

REDISCOVERY OF THE BUFF-VENTED BULBUL, *HYPSSIPETES CHARLOTTAE* (FINSCH) (AVES: PASSERIFORMES: PYCNONOTIDAE) IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT. - A Buff-vented Bulbul, *Hypsipetes charlottae* observed on Bukit Timah on 20th December 1990 represents the first record of this species in Singapore since 1922.

On 20th December, 1990, at about 1035 hrs, while observing birds congregating at a fruiting *Ficus benjamina* on the summit of Bukit Timah Nature Reserve, Ms. Elizabeth Loh, Mr. Morten Strange, and the author noted a Buff-vented Bulbul, *Hypsipetes charlottae* (Finsch, 1867) actively foraging among the lower branches. Observation was maintained for about twenty minutes, during which two colour photographs (one of which is shown in monochrome in Fig. 1) were taken. The bird remained at this location daily until 23 December 1990.

Description (based on author's original field notes). - Small bulbul, about the size of the Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus brunneus* (total length about 190 mm). Upper parts, olive brown; bill, short, decurved; face, horn; throat, predominantly white; eyes, black with a thin, brown ring; eyebrow, whitish, topped off with a dark crown line, appearing rather like a black supracoronal stripe; crown, darker brown with a slightly crested appearance due to short, stiff feathers at hind crown; rest of underparts, whitish with fine yellow and dirty greyish streaks; flanks and sides greyer; vent, pale rufous; legs, reddish.

The bird was active and appeared undisturbed by human presence. Its call, a rather low, disyllabic "hee-yeah", often-repeated, occasionally interspersed with loud, piercing, high-pitched whistles. Observed associating with a *Pycnonotus brunneus*, with which it appeared to "fight" on one occasion.

The combination of an olive-brown upper parts, pure white throat, whitish under parts, and a pale rufous vent is diagnostic of *Hypsipetes charlottae*, *Hypsipetes propinquus* and *H. viridescens* of Indo-China are similar, but both have more yellow under parts, especially on the belly, olive upper parts, and cinnamon under tail coverts (King *et al.*, 1975: 267).

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Fig. 1. *Hypsipetes charlottae* in a fig tree at the summit of Bukit Timah (Photograph by Morten Strange).

Hypsipetes charlottae appears to be a sedentary species which inhabits forests, orchards and secondary growth, at low elevations, from the south Tenasserim in Burma, through Peninsular Thailand and Malaysia, to Sumatra and Borneo (King *et al.*, 1975: 267). In Singapore, this species was a fairly common resident in open wooded areas according to Gibson-Hill (1949: 168) [as *Microscelis olivacea olivacea* Blyth].

The author has examined the specimens of *Hypsipetes charlottae* in the Zoological Reference Collection (ZRC), Department of Zoology, National University of Singapore, and found only one specimen from Singapore (catalogue no. ZRC.3.16289, as *Iole charlottae cryptus*). It is an adult collected by F.N. Chasen from Bukit Timah on 26 June 1922.

The present record represents what is most likely, the first authenticated sighting of *Hypsipetes charlottae* in Singapore since 1922, and therefore reinstates this species in the avifauna of Singapore (Lim, 1990).

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