

## Short communication

### Plumage-types of the Little-known Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker *Prionochilus thoracicus* (Aves: Passeriformes: Dicaeidae)

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**ABSTRACT:-** Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker, *Prionochilus thoracicus* is a scarce flowerpecker inhabiting in lowland forest of the Thai-Malay Peninsula. Plumages of an adult, as well as a juvenile, of this species have been well described in literature. However, details of moulting are still missing. This article presents the documentation of moulting from a juvenile to an adult male.

**KEY WORDS:** *Prionochilus thoracicus*, Plumage-types, Dicaeidae

#### INTRODUCTION

Despite the rapid advance of digital photography, adequate photographic documentation enabling differentiation among age and sex-classes is still lacking for many species of birds. This is especially true for smaller species with dull coloration, which are often overlooked and under-recorded. The chance to obtain a photo is even slimmer for a rarity.

Flowerpeckers (Aves: Passeriformes: Dicaeidae) are very small birds with an overall body length of between 9 to 13 cm (Lekagul and Round, 1991). Sexual dimorphism is strongly marked in flowerpeckers of the genus *Prionochilus*, in which males are brightly colored as already shown in most field guides and handbooks (Lekagul and Round, 1991; Wells, 2007; Robson, 2008).

This article focuses on Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker, which at least in the Thai context, is among the scarcest and least known flowerpeckers.

The Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker is a rare resident reported from a few places in southern Thailand. There were records in Khao Bantad Wildlife Sanctuary, Khao Pra-Bang Khram Wildlife Sanctuary, and Hala-Bala Wildlife Sanctuary (Sanguansombat, 2005). Although listed by BirdLife International (2015) as near-threatened, its status in the Thai-Malay Peninsula is vulnerable to almost endangered due to loss of lowland evergreen and peat swamp forest (Wells, 2007).

#### Adult plumage details

Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker males are undeniably beautiful with a black head and a bright red crown stripe. A red patch on its breast is surrounded by black. Wings are greyish-black with yellow tinges on tertials, greater coverts, and median coverts. The back, rump, upper-tail coverts and belly are bright yellow. The tail is black (Fig. 1).

The females are distinguished from female Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker (*P. percussus*)

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**Figure 1.** Male Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*), Khao Nam Khang National Park, Songkhla Province, 14 April 2015, photo by Thanee Wongniwatkaorn.



**Figure 2.** Female Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*), Khao Banthad Wildlife Sanctuary, Satun Province, 2 May 2015, photo by Patrawut Sitifong.

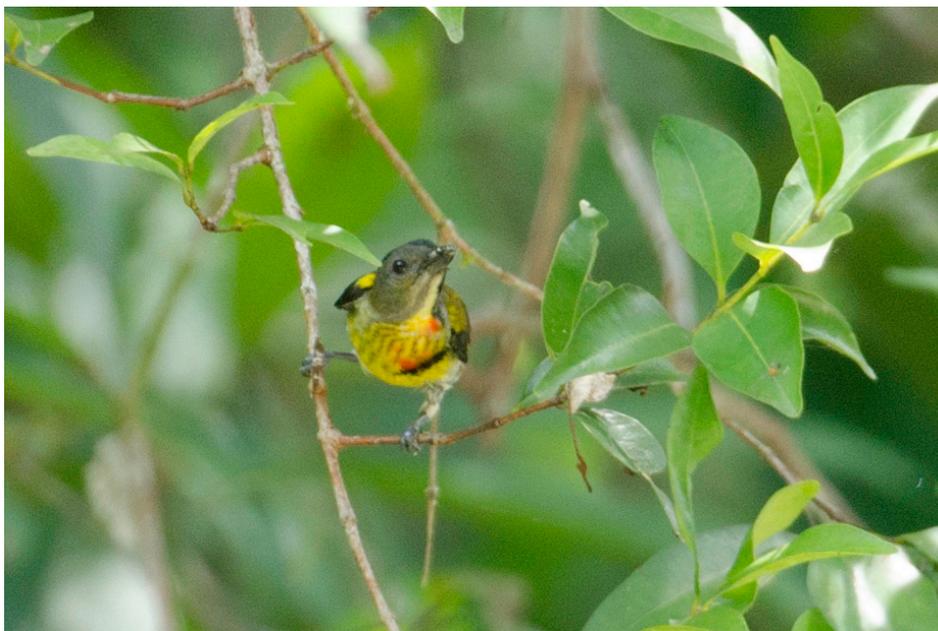
by a greyer head, contrasting with olive-green upperparts, yellow upper tail coverts, and lack of a whitish malar stripe. The females show more yellow on belly; they have an orange-tinged breast, and yellow under tail coverts (Lekagul and Round, 1991) (Fig. 2).

### Details of moulting from a juvenile to an adult male

Robson (2008) describes the juvenile as “much duller and more greyish-olive below than female with narrow yellowish stripe down centre of abdomen. Very like Crimson-breasted but pale stripe on centre of abdomen tends to be more clearly defined and yellower. Wing-feather fringes less green.” Lekagul and Round (1991) wrote “Juvenile duller greyish-olive underneath lacking any yellow tinge. From juvenile Crimson-breasted by brighter, yellower bill.”

A bird photographed at Khao Banthad Wildlife Sanctuary on 22 April 2014 showed plumage intermediate between that of an adult and a juvenile male. The overall appearance was yellow with a grey head, faint malar stripe, and white throat. Its head resembled an adult female but the nape showed sign of black. Greater coverts were black with yellow on shoulders and yellow under tail-coverts. There were dark streaks on breast with a thick breast band and orange spots. The iris was dark brown and the bill dark grey. The legs were dark grey (Figs 3, 4, 5).

This article touches upon details of the moulting of a male bird from juvenile to adult. This detail is crucial, but information is missing. There have never been records in any academic works. This article will help shed light with better and more accurate identification of *Prionochilus* plumage.



**Figure 3.** A juvenile male of Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*), showing the dark streaks on breast with a thick breast band and orange spots, 28 April 2013, photo by Patrawut Sitifong.



**Figure 4.** A juvenile male of Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*) showing underparts, Khao Banthad Wildlife Sanctuary, Satun Province, 28 April 2013, photo by Patrawut Sitifong.



**Figure 5.** A juvenile male Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker (*Prionochilus thoracicus*), showing sign of black on the nape, and bright yellow on the shoulder, resembling an adult male, 28 April 2013, photo by Patrawut Sitifong.

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