

Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, southern Rajasthan

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While birding near Sitabari / Valmiki Ashram (24°15'N 74°30'E) in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Chittorgarh district in southern Rajasthan on 21 December 2009 we noticed a comparatively large warbler foraging in the middle canopy, but our view was heavily criss-crossed with twigs and leaves, and the bird was constantly flitting back and forth, frantically feeding and picking off insects as it went. Eventually it flew towards us and stopped for a brief second, and allowed us to see it better. GSB managed to take photograph it during that brief period.

We looked at the results on the camera monitor and were quite pleased to identify it as Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*. Later, this bird, and at least four more birds, in different parts of the sanctuary, gave clear views to us during the day. The species seemed to prefer denser parts of forest along the dry streambed. We realised the significance of this sighting in the evening when we consulted the available literature, in the forest rest house at Bansi. We found it was recorded only from Bharatpur in Rajasthan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000).

The most obvious features of the first bird, which was photographed by GSB, were two yellowish wing-bars, crown stripe, light grey-brown legs, and conspicuous pinkish lower mandible (looked yellowish-orange in good light).

After better views and results on camera monitor, we were also able to discern that the bird had conspicuously long supercilia extending to nape, yellow before and above eye, whiter towards nape; lores and eye stripe dark-grey (looked almost black in bad light); cheeks and ear-coverