

Gujarat when one individual was mist-netted from Hingolghat, Rajkot District in September 1960 by Dr. Salim Ali (Ali 1962; Shivraj Kumar 1962). Whitehead (1910) found it in fair numbers in Kohat District, Pakistan during spring migration from late March till middle of May. Mallalieu (1988) reported it from the northern shore of Lake Rawal in Islamabad, Pakistan in August 1987. Several eBird records of the species indicate its regular occurrence in north-western India, from Gujarat, Punjab, Delhi, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, eastern Rajasthan, and western Uttar Pradesh (eBird 2023).

On 10 September 2022, while birding in and around Desert National Park, Rajasthan during the autumn migration season, we found a Grasshopper Warbler at the outskirts of village Kuchhri (27.01°N, 70.55°E). The bird was first spotted in thickets of *Calotropis* sp. and its skulking habits made it difficult to observe. It was initially obscured under some short dense vegetation, and its movements were difficult to track as it was also silent, but a slight movement in the shrubby thickets drew our attention. The first impression of the bird indicated that it was some kind of a small, skulking warbler, but its identification remained unclear. Subsequently, we were able to take some clear photographs [155, 156] when it perched on a *Calotropis* sp. shrub briefly in the open, perhaps, while foraging. The bird showed brown olive upperparts, dark brown streaked wings, a rounded tail with diffused bars, pale underparts and pinkish legs, and these features confirmed it to be a Grasshopper Warbler. It lacked features, such



155. Grasshopper Warbler in *Calotropis* shrubs.



156. Close-up of Grasshopper Warbler.

as, rufous rump, prominent supercilium, and white tail-tips, which separate it from Rusty-rumped Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*.

The vocalisations of the species are described as a continuous long stridulating call, like that of an insect, such as a grasshopper *Caelifera* sp. (Ali & Ripley 1983), but it usually remains silent outside the breeding season, and therefore, relatively difficult to detect in its wintering grounds or during passage. The species is mapped for eastern Rajasthan in Grimmett et al. (2011) and it is also reported to occur at Bharatpur (Kazmierczak & Singh 1998), however, it is not listed in Vyas (2015). Several recent records for the State appear in the public database of eBird, but none reported from the Thar Desert in Rajasthan (eBird 2023). Idris et al. (2009) also do not report it from this arid region. Our record appears to be the first photographic record for the species documented from the Thar Desert region, near Desert National Park, Rajasthan.

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Status of the Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and the Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata* in the Union Territory of Ladakh, India

We report multiple records of two new species for eastern Ladakh—Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* and Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*—and discuss their past status from the union territory. Neither of these species has been listed for eastern Ladakh in standard references (Osmaston 1925, 1926; Sillem 1934; Vaurie 1972; Holmes 1986; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Delany et al. 2014; Pfister 2014; Grimmett et al. 2016; NIHE & WCBCL 2021) though they have occurred in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Ladakh union territory (www.birdsofgilgit.com), which is now administered by Pakistan.

From 04–06 September 2021, a five-member team from Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) consisting of Tashi Angchuk Stanba, Choldan Gasha, Norboo

Tashi, Tsewang Gurmet, and myself were on a bird watching trip to Anley village (32.70°N, 79.00°E) in eastern Ladakh. On 05 September, I photographed a warbler considering it as a Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum*, a regular passage migrant through Ladakh from mid-August till late-September. While reviewing the pictures later, I noticed several black spots on its mantle and rump [157, 158]. I posted the photo on 'Ask id of Indian birds' forum on Facebook and the species ID was suggested as Grasshopper Warbler. The combination of longer primary projection, more distinct black streaking on upperparts, fairly long undertail-coverts with streaking (slightly visible in [157] and streaking on the rump and upper tail-coverts [158] distinguished it from both Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *L. certhiola* and Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*.

Apart from its novelty status in eastern Ladakh, the bird has not been mentioned in historical references from Gilgit as well (Biddulph 1881, 1882; Scully 1881a, 1881b); nor are there any recent records in eBird (eBird 2023). However, Grimmett et al. (2016) showed a single passage record from the Gilgit-Baltistan region, the source of which we are not able to trace. Recently, there are two more photographic records from eastern Ladakh, from Chushul (Norboo 2022) and Hanle (Saggar 2022), suggesting that the warbler may be a passage migrant here.



