

Two Flycatchers New to Iraq's Avifauna

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Abstract

Due to contradictory literatures and taxonomic contention, the status of many avifaunal species, especially passerines, in Iraq is still enigmatic. In 2026, the Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* and the Indian (Asian) Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* were recorded in urban gardens in central and southern Iraq, respectively. These records represent the first confirmed occurrences of these flycatchers in Iraq and presented in this note.

Keywords: Birds of Iraq; Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*; First record; Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*; vagrant.

Introduction

The avifauna of Iraq, especially the passerine (order: Passeriformes) is unique and diverse, but far from fully explored. The family Muscicapidae (Old-World flycatchers) is represented in Iraq by four species: Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata*, Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (Salim *et al.*, 2012), and European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* (Abed *et al.*, 2022). The family Monarchidae (Monarch-flycatchers) has not been confirmed to occur in Iraq by any known species.

Due to taxonomic contention in literatures and “doubtful” misidentification of the seasonal plumage variations of black-and-white *Ficedula* male flycatchers, the occurrence of Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula*

albicollis in Iraq was not confirmed (see Salim *et al.*, 2012), yet anticipated to occur on passage. Past ornithological claims of Collared Flycatcher in Iraq are almost referred to races of European Pied (Cumming 1918; Ticehurst *et al.*, 1922; 1926; Johnson 1958; Marchant 1961) and Semi-collared flycatchers (Allouse 1953; 1962; Moor and Boswell 1957). Salim *et al.* (2012) indicated that Iraq's past records were assigned to Semi-collared Flycatcher.

In this note, the occurrence of both Collared Flycatcher and the family Monarchidae (genus: *Terpsiphone*) represented by the Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* is confirmed for the first time in Iraq.

Previous Records

The first national record was made at Daik Park (35°33'46.4"N 45°26'49.2"E) in Sulaymaniyah Governorate in northern Iraq (Kurdistan Region) where a first summer male was photographed on 2nd of April 2023 (Figure 1D). The habitat is urban landscape of mixed native and ornamental vegetation of the Zagros Mountains Forest Steppe (PA0446), mainly by scattered Oak tree *Quercus aegilops*, Chinaberry *Melia azedarach*, Plane tree *Platanus orientalis*, and Poplar *Populus nigra* (Figure 1C).

Recent Records

1-Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*

On 29th of March 2026, an adult male

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was photographed at *ca.* 200m² public garden (32°29'19.78"N 44°26'33.05"E), southwestern edge of Al-Khisrawiyah Park, Hillah City, *ca.* 280m from the eastern bank of Shatt Al-Hillah (Hillah River), Babylon Governorate in central Iraq (Figure 2D). The habitat is urban landscape of mixed mosaic native and ornamental vegetation of the Arabian Desert and East Saharo-Arabian Xeric Shrublands ecoregion (PA1303), dominated majorly by Common Date Palm tree *Phoenix dactylifera* orchards, Common Jujube tree *Ziziphus vulgaris*, and Bitter Orange tree *Citrus × aurantium*, Lanceleaf Buttonwood "Damas" *Conocarpus lancifolius* (Introduced), along with riparian bushes and hedges (Figure 2C).

The birds were identified following Svensson *et al.* (2022). Their plumage was unmistakable, instantly recognized by its very distinctive broad white collar complete around the neck (black hindneck in *F. hypoleuca*; white half-collar onto sides of neck in *F. semitorquata*) (Figures 1 and 2

A and B). They had large white forehead patch (small forehead patch narrowing in the middle, sometimes divided into two very small white forehead spots in some *F. hypoleuca* observed in the region; smaller white forehead patch in *F. semitorquata*) (Figure 3 A and B). Extensive white on the wing tertials and large patch on base of the wing primaries (small white streak at base of primaries in *F. semitorquata*; white tips to median wing-coverts which may merge forming large white wing patch in *F. semitorquata*). They had all-black tail (prominent white bases or edges on the outermost tail feathers in *F. hypoleuca*; distinct black-and-white tail pattern with extensive white on the sides outer tail feathers/rectrices in *F. semitorquata*).

The Collared Flycatcher breeds in central and eastern Europe, and winters in central and south-eastern Africa (BirdLife International 2025). In the Arabian Peninsula, it is a common spring and rare autumn passage migrant (OSME 2025).

