted, while expanding development continued to erode the forests they depended on. Misunderstandings about Grey-faced Buzzards further fueled conflict, as many residents viewed them as threats rather than part of their natural heritage.

Each migration season revealed the scale of the problem. The skies that should have been filled with soaring raptors instead became a reminder of loss. A local saying captured this reality: “Of every ten thousand hawks on the southern route, nine thousand perish.”

The crisis reached a turning point when conservationists, government agencies, and local communities recognized that enforcement alone was not enough. Hunting could be stopped temporarily, but the conflict would persist if local livelihoods and community needs were left unaddressed.

This realization changed everything. The challenge was no longer simply how to protect migratory birds, but how to create a future in which conservation, local identity, and economic opportunity could coexist. That shared understanding became the foundation for Baguashan's transformation.

The community's turning point came when it realized that saving the eagles required more than protecting birds—it required changing the relationship between people, nature, and livelihood.

The Vision: What you set out to do
In the early 1990s, a shared vision emerged in Baguashan: to transform a hunting ground into a place where migratory raptors, local communities, and nature could thrive together. The goal

was not only to protect Grey-faced Buzzards, but to create a future where conservation could become a source of local pride, learning, and sustainable livelihoods.

This vision was championed by the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters, together with the Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency and the Wild Bird Society of Changhua. Faced with declining raptor populations, habitat loss, and growing concern for the region's natural heritage, these partners recognized that lasting change required more than enforcement. Local communities had to become part of the solution.

The motivation came from witnessing the decline of migratory raptors and realizing that Baguashan could lose one of its greatest natural spectacles. In 1993, the partners launched the "Soaring Eagles on Bagua" initiative with a simple but ambitious goal: to replace conflict with coexistence and transform a former hunting ground into a sanctuary where people and wildlife flourish together.

The Journey: How change happened

The transformation of Baguashan began in 1993, when conservation partners realized that enforcement alone could not stop illegal hunting. While laws could prohibit hunting, they could not change long-held beliefs or address the economic realities faced by local communities. The challenge was not only to protect Grey-faced Buzzards, but to rebuild the relationship between people and nature.

One of the most powerful examples of this transformation is Mr. Chin-Fa Ho from Yongxing Community in Nantou. As a child, he watched adults set mist nets across the mountains to catch migratory birds. Curious, he followed the practice without questioning it. Years later, after attending environmental education programs organized by the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters, he learned that these seasonal visitors were protected raptors undertaking remarkable journeys across Asia. The experience changed his perspective. Instead of helping hunters, he began reporting illegal trapping sites and joined conservation patrols. In 2006, he became part of the newly established 「Forest and Eagle Protection Team」, a community-based group dedicated to protecting forests and migratory birds. As more residents joined the effort, illegal hunting in the area gradually disappeared.

Recognizing that lasting change required public support, the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters, the Forestry and Nature Conservation Agency, and the Wild Bird Society of Changhua expanded their efforts beyond enforcement. They invested in environmental education, opening Taiwan’s first Grey-faced Buzzard Environmental Education Center in 2014. Interactive AR and VR experiences, school programs, multilingual Eagle Watching Guides, and the 「Buzzard Family Hand Puppet Theater」 helped transform conservation from a scientific concept into a shared community experience.

To ensure that environmental education reached everyone, the partners launched the 「Environmental Education Train」, bringing educators and learning resources directly to rural schools and communities. This approach helped remove geographic barriers and encouraged broader participation in conservation.

As community engagement grew, so did collaboration. Government agencies provided legal protection, funding, and habitat management; the Wild Bird Society contributed more than three decades of scientific monitoring data; and local communities became active conservation partners. Former resource users evolved into eco-guides, volunteers, and local ambassadors who helped protect habitats while benefiting from new opportunities created by nature-based tourism.

