

The first Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* in Yemen

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Plate 1. Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris*, 4 October 2008, west coast of Yemen. © David B Stanton

Collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus chloris* is a highly variable and wide-ranging species that occurs from the Sudan eastwards through many countries across to American Samoa in the South Pacific. Taxonomists have described as many as 50 subspecies of which two, *T. c. abyssinicus* and *T. c. kalbaensis*, occur in the Middle East (Dickinson 2003). The former is known from Saudi Arabia's southern Red Sea coast while the latter has been recorded at Khor Kalba in the United Arab Emirates and Khors Liwa and Shinas of Oman (Dickinson 2003, Eriksen *et al* 2003, Porter *et al* 1996). A denizen of mangroves where it preys principally on crabs, the Collared Kingfisher has long been suspected as being present in the mangrove stands of Yemen's west coast.

On 3 October 2008, my wife Sharon and I visited the 'Ecotourism Camp' at Al Jar (16° 04' 25.26 N, 42° 50' 09.82 E) approximately mid-way between Al Luhayyah and Midi. Easily accessible by asphalted road from Abs, the camp is situated just above the high tide line at the northern extremity of Yemen's most extensive mangrove *Avicennia marina* forest. Extending 29 km to the south, this forest, Al Buhays, is up to 300 m in breadth and contains much unexplored habitat.

At around 09.30 h on the following morning, I flushed a turquoise bird of medium size from one mangrove into the lower branches of a second, near the camp. Looking at the bird from close range, through binoculars and telescope, it was instantly recognizable as a Collared Kingfisher. Digiscoping the bird proved somewhat challenging as it spooked eas-

ily and tended to alight in rather dense foliage. Nevertheless, it stayed within a relatively small area and I was eventually able to capture acceptable images (Plate 1).

On 24 October, I returned to the area with a group of students, teachers and Simon Aspinall. On the morning of 25 October, Simon, Maryam Hantash and I again spotted a Collared Kingfisher near the camp. Possibly the same individual that I had seen on the previous visit three weeks earlier, this bird was even shyer. It did, however, permit clear views for all three observers.

Description: A rather large kingfisher almost uniformly turquoise with a clear white collar when seen from behind. Perched, the chin, throat, cheeks, breast, and belly were clear white with a prominent white patch above the lores extending into a weak white supercilium. A broad dark eyestripe appeared black under the viewing conditions that prevailed. Its large, predominantly black, boat-shaped bill showed ivory on the proximal two thirds of the lower mandible. The bird's eye was black and the feet dark grey. Given that summer breeding Grey-headed Kingfishers *Halcyon leucocephala* would be passing through the area at this time, special care was taken to eliminate any possible confusion with this species.

Although the individual(s) observed at Al Jar may have arrived following dispersal from the breeding area in Saudi Arabia, local breeding can not be ruled out. The mangroves in the immediate area where the bird was recorded did not appear large enough to meet this species' nesting requirements. However, the PERSGA/GEF (2004) report on the status of mangroves in the Red Sea and gulf of Aden states that "... those in the inner parts of the stand [Al Buhays] are relatively undisturbed and grow 4–6 m high with a GBH [girth at breast height] of up to 100 cm." It thus seems likely that within the extent of mangrove forest along this coast are trees (or perhaps subterranean cavities or burrows) large enough to support breeding by Collared Kingfisher. Further research is obviously needed to determine the exact status of this species in Yemen.

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