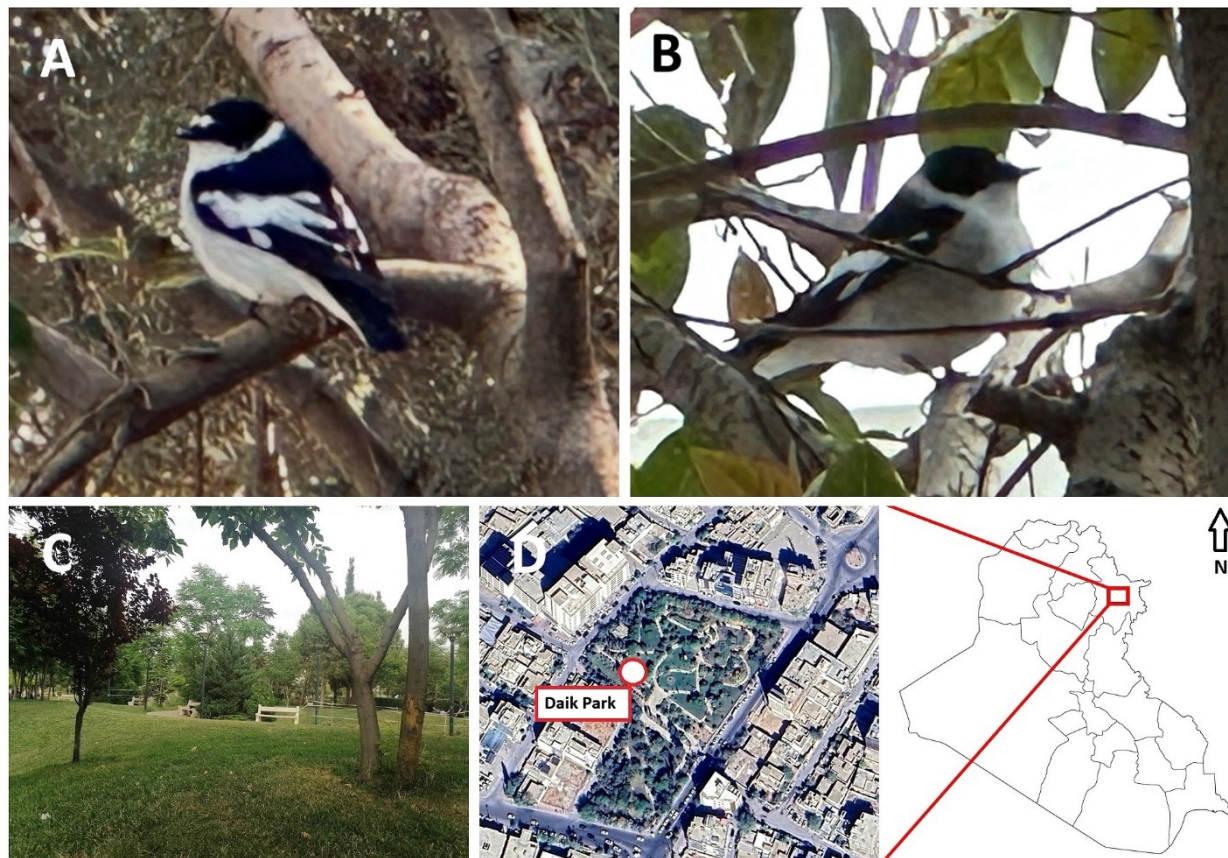


Figure 1: A and B: black-and-white 1st summer male Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* in Iraq (Photos ©Korsh Ararat); C: Daik Park (source: <https://mindtrip.ai/attraction/sulaymaniyah/daik-park/at-XymFTsKC>); D: a Google Map image of the observation site.