157. Grasshopper Warbler showing primary projection and boldly streaked mantle with uniform brown upper tail-coverts.



158. Grasshopper Warbler showing uniform brown upper tail-coverts.

All photos: Padma Gyalpo

On 12 September 2021, at 0700 h, I photographed a Booted Warbler that was feeding in the fields of Khaldo village (32.77°N, 78.97°E) adjacent to the road [3]. From a distance, it looked

quite similar to a Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus*, a common summer breeder in Ladakh. On closer examination, paler legs and pale lower mandible were noticed eliminating any chances of Mountain Chiffchaff. The slight extension of supercilium behind the eye, presence of ochre-buff tinge on sides with paler outer tail-feathers, small bill with extensive dark tip [159] eliminated Sykes's Warbler *I. rama*. The prominent pale edges to tertials and primaries, short undertail-coverts, dark eye, and black-tipped bill separated it from the Blyth's Reed Warbler. Further the confusion between Sykes's Warbler was cleared on 'Ask id of Indian birds' on Facebook by various members.

On 14 September 2021, I photographed another Booted Warbler [160] at Chumathang village (33.36°N, 78.35°E) that showed similar features—pale bill with dark tip, pale legs, more rounded head, and short undertail coverts.



159. Booted Warbler from Khaldo, Ladakh.



160. Booted Warbler from Chumthang, Ladakh.

There are few recent reports in eBird from Gilgit-Baltistan (Shah 2014) and from Hanle (Panwar 2022; Visuddha 2022; Gyalpo 2023), all during August–September migration season indicating that the bird might be using this route regularly for passage migration. Though Khan et al. (2022) reported Booted Warbler from Hanle on 14 September 2021, I verified their photos privately on WhatsApp and there are several features visible in their images that do not match a Booted Warbler. Structurally, the bill and tail of their bird is particularly long for a Booted Warbler, in addition to the presence of a sloping forehead (vs a rounded head in Booted). It also lacks the warm-toned upperparts and buff flanks that most Booted Warblers have. This leads to the conclusion that the bird must have been misidentified, and it was either a Blyth's Reed Warbler or a Sykes's Warbler.

I would like to thank everyone on 'Ask ID of Indian Birds' Facebook forum who helped in identification of both the birds as well our fellow birder friends who were part of the trip. Thanks also to Tsewang Namgail, Director Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust (SLC-IT) for organizing the trip to Hanle. I would like to thank Praveen J and Ashwin Viswanathan for providing additional help regarding both the species and *Indian BIRDS* editorial board members for further help to ID the warbler in Khan et al. (2022). Lastly, I would also like to thank Iqbal Ali for sending the photos on WhatsApp.

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A possible partial-leucistic Eurasian Wigeon *Mareca penelope* in Assam

On 14 January 2023, the Forest department staff of Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, informed me of a possible Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* at Hanhchara Beel (26.21°N, 92.08°E; c.47 m asl). We reached the spot at 1114 h, and then at 1145 h, we spotted the duck. It took off along with some Common Teal *Anas crecca* but soon returned and settled on the water. It was in a mixed group of ducks containing Common Teal, Gadwall *Mareca strepera*, Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *S. querquedula*, and Common Pochard *Anas*

ferina. I observed the bird for about an hour and took several photographs.

When I saw it first, it appeared to be an intriguing, medium-sized duck. Closer observation revealed an entirely whitish body plumage, and the areas around the eyes were dark. The head and upper neck were light grey. Careful observation of its body revealed faint blotches and markings, although it appeared whitish from far away. The bill colour was pinkish with a black tip [161], unlike a typical Eurasian Wigeon *M. penelope*, which has a blue-grey bill with a black tip. The underwings were white, while its breast had a light rufous-brown patch [162]. The head shape was of a typical Eurasian Wigeon. The colour of its iris (pupils not clearly visible owing to distance) was typical, indicating that the individual does not have albinism.



161. Leucistic Eurasian Wigeon



162. In-flight showing underparts

Both: Anwaruddin Choudhury

A typical male Eurasian Wigeon has a chestnut head and neck with a distinctive yellowish forecrown. The breast is vinous, tail-coverts are black, and upper wing coverts are white (Ali & Ripley 1999). There were no typical Eurasian Wigeons in Hanhchara Beel on that day, but there were many of them at Tamuliduba Beel c.5 km away. A search for leucistic wigeons on the internet showed only two records: a stuffed male and female leucistic Eurasian Wigeon posted on a website for recreational hunting (Anonymous 2023) and another, a photo of a live leucistic American Wigeon *M. americana* (Goltz 2011).

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