

First record of Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* in Iran and the Middle East

SAEED CHERAGHI & MOHAMMAD TOHIDIFAR

The Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* is a breeding visitor to the Himalayas west to the mountains of northeast Afghanistan (Safed Koh). It winters in central and southern India but has straggled to Karachi (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It has not previously been recorded in Iran (Scott *et al* 1975, Firouz 2005, Scott & Adhami 2006, Adhami 2008, Mansoori 2008) or the Middle East (Porter *et al* 1996).

On 25 April 2009 during a bird survey in Delbar oasis (35° 58' 7.04" N, 56° 3' 49.537" E), Touran biosphere reserve, Semnan province, northeast Iran, SC saw a small dark bird chasing Red-breasted Flycatchers *Ficedula parva*. First, it was thought to be a Pied Stonechat *Saxicola caprata* but better views revealed otherwise. It had dark blue on its back with a glistening supercilium. More effort found two more conspecifics, near adjacent fig trees *Ficus carica*. In these three birds, forehead, cape, sides of head, neck, mantle and wings were deep blue in contrast with white underparts. The primaries appeared dark brown and there were white patches at the base of the tail. White supercilia were obvious and bill, eyes and legs were black. SC took photos (Plates 1–4) and inspection of the Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan (Ali & Ripley 1998) helped us to identify them as male Ultramarine Flycatchers. The birds showed the features (white tail-base patches and supercilia) of the western form *F. s. superciliaris* (A Adhami *in litt*, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). No attempt was made to find female individuals.



Plates 1 & 2. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*, 25 April 2009, Delbar oasis, Touran biosphere reserve, northeast Iran. © S Cheraghi



Plates 3 & 4. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula supercilialis*, 25 April 2009, Delbar oasis, Touran biosphere reserve, northeast Iran. © S Cheraghi

These birds were presumably vagrants, being pushed too far west by easterly or southeasterly winds (DA Scott *in litt*). Captive origin of these birds seems unlikely as insectivorous birds are difficult to keep and probably few people do so in the region (Roth *et al* 2005). Another flycatcher from east of Iran, Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*, was seen in extreme southeast Iran in late March 2001 (Roth *et al* 2005).

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Saeed Cheraghi, Eco-researchers Society, Tehran, Iran.

Mohammad Tohidifar, Biodiversity & Habitats Division, Faculty of Environment & Energy, Science & Research branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran PO 16516–43711, Iran. mohammad_8463@yahoo.com