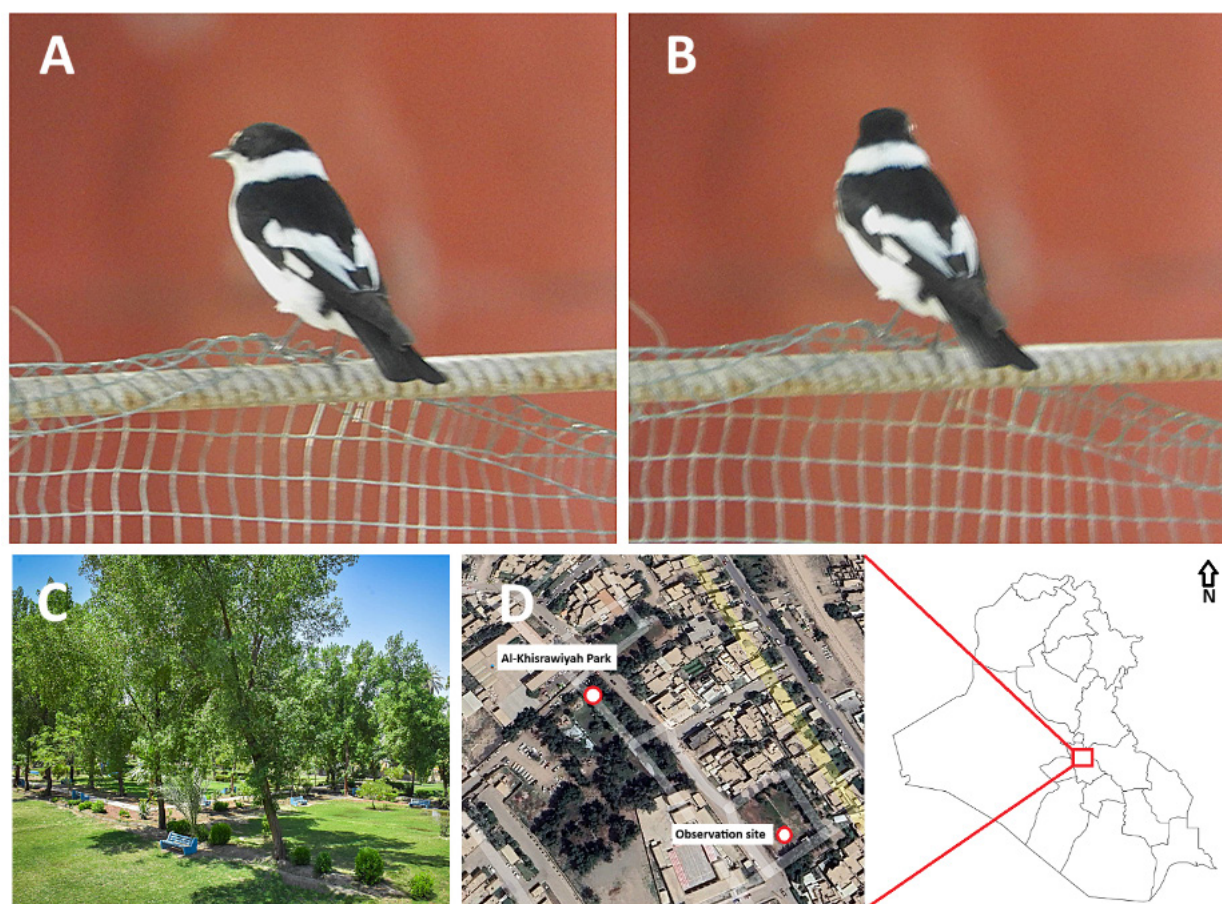


Figure 2. A and B: black-and-white adult male Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* in Iraq (Photos © Ameen Ahmed Ali); C: Al-Khisrawiyah Park (source: HillaMunicipal@babel.gov.iq); D: a Google Map image of the observation site.

It is recorded as passage migrant in Jordan (JBW 2025), Syria (Aidek *et al.* 2025), and Gaza Strip-Palestine (Abd Rabou *et al.* 2023). It is recorded as vagrant in Bahrain (BRC 2023); Al Mefah Park, Tanoumah, Saudi Arabia in September 2016 (Harrison and Lamsdell 2016; Alshwamin 2026); Al Abraq in April 2013 and Jahra in May 2018 (KORC 2025; Shobrak and Al-Sirhan 2022), and at Mamzar park in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) in October 2015 (Campbell *et al.*, 2016). Old ornithological claims from Iran are now assigned to Semi-collared Flycatcher (Scott and Adhami 2006; Khaleghizadeh *et al.*, 2017) similarly to Iraq (Salim *et al.*, 2012).

The species is possibly a passage migrant in Iraq (see Porter and Aspinall 2010); however, additional observations are required to substantiate this claim.

2-Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*

On 27th of January 2026, an adult rufous female was captured and photographed by a local person at his house garden (31°50'46.66"N 47° 8'48.10"E), in Shabanah neighborhood, *ca.* 200 m from the western edge of the Tigris River, Amarah City, Maysan Governorate in southern Iraq (Figure 4 D). Later on, the flycatcher was released back into the wild at same capturing site. The habitat is urban landscape at the fringes of the Tigris-Euphrates Alluvial Salt Marsh ecoregion (PA0906), which consists of scattered private and public gardens of native and ornamental plants, majorly Common Date Palm trees, Common Jujube trees, Lanceleaf Buttonwood, along with aquatic riparian bushes and hedges, mainly Common Reed *Phragmites australis* beds alongside Tigris River banks (Figure 4 C).