The next challenge was making conservation relevant to everyday life. Rather than relying solely on campaigns and workshops, the partners transformed conservation into a celebration. For 33 consecutive years, the Soaring Eagles on Bagua event has brought together guided birdwatching, cultural activities, music, and local markets, attracting visitors from across Taiwan and abroad. In 2025, this journey reached a new milestone when Baguashan hosted Taiwan's first 「World Bird Fair」, welcoming nearly one hundred international birdwatchers and more than 90,000 visitors.

What began as a response to poaching has evolved into a regional movement. Inspired by the success of Changhua's eagle-watching initiatives, Yongxing Community developed its own programs and ecotourism activities, attracting nearly 2,000 students and visitors in 2025. Today, conservation efforts continue to expand through habitat restoration, environmental education, community participation, and OECM-based conservation measures, ensuring that Grey-faced Buzzards will continue to find a safe refuge in Baguashan for generations to come.

The Breakthrough: What you achieved

Baguashan has transformed from a hunting ground into one of Taiwan's leading destinations for raptor conservation. Annual Grey-faced Buzzard numbers have recovered from around 10,000 individuals to more than 30,000 in recent years, exceeding 51,000 in 2025. Illegal hunting has dramatically declined, and migratory raptors once again find a safe refuge along their journey.

The transformation extends beyond wildlife. Former hunters have become conservation volunteers and eco-guides, while younger generations now learn to protect birds rather than hunt them. The arrival of the eagles has become a source of local pride and a symbol of community identity.

Conservation has also strengthened the local economy. Participation in eagle-watching activities increased from approximately 4,000 visitors in 2015 to more than 10,000 in recent years, generating over NT$17.76 million in economic value.

Most importantly, residents now see themselves as guardians of a globally important migratory landscape. Baguashan's greatest achievement is not only the return of the eagles, but the renewed relationship between people, nature, and place.

Reflections: What you learned and what others can learn

The success of Soaring Eagles on Bagua did not come from regulations alone. Our greatest lesson is that lasting conservation begins with trust. Protecting nature cannot be achieved by government agencies acting alone; it requires a shift from conflict to collaboration.

In the early years, we struggled to communicate conservation issues to the public. Over time, we discovered that markets, guided nature experiences, and immersive technologies such as VR could turn ecological concepts into engaging experiences. We learned that participation begins when people find value and connection in conservation.

Looking back, we would have established cross-sector partnerships even earlier. Bird conservation groups provided scientific evidence for decision-making, while private-sector partnerships helped reduce environmental impacts and improve visitor experiences. This model —government support, NGO expertise, community action, and business investment—offers a practical framework for destinations facing similar conservation challenges.

For destinations pursuing sustainable tourism, our message is simple: local pride is the foundation of long-term stewardship. When residents become guardians of their natural and cultural heritage, conservation gains a momentum of its own, creating benefits for both communities and nature.

The Ripple Effect: Lasting impact

"The more people understand their environment, the deeper their connection to the land becomes." This belief has guided Baguashan’s transformation over the past three decades. Beyond the recovery of Grey-faced Buzzards and their habitats, the most meaningful change has been in people. Through environmental education and community celebrations, residents have evolved from passive observers into guardians of their natural heritage. As one long-time volunteer shared, “Every year, when the eagles return to Changhua, I feel deeply moved. That feeling keeps me involved, and I want the world to know this is one of the best places to witness migratory raptors.”

The successful hosting of the 2025 World Bird Fair extended this impact beyond Taiwan and helped establish a global rotation mechanism for future fairs. By sharing our experience with future host destinations, including Colombia in 2027, we hope to strengthen international collaboration for biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism.

Looking ahead, Baguashan will continue protecting critical habitats and expanding environmental education. As an important stop along the East Asian–Australasian Flyway, it will remain a sanctuary for migratory raptors and an example of how communities and nature can thrive together.

Awards or Certifications

1. 2017 – The Soaring Eagles on Bagua event was recognized by the Tourism Administration, MOTC, as an International-level Featured Event in the Taiwan Tourism Calendar and selected as one of Taiwan's Ecotourism Highlights.

