

First record of Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* in the Wallacean region

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Ringkasan. Sampai saat ini Sikatan Biru-putih *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* belum pernah dilaporkan di Wallacea, meskipun begitu area utama migrasi musim dinginnya berada dalam jalur yang pendek mengarah kebagian barat dan utara kawasan ini, dan kelompok terakhir telah mencapai Australia bagian barat. Penulis mengamati satu burung jantan spesies ini pada ketinggian sekitar 1150 m di atas permukaan laut gunung Ambang, Sulawesi Utara pada tanggal 16 Maret 2009. Tepatnya, burung ini mungkin sedang bermigrasi. Sikatan Biru-putih mungkin pengunjung teratur namun tidak pernah terdeteksi karena merupakan pengunjung yang sangat jarang ke Sulawesi Utara pada saat musing dingin.

The Blue-and-white Flycatcher *Cyanoptila cyanomelana* is an Eastern Palearctic long-distance migrant that winters widely in South-east Asia (Taylor & Clement 2006). It is divided into two subspecies: (1) the nominate race is of a more easterly distribution, breeding in Japan and South Korea, while (2) the subspecies *cumatilis* breeds further to the west in north-east China, Ussuriland and North Korea (Taylor & Clement 2006). The two races have identical plumage patterns but differ in the tone of the blue upperparts colouration of the male plumage, which is cobalt-blue in the nominate race and more turquoise in *cumatilis* (Robson 2000; Taylor & Clement 2006). The two races probably intergrade widely in Korea, and some individuals may be unidentifiable to race.

The western subspecies *cumatilis* winters over an extensive area in the Greater Sunda Islands and Malaysia to the Philippines, partly overlapping the wintering grounds of the more easterly nominate subspecies, which extend from Borneo to the Philippines (MacKinnon & Phillipps 1994; Kennedy *et al.* 2000; Robson 2000; Taylor & Clement 2006). Additionally, the species has recently been recorded as a straggler to Australia on at least four occasions (Johnstone & Darnell 1996; Palliser 1999; Hassell *et al.* 2003; Christidis & Boles 2008), two of which refer to birds observed on Christmas Island, and two others in Western Australia. Some of the Australian stragglers belonged to the easterly nominate subspecies, as would be expected from distributional considerations, while the remainder was not identified to subspecies level (Johnstone & Darnell 1996; Palliser 1999; Hassell *et al.* 2003).

Even though the core wintering grounds of this species lie just a short way to the west (Borneo) and to the north (Philippines), the Blue-and-white

Flycatcher has so far not been recorded in the Wallacean Region of eastern Indonesia (Coates & Bishop 1997). This is surprising, given the fact that some of the stragglers to Australia would have had to cross Wallacean waters. Coates & Bishop (1997) noted its possible 'future addition' to Wallacea as a likely irregular winter visitor.

On 16 March 2009 at c. 07:00 hrs, in the ecotone between agricultural land and montane forest at c. 1150 m asl on Mount Ambang, North Sulawesi Province (c. 0° 47' N, 124° 24' E), we noted a bulky small to mid-sized passerine in the mid-canopy of a tree that immediately caught our attention on account of its distinctive underparts coloration that was characterised by a white belly sharply demarcated from a black throat and breast. After obtaining good views of the underparts for about 10 sec, the bird flew into another tree, where we were able to discern its blue upperparts. Following observations that lasted about another 10 sec, the bird flew away and was not re-located. The bird was immediately identified as a Blue-and-white Flycatcher. Both authors have had previous field experience with this species in at least three countries. The distinctive plumage of this species rules out confusion with any other birds to be expected in Sulawesi. The only other Sulawesi bird species that has a similar black-and-white underparts coloration is the Pygmy Cuckooshrike *Coracina abbotti*, which has a very different shape and grey – not blue – upperparts (Coates & Bishop 1997). Although its occurrence on Mt. Ambang is not inconceivable, the Pygmy Cuckooshrike has never been recorded in North Sulawesi east of Mt Poniki, which is c. 80 km to the west of Mt Ambang (Coates & Bishop 1997), and is a bird of the forest interior that is not expected to venture out into the farmland-forest ecotone.

The briefness of the observation left no time for determining the subspecific identity of this individual. Geographically, any bird turning up in Sulawesi would be expected to belong to the more easterly nominate subspecies, which is also supported by the subspecies identity of some of the Australian stragglers. Our observation in mid-March falls exactly within the expected migration period of this species. It also falls exactly within the preferred elevational range of this species in its wintering grounds (Taylor & Clement 2006; pers. obs. in Palawan 2005). The bird may have been either a straggler, or a late winter visitor, or a migrant from some as yet unknown wintering area. We suspect that the Blue-and-white Flycatcher may be a regular but scarce winter visitor to North Sulawesi, and may have been overlooked in the past owing to the low number of bird observers frequenting the region. This is all the more likely given that, unlike the distinct male, the drab female can be confused with a number of other drab *Rhimomyias* or female *Ficedula* flycatchers.

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