

FIRST BREEDING OF THE SEMI-COLLARED FLYCATCHER (*FICEDULA SEMITORQUATA*) IN LOZEN MOUNTAIN (CW BULGARIA)

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Abstract

The vulnerable Semi-collared Flycatcher was found with two breeding pairs in 2012 and four pairs in 2013 in Lozen Mountain, CW Bulgaria, UTM square GN10. Three pairs inhabited a natural deciduous oak (*Quercus* sp.), and European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* L.) forest in a moist dingle, 915 m a.s.l. The other territory was a plantation of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.) and Silver birch (*Betula pendula* Roth) crossed by a brook with Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos*) along it, 885 m a.s.l. Two pairs occupied old woodpecker hollows in a dead poplar tree (*Populus* sp), and in a single Cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera* Ehrh.), respectively.

Key words: Semi-collared Flycatcher, *Ficedula semitorquata*, breeding habitat, Lozen Mountain.

The Semi-collared Flycatcher *Ficedula semitorquata* (Homeyer, 1885) is a hollow breeding migrant inhabiting mainly mature, moist deciduous and rarely mixed forest in Bulgaria. Its breeding population is concentrated in Stara planina and Strandzha Mountains and moist forests along the lower reaches of rivers in the Black Sea catchment area (Iankov 2007, Nankinov 2009). The distribution and population size of the species have decreased as a result of habitat losses mainly in its breeding area (IUCN 2012). Consequently, it is classified as “vulnerable” in Bulgarian Red Data Book (Golemanski 2011) and “near threatened” in IUCN Red List (IUCN 2012).

The regular breeding of Semi-collared Flycatcher was known in Central West Bulgaria in the past: Lyulin Mountain,

Vitosha Mountain, the city of Sofia and Samokov kettle (Nankinov 2009). Its current breeding in the area was reported in only one 10-km UTM square in Vitosha Mountain with up to 9 pairs (Iankov 2007). The species has not been found in Lozen Mountain for the last 50 years (Belichev and Milchev 2010).

Two pairs with singing males were observed in the central part of Iskar Hunting Ranch (IHR), Lozen Mountain, UTM square GN10, on 13.05.2012. A traditional transect used for the practical training of students since 2009 crossed the two pairs' territories, situated themselves at a distance of 940 m from each other. The first territory included a moist dingle with natural oak (*Quercus* sp.) and European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus* L.) forest at 915 m a.s.l. Dead and declining poplars

(*Populus* sp.) were in line only along the brook. The female visited several times an old woodpecker hollow situated at around 6 m height in a dead poplar. The other territory was in an artificial mixed plantation consisting of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.) and Silver birch (*Betula pendula* Roth), crossed by a brook with Honey locust (*Gleditsia triacanthos* L.) along it, at 885 m a.s.l. The pair here occupied an old woodpecker hollow situated at around 3.5 m height in a broken, dry top of a single Cherry plum (*Prunus cerasifera* Ehrh.). The same hollows were occupied on 18.05.2013, but we found other two territories adjacent to the first pair in its dingle.

The forests in IHR are not among the preferred habitat types of the Semi-collared Flycatcher. They are mainly artificial, coniferous and 40–60 years old. Dead or dying trees with hollows are very rare. The new locality is about 25–40 km apart from the nearest and similarly detached, not numerous localities in Vitosha, Western Rhodopes and Sredna gora Mountains according to the maps in Iankov (2007).

However, the similarity of breeding avifauna in IHR between the data of Iankov (2007) and Belichev and Milchev (2010) was only 49.4 %. Therefore, we suppose the existence of other unknown breeding localities in CW Bulgaria as a source of the new occupation, rather than to explain it with better condition of the Semi-collared Flycatcher population.

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