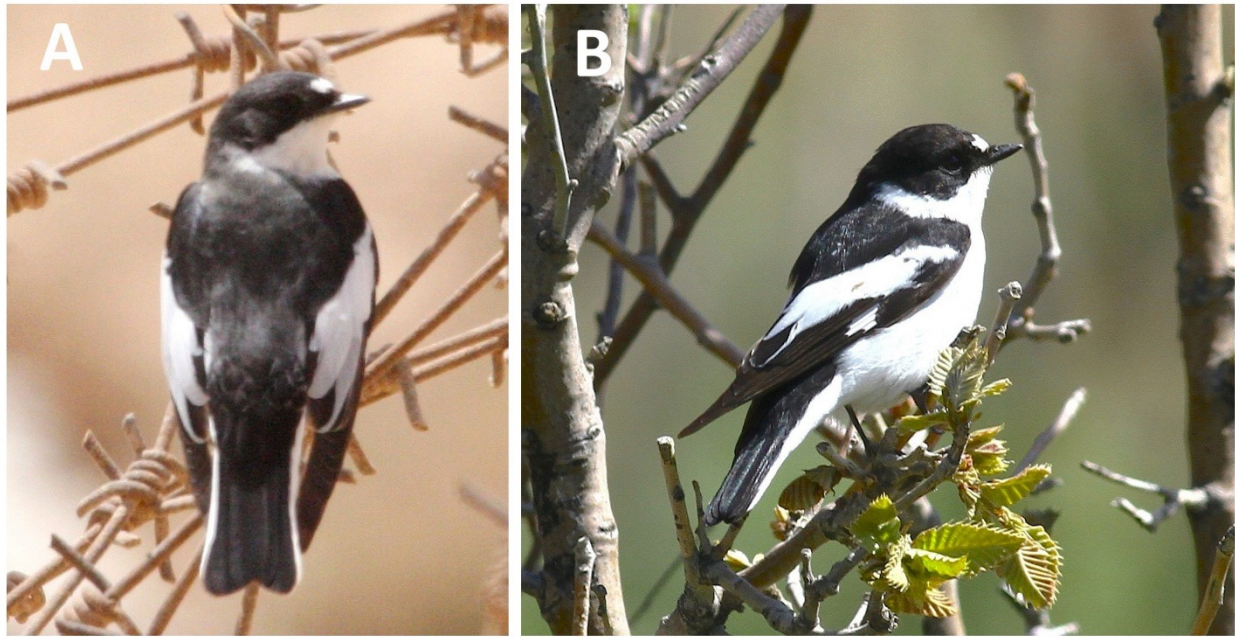


Figure 3. Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* in Iraq. A: Adult male at Jabal Makhool (KBA IQ046) in Salah Ad-Din Governorate (Photo © Omar Al-Sheikhly). B: Adult male at Qara Dag (KBA IQ039) in Sulaimani Governorate (Photo © Korsh Ararat).



Figure 4. A & B: adult female Indian Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* in Iraq (Photos © Mahdi Alawi Hanon); C: Shabanah neighborhood (source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2315487421945604&set=pcb.1457328661468644>); D: a Google Map image of the observation site.

The bird was identified according to del Hoyo *et al.*, (2006), and del Hoyo (2020). However, Chhin *et al.* (2012) indicated that the male Indian (Asian) Paradise-flycatchers' plumage changes during their first years. Sub-adult males look very similar to females, but have a black throat and bright blue-ringed eyes (Salomonsen 2008). The female flycatcher had rich rufous plumage with cinnamon-brown upperparts, black-greyish head with short and rounded crest (glossy black head with notably long and pointed crest in males) and pale-whitish throat (full black in males). Tail feathers were taken off accidentally due to capturing (males have long central tail feathers). It had thin and faint pale greyish eye-ring (prominent, well defined vivid blue eye-ring in males – see Robson *et al.*, 2008). The breast was pale-greyish; underparts, belly, and flanks were white (dark-greyish throat and breast, and salty flanks and underparts in female African Paradise Flycatcher, *Terpsiphone viridis* which is confined to southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula – see Porter and Aspinall 2010) (Figure 4 A and B). The female could not be assigned into a subspecies for certainty.

The Indian Paradise-flycatcher is found in west Tien Shan to northern Afghanistan, north and east Pakistan, western and central Nepal, India, central Bangladesh, southwest Myanmar and Sri Lanka (BirdLife International. 2024). The species showed seasonal movements to the west of its range in central and southern Asia, to the south and alongside Arabian Gulf region. It was first recorded for the Arabian Peninsula in UAE as a vagrant at Dalma Island in October 2011, Mushrif Palace Gardens in Abu Dhabi in December 2019–March 2020 (Lloyd *et al.*, 2020), and a record claimed from Ras Al-Khaimah in May 2025 (del Hoyo 2020; Anonymous 2025). In Iran, the species was first recorded near Bandar Abbas in southern Iran in November 2021. Several additional southern records were made near Gwadar, Pakistan (no details), Mellat Park, Minab, and Hormozgan in February 2023, and Minab in January 2025 (del Hoyo 2020;

GBIF 2023; OSME 2025). The species is possibly vagrant or a rare passage migrant in Iraq; though this claim requires further observations.

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