

First record for Iran of Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*, near Jask city, Hormozgan province

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On 13 February 2011 in the morning, during a trip to the southern regions of Iran, I was busy photographing remote *Balouch* tribes when a species of bird new to me caught my eye. I had no idea of what it might be! I had found the bird in the remote village of Alayie, north of the small town of Lirdaf and some 40 km from the gulf of Oman. The village was not accessible by road and was inhabited by only a couple of families. The only habitat for woodland birds was a big palm garden c200 m from the *capars* (the small round houses made of woven palm fronds of the local people), and this was the only haven in this mountainous arid habitat.

It was c10.00 h when first I saw the bird, and I spent about an hour watching it and taking photographs. The weather was fine with brilliant sunshine and no wind. The strange bird was very active and quite easy to see. It was brownish-grey on the back, wings, tail and breast, and had a conspicuous blue-grey head with a thin black band across the throat. It looked very much like a flycatcher and had the same typical behaviour. It was foraging in a Jujube tree *Ziziphus mauritiana*, frequently flying around in the upper parts of the tree for a metre or two to catch passing insects, and occasionally flying down to perch in the lower branches or on a nearby wooden post. I only had a Canon 70–200 mm lens to



Plates 1–4. Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* near Jask city, Hormozgan province, southern Iran, 13 February 2011. © Ali Alieslam

mount on my Canon 5D body, and it proved difficult to take good photographs of the bird in the dense foliage. However, I managed to take several acceptable photographs (Plates 1–4) which assisted me in my subsequent investigation into the bird's identity. After about an hour, the bird finally disappeared into some big palm trees nearby.

Back in Tehran, I searched through various field guides and discussed the bird with Babak Musavi, Houman Jowkar and Mohammad Kaboli. The strange bird turned out to be a female Black-naped Monarch or Black-naped Blue Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea*. The bird is an Oriental species widely distributed in southeast Asia including India. Though it is generally a sedentary species it sometimes wanders quite widely in winter and is a vagrant to southeast Sind, Pakistan (Roberts 1992).

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