Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* at Santhigiri, near Kumily, Idukki District, Kerala, India

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The Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* is a small, compact, arboreal flycatcher. Its nominate race breeds in India, in the foothills of western Himalaya, from Jammu and Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh, to Uttarakhand. It winters in central India, straggling to southern India, and is fairly common in appropriate habitats in northern Maharashtra, erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, and Karnataka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012b).

A small, brownish flycatcher was photographed at 1530hrs at Santhigiri (9.61°N, 77.10°E), about eight kilometres away from Kumily in Idukki District, Kerala, on the slightly misty afternoon of 14 November 2015. It was perched on a small tree amidst thick *Lantana camara* bushes on the rocky crest of a thickly wooded hill. This site appears to be a favourite habitat for warblers, flycatchers, sunbirds, flowerpeckers, tits, and treepies; I visit this particular spot several times a year. The bird emerged suddenly, on the low tree, amidst a mixed hunting flock of birds, but it did not move away with the other birds. It remained perched on a low branch for a few minutes, jerking its tail a couple of times. It changed its position, and stance, a few times, looking in all directions, and then darted down into the thick undergrowth and was gone.

Photographs **[103-104]** were circulated on online forums, and the bird was identified as a first-winter Ultramarine Flycatcher. The photos showed a short-tailed, brownish,flycatcher with a pale eye-ring, a short dark beak, and whitish underparts. Prominently seen in both photographs is the greyish half-breastband (a feature that is expected to turn blue as the bird ages), which stands out against a pale throat and mid-breast. **[104]** shows the primary tips, a guide in assessing the length of the short, notched tail; perhaps the central retrices are moulting. There is a strong chestnut cast to the face. A pale white covert bar is visible on both pictures, more like what is seen in some of the leafwarblers (*Phylloscopus*, and *Seicercus* species). Identification as a first-winter male Ultramarine Flycatcher is based on the prominent breast band, pale covert bar, and overall structure. Its posture and behaviour were also quite appropriate for a wintering Ultramarine Flycatcher, which keeps mostly to small trees, and bushes, and can be part of mixed hunting flocks.

Photos: P. J. George

103. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*.

104. Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*.

Upon confirming that it was an Ultramarine Flycatcher, it was posted in eBird (www.ebird.org) with these pictures (George 2015) where further records from southern India are available.

The Ultramarine Flycatcher was first reported from southern India by Ali & Whistler (1942), during the Mysore bird survey,when they procured a specimen from Devarayanadugra State Forest, Tumkur District, Karnataka; they thought it was a 'remarkable range extension'. This is the only record from southern, and south-western, India that features in Grimmett *et al.* (1999). It is listed as a 'vagrant' to Goa (Lainer & Alvares 2013), where a single specimen was collected, and is in the BNHS Collection (Abdulali 1985). The Bengaluru area (Karnataka) has been generally accepted as its southern-most wintering range, and includes some published (Hemanth 1988; Karthikeyan & Prasad 1993), and online records (Bhatia 2009; Mohan 2015; Shenoy 2016). Kazmierczak (2000) also lists four records from Karnataka, two of them from the whereabouts of Bengaluru, which undoubtedly refer to prior published records. Nandi Hills, lying 60 km north-north-east of Bengaluru, is a well-known wintering site for this species, and from where at least 16 independent records are listed in eBird (eBird 2016), starting from February 2005 till January 2016, which includes one that was published (Lethaby 2006). Oriental Bird Images (http://www.orientalbirdimages.

org/, Accesssed on 17 February 2016) contains four photo records (five images) from Nandi Hills since December 2004. It has been reported once from Melkote, Mandya District (Koulagi 2012), which is *c.*100km south-west of Bengaluru. Five reports from Horsley Hills, and Rishi Valley (Andhra Pradesh) (eBird 2016), one from Sandur (Karnataka) (Ghorpade 1974), and two from Dharwad (Karnataka) (eBird 2016) further substantiate its regular wintering status, in appropriate habitats, in the intervening areas of the Deccan. Records also exist from further north, from Telangana, and north-eastern Andhra Pradesh, but are not being listed here. However, there are no reports south of a Bengaluru–Melkote axis in Karnataka, or in Tamil Nadu. For Kerala, Sashikumar *et al.* (2011) include this species only in the secondary list, citing a single record from Silent Valley National Park (Ajaykumar & Nayar 1999); this is not included in the checklist of birds of Kerala (Praveen 2015). Apart from the single records from Goa, and Silent Valley National Park, there are no reports from the intervening Western Ghats. In this context, the maps in Grimmett *et al.* (2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012a) that show the entire south-western India, northern Kerala, and north-western Tamil Nadu as its wintering range seem an oversimplification. The map in *HBWAlive* (Clement & Juana 2016) is more accurate with regard to this southern wintering range, excluding most of south-western India. It remains to be seen if more Ultramarine Flycatchers get reported from other parts of the Western Ghats.

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Letters to the Editor

Comments on total albinism in Red-vented Bulbul in Sri Lanka

This is with reference to the case of total albinism reported for a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, in Sri Lanka, by Gabadage *et al.* (2015).

A recent paper on colour aberration in birds proposes a uniform system of nomenclature for colour aberrations in birds, and discusses the difficulties in correctly identifying colour aberrant birds in the wild. It states that the most commonly misapplied names are, 'albino', and 'partial albino', with the term 'albino' being the most widely used but, correctly identified only in very few cases (van Grouw 2013). An identification key is given in Table 1 in this reference to identify the most common colour aberrations in birds.

In this case, the juvenile Red-vented Bulbul is not an albino. Also the terms 'total albinism' and 'partial albinism' are misnomers. Readers may refer to van Grouw (2013) for details. Correct identification of colour aberrant birds is extremely difficult, and trying to name the mutation correctly, a challenge.

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Editor's note: Hein Van Grow has checked the original photos, and confirms the mutation involved is 'Ino' (see details in van Grow 2013). The plumage is not bright white and clearly shows a minimal amount of melanin pigmentation left, giving the plumage a pale, cream colour. The eyes are reddish, but not as bright red as they would have been in an albino. Readers should bear in mind that the low-resolution online versions of the paper might not reproduce the true colours in the photograph to be of use in identification of the mutation.