
SIBERIAN BLUE ROBIN IN WEST JAVA

by

Tou S J.C. Luijendijk & Jelle Scharrings

(Received 22 April 1998)

In the early morning of 10 April 1998, 1 (TL) set out from Cibodas to climb Gunung Gede, West Java. My intention was to climb quickly through the first five kilometres where I had been bird watching already for a few days, in order to reach the peak before the first rain. However, at ca. 05.55 attention was drawn to two birds hopping across the path at Hm peg 2, close to the park's main entrance. The first bird was readily identified as Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys*, but the second bird was obviously a different species. The main features were bright blue upperparts, a black facial mask extending down on to the sides of the upper breast, and clean white underparts. The following description was made:

"Size of Tree Sparrow *Paserr montanus* Obviously larger than Lesser Shortwing (direct comparison). Clear pure white underparts. Upperparts, from base of upper mandible all across crown, nape, mantle, back, rump and tail, bright deep blue, though not particularly shiny. Black face mask, lores, lower cheeks, sides of nape and sides of upper breast. Wings much darker and duller than back. Tail fairly short, though not as much as on Lesser Shortwing (direct comparison), vibrating shortly after hops. Legs long, very pale flesh coloured. Eye and bill dark."

I realized I was watching a male Blue Siberian Robin *Luscinia cyane* a species I knew quite well from previous visits to South East Asia. The bird showed very well at a distance of ca 6 m, while foraging between the boulders that make up the path here. It was heard calling twice, a soft "tchack", very deep for such a small bird. After about one minute, it skulked away into the undergrowth and was not seen again.

It was only when consulting MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993) later that day that it was realized this must have been the first record of the species for Java.

When visiting the Botanical Gardens of Cibodas on 17 November 1997, Jelle & Cees J.G. Schminga observed an immature or female Siberian Blue Robin. It was seen on the locally well known cobblestone zag zag trail near the primary forest edge at 06.00 hrs. The following brief description was made:

"A small thrush like bird with relatively short tail and long legs, plain olive brownish upperparts and head, and pale whitish underparts. The upper breast had some brownish mottling and some blue was noted on the upper tail. It had a large black eye and strikingly pale legs."

The bird was briefly seen running on the edge of the wide trail, with its tail shivering constantly, which is typical for this species. It disappeared into the forest undergrowth above the trail. No call was heard and the bird could not be relocated. Although it was only observed for a short time, JS is familiar with the species and there was no doubt about the identification.

These observations of Siberian Blue Robin constitute the first and second records for this species for Java. Because of its skulking habits and because the area of Gunung Gede Pangrango National Park is less often visited by bird watchers in the winter half year, it is possible that the species is overlooked rather than rare.

Reference

MacKinnon, J. & K. Phillipps. 1993. *A field guide to the birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali*. Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford Uni. Press.

Address: Teus J.C. Luijendijk, Nieuwe Rijn 44A, 2312 JG Leiden, The Netherlands.