

Grey-headed Kingfisher mystery solved!

Adrian Skerrett



Brian Finch recently contacted Seychelles Bird Records Committee and requested details of Grey-headed Kingfisher records from Seychelles. In fact, there are only two such records and only one of these is accompanied by photos. This was the first record for Seychelles, seen and photographed by Camille Hoareau at Denis Island, where the bird was present from 30 December 2003 to 16 February 2004. The photographs were rather blurred but they were sufficient. Brian wrote:

"I think I am not imagining that the photos show a brownish cap contrasting with paler greyish cheeks and the underparts are very deep chestnut. It cannot just be a coincidence that this is the feature that I was hoping and expecting to find either.

The race involved with these characteristics is *semicaerulea* which is an endemic breeder to south Oman, Yemen and SW Arabia N to Mecca. The amazing thing is that although quite a common species in its range the entire population completely disappears for five months of the year and no-one knows where they go to! It is assumed they slip into Somalia, but there is nothing conclusive that shows it has even been recorded in Africa. So BOA didn't even include the race in the Handbook [for mainland Africa] and even now HBW only have... possibly to Somalia. I believe I have the evidence to show that it is a very long-distance migrant even getting to South Africa, but has just been ignored. I had no idea that the GHK had managed to get down to Seychelles, but when I researched it, found that they had. I was looking for a place where they might be vagrant, and Seychelles looked ideal for picking out a migrant from that part of the Middle-east that had strayed into the Indian Ocean when on a southwards migration. So the chances were extremely probable that any GHK to reach Seychelles would be of that race. There was no reason for any of the other races to randomly fly out to sea in the wrong direction!"

Meanwhile, Brian has a *semicaerulea* (pictured above) in his back paddock which was the reason for

starting all this! He is currently preparing to do a presentation to the East Africa Records Committee to get the race accepted as occurring in East Africa. He will use the two Seychelles images (pictured below) for the supporting argument.