2. 2017 – The Baguashan Ecology Visitor Center received certification as an Environmental Education Facility from Taiwan's Environmental Protection Administration, providing environmental education programs and services.

3. 2019 – Awarded the Gold Award for Destination Marketing by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA).

4. 2024 – The "Sustainable Action in Bagua Mountain" initiative received the SDG 11 Bronze Award at the 3rd Asia-Pacific Sustainability Action Awards (APSAA) and the SDG 11 Silver Award at the 4th Taiwan Sustainability Action Awards (TSAA).

5. 2024 – Successfully secured the hosting rights for the inaugural World Bird Fair in central Taiwan. This achievement highlighted the region's strengths in bird conservation and environmental education, earning international recognition as a premier birdwatching destination.

6. 2025 – The international promotional film "Birding in Taiwan" won the Gold Award in the Documentary Category at the 7th Japan World Tourism Film Festival, selected from 1,132 entries worldwide.

7. 2026 – Selected as a finalist for the 10th National Environmental Education Award.

Web Articles

1. "Soaring Eagles on Bagua: Sustainable Conservation Initiative Wins Asia-Pacific and Taiwan Sustainability Action Awards"
https://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20240809002594-260405?chdtv

2. "Birding in Taiwan Documentary Wins Gold Award at the Japan World Tourism Film Festival"
https://art.ltn.com.tw/article/breakingnews/4986172

3. “Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters Receives PATA Gold Award for Tourism Marketing Excellence” https://www.cna.com.tw/news/ahel/201909200252.aspx

4. “The First World Bird Fair 2025 Brings Together Participants from 30 Countries in Taichung” https://reurl.cc/Q22jzp

5. “Baguashan Eagle-Watching Season Welcomes the Spectacle of Tens of Thousands of Migratory Raptors”
https://www.watchmedia01.com/archives/496063

Other Relevant Links
Officail Website:
https://www.trimt-nsa.gov.tw/bagua-bird-watching/en/

YOUTUBE:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWa3dTMpzbw
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBF1VpFC8j4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liqxLoL3GEA
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lrc1UbQLOL4
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzqUi0bjaRQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxsY26laIX8
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQqVnFYocmk
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7lSLw8_sro
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yu8TwAJmqcw

Supporting Documents:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1UfUSQp1P_kNmKOFKV8XDw-GitMfF0-yR?usp=sharing

Quotes or Testimonials
1. Yi-Hsin Lee, Secretary-General, Wild Bird Society of Changhua
"The greatest achievement of Soaring Eagles on Bagua is helping people move from awareness to action. What began as an introduction to the Grey-faced Buzzard has grown into a deeper understanding of the entire lowland mountain ecosystem. More importantly, it inspires people to ask how they can help protect it."

2. Mei-Li Shih, Village Chief of Yongxing Community, Nantou City
"Our community has grown alongside this journey. When we first launched the Eagle Gathering Carnival in 2004, few people understood ecology. With the support of the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters, a small local activity gradually evolved into a nationally recognized environmental education program. That transformation means a great deal to our community."

3. Hsiu-Chin Liang, Chairperson, Changhua County Tour Guide Association
"Since 2016, we have worked closely with the Tri-Mountain National Scenic Area Headquarters on environmental interpretation and volunteer training. Their long-term commitment to nurturing local conservation advocates has strengthened our confidence in the future of this landscape."

4. Cheng-Ying Lee, Principal, Guo Sheng Elementary School, Changhua City
“The Environmental Education Traine Program brings valuable learning opportunities directly into schools. It allows students to experience and understand nature firsthand, helping them develop the awareness and responsibility needed to protect it."

5. Soaring Eagles on Bagua Volunteer
"I love the Grey-faced Buzzard, and every year its arrival in Changhua moves me deeply. I became a volunteer because I want more people to know that this is one of the best places to witness migratory raptors. The more people understand their environment, the stronger their connection to the land becomes."