

First record of Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* in the United Arab Emirates

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Of the three species of black-and-white *Ficedula* flycatchers breeding in Europe and western Asia, only Semi-collared Flycatcher *F. semitorquata* occurs regularly in the United Arab Emirates, where it is an extremely uncommon spring migrant. The UAE bird database contains a total of 117 bird-days for this species, 2004–2014, the majority from 2009 (21%) and 2014 (46%) influxes (Tommy Pedersen *in litt*). All records were from spring migration, with a clear peak in late March and early April (see Figure 1). For this reason, a black-and-white *Ficedula* briefly glimpsed by MS on the edge of Mamzar park, Dubai emirate, 3 October 2015 was most intriguing. An effort was made to relocate the bird on 6 October and images obtained on that date (Plates 1–3) immediately raised alarm bells as to the bird's identity. Despite being both elusive and difficult to view, the bird was seen and photographed again on 9 October (Plates 4, 5). From views in the field and, in particular, the images obtained, the bird was identified as an adult male Collared Flycatcher *F. albicollis*. The record was accepted by the Emirates Bird Records Committee (EBRC) and represents the first record of the species in the UAE. It was not seen again after 9 October.

FIELD CHARACTERS AND IDENTIFICATION

The bird's appearance was compared against information in a number of references (Svensson 1992, Harris *et al* 1996, van Duivendijk 2010 and, especially, Mild 1994a, b). The following characters allowed secure aging and identification:

Aging. The rather narrowly-edged tertial feathers, with a narrowing white fringe and no apparent 'step' on the tip of the central tertial, coupled with the very large, broad white patch at the base of the primaries that virtually reached the outermost web strongly indicated an adult male. The obviously black remiges, primary coverts, rectrices and uppertail coverts, strongly contrasting with the brown-grey mantle, nape and crown support this contention.

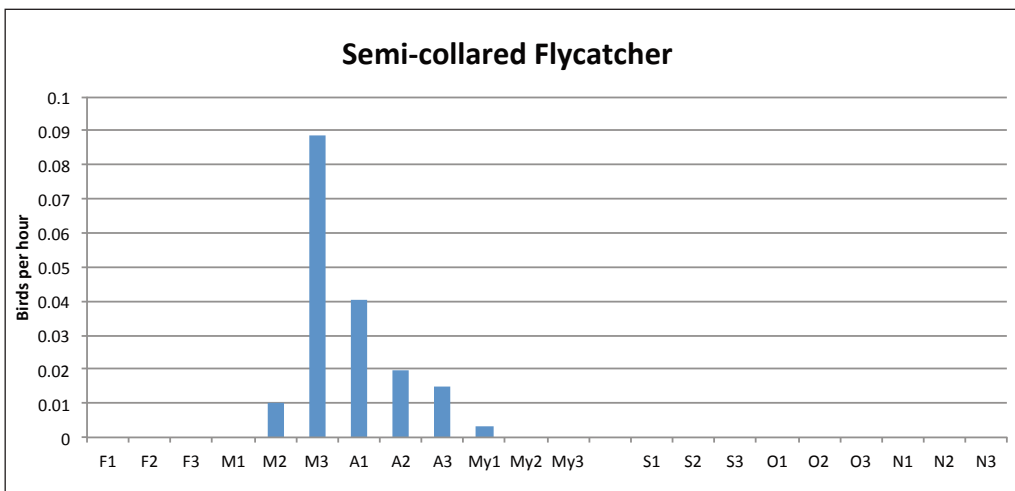


Figure 1. Phenology of Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* migration through the United Arab Emirates, based on standardized recording 2007–2015. Data from Campbell & Smiles (in prep). Y-axis birds per hour, plotted against 10 day periods (x-axis, F Feb, M Mar, A Apr, My May, S Sep, O Oct, N Nov).



Plates 1 & 2 (above left & right). Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* Mamzar park, Dubai, UAE, 6 October 2015. © Mark Smiles

Plate 3 (right). Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* Mamzar park, Dubai, UAE, 6 October 2015. © Simon Lloyd



Primary patch. This is both extensive (virtually reaching the wing edge) and broad (greatest extent virtually falling level with the tip of the shortest tertial). This feature strongly points away from Pied Flycatcher *F. hypoleuca* in which the white extends only narrowly, if at all, beyond the primary coverts (Mild 1994a). Semi-collared Flycatcher would be expected to show a (somewhat) smaller white patch, but its extent marginally overlaps with that exhibited by Collared and measurements taken from a trapped bird would be necessary to determine any distinction (Mild 1994b).

Median coverts. These are rather plain grey-brown, entirely lacking obvious white tips that would be expected on Semi-collared Flycatcher. However, a significant minority of adult male Semi-collared lack obvious white tips to the median coverts (Mild 1994b), so this feature, whilst strongly indicative of Collared Flycatcher, is not conclusive.

Tail pattern. This was impossible to analyze in the field but fortunately was captured in photos by SL (Plates 4, 5). There are obvious white edges on the outermost three tail feathers, formed by white outer webs. This pattern is at odds with an adult male Collared Flycatcher in spring, which would be expected to exhibit all-black rectrices. However Collared Flycatcher, rather unusually, replaces its tail feathers in an incomplete, pre-breeding moult carried out in winter quarters (Svensson 1992) and autumn feathers do exhibit white edges. Importantly, there is no suggestion of white on the inner webs of any feathers, a feature typical of most male Semi-collared.



Plates 4 & 5. Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* Mamzar park, Dubai, UAE, 9 October 2015. © Simon Lloyd

Other features. The rather obvious, diffuse whitish patch on the forehead, whilst possible on some Semi-collared Flycatchers, is much more typical of Collared. A very diffuse, greyish collar effect, barely evident in images but actually rather more prominent in the field (MS *pers obs*), is apparently never shown by Semi-collared (Mild 1994b). Finally, the obviously blackish remiges and rectrices (already alluded to above) are not exhibited by autumn Pied Flycatchers of any age or sex.

DISCUSSION

Collared Flycatcher breeds in the middle latitudes of Europe, from eastern France to western Russia and winters in east-central Africa to about 20° S (Cramp & Perrins 1993). Many birds, at least from the western part of the breeding range, make a lengthy staging stop in autumn in Italy and then complete a rapid crossing of the Mediterranean and Sahara (Taylor 2016). Consequently, they are rare or very rare during autumn passage at localities such as Cyprus (Richardson 2014) and Israel (Shirihai 1996) where they are relatively common in spring. In the latter country, most years witness no autumn records, although a few tens appear simultaneously in occasional influx years. Bulk of passage is 8–24 September and almost all records refer to first-winters. There was no significant influx of Collared Flycatchers (nor Pied or Semi-collared Flycatchers) in Israel in autumn 2015 (J Meyrav *in litt*). In Cyprus, Richardson (2014) reported no autumn record of Collared Flycatcher during an 11-year study of passerine migrants, compared to 53 records totaling 171 birds in spring. Interestingly, single Collared Flycatchers were reported from Cyprus 29 August and 2 October 2015 (Harrison & Lamsdell 2016). On the Arabian peninsula, the species is even rarer during either migration season; it has been recorded from Tabuk, northwest Saudi Arabia but not further east (Jem Babbington *in litt*). It is unrecorded from Kuwait (Pope & Zogaris 2012) and Oman (Eriksen & Victor 2013). The occurrence of Collared Flycatcher, especially an adult male, in the UAE is clearly somewhat surprising.

Following this record, EBRC decided to review all records of black-and-white *Ficedula* flycatchers other than spring Semi-collared from the UAE. Four such records exist. One, reported as Semi-collared Flycatcher, was at Khalidayh, Abu Dhabi island, 14–15 October 1999 though no documentation exists (EBRC has never asked for substantiation of claims of this species). The other three records concerned Pied Flycatcher. Of these, two previously accepted records (April 1986, September 2007) were considered not proven though one

record, from Mushrif Palace gardens, Abu Dhabi island, 14 May 2003 was upheld. The latter now constitutes the sole record of Pied Flycatcher in the UAE. EBRC now requires documentation for all reports of autumn black-and-white *Ficedula* flycatchers.

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