

A new record of the Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* from Kakamega Forest, western Kenya

The Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca*, along with congeners, the Semi-collared *F. semitorquata* and Collared *F. albicollis* Flycatchers, comprise three very similar black-and-white migratory passerines that breed in the Palaearctic and winter in sub-Saharan Africa. Historically, both the Semi-collared and Collared Flycatchers have occurred in Kenya (Urban *et al.* 1997, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), with the Pied Flycatcher having a confused history. It was first collected on 8 December 1965 at Kakamega Forest, but not formally accepted as such by the East African Rarities Committee (EARC) until the 1990s (Pearson 1998). Only one subsequent accepted record of Pied Flycatcher is known from Kenya, that of two birds seen on 26 February 2002, also at Kakamega Forest (B. de Bruijn, pers. comm.; N. Hunter, pers. comm.). The difficulties of identifying members of this group to species level on the wintering grounds, especially without in-hand analysis required to assign some individuals (Pearson 1998), complicates assessment of their true status in Kenya. On 29 March 2017 we encountered two *Ficedula* flycatchers in the Kenya Forest Service compound at Kakamega Forest (0°14.126 N, 34°51.919 E), which we identified in the field as Pied Flycatchers, and which we detail here to assist in gaining a better understanding of this species' status in East Africa.

The first bird sighted was found at approximately 07:00 and observed initially at a distance of *c.* 20 m foraging in the lower to mid-canopy of a leafy tree in the corner of the compound for a period of around 5 min. It was identified as an adult male and was seen repeatedly throughout the day on 29 March, and again until noon on 30 March (when we left the area), allowing us and other observers (A. Scott-Kennedy, T. Davis, B. Obanda and A. Kilpin) the opportunity to study the bird closely and obtain photographs. The second bird was found at 12:30 on 29 March but was higher in the mid-storey of a taller tree than the earlier bird, was more skittish, and was seen well several times, but only briefly. It was thought to be either an adult female or a more grey-toned male, but no photographs were obtained. Both birds were quite active, ranging from the lower mid-storey to sub-canopy of several medium-sized trees, and it seemed that the first bird was defending a roughly 75 x 50 m area of the compound from the second bird, where it also foraged from man-made structures.

We identified the first bird as a Pied Flycatcher based on several characteristics visible in the field. Most notable was the absence of a white collar, immediately ruling out Collared Flycatcher, instead showing only a small incursion of white along the lower border of the auricular, which barely extended behind the level of the eye at rest. Several other features consistent with Pied Flycatcher, but anomalous for Semi-collared or Collared, were noted. These



Figure 1. Male Pied Flycatcher at Kakamega Forest, 30 March 2017 (photo: A. Kilpin).

included uniformly dark median coverts (pale-tipped forming an upper-wing bar in Semi-collared, e.g. see Mullarney *et al.* 1999), as well as only a very limited white patch at the base of the primaries, which did not extend beyond the tip of the longest primary covert on the closed wing and which did not reach the outer edge of the wing (*contra* Semi-collared Flycatcher). The white forehead patch was relatively small and bisected down the middle (in line with the culmen edge) by black, resulting in two small patches (one on each side of the head). At rest, only a limited amount of white was visible in the outer rectrices of the closed tail, which is also consistent with Pied Flycatcher. A photograph taken by Alistair Kilpin illustrates many of these features (see Fig. 1). Photographs also revealed that many wing feathers (primaries, secondaries, and many coverts) were contrastingly duller than the black on the rest of the upperparts, a field mark mentioned for Pied Flycatcher (e.g. Mullarney *et al.* 1999), though we do not know to what extent this may be influenced by moult timing or age. Many of the same relevant field marks were noted on the second individual, notably the lack of a median covert wing bar and minimal white at the base of the inner primaries, though the upper parts appeared a greyish-brown instead of black. Both birds remained silent during our observations.

Based on these records, and those from Kakamega in early December 1965 and late February 2002, it is plausible that the Pied Flycatcher may occur more regularly in Kenya than previously recognized and could lead to a finding that the species occurs in western Kenya principally as a rare spring passage migrant. Previous records may have gone undocumented due to misidentifications based on assumptions of range and owing to the difficult identification challenge this group presents. In order to accurately ascertain the status of Pied Flycatcher and congeners in East Africa, we strongly encourage observers to scrutinize and carefully document any *Ficedula* flycatcher they see in the region. Our records described herein, plus additional photographs, were submitted to the EARC and have been accepted by them as the third and fourth records of Pied Flycatcher in Kenya (Fisher & Hunter 2018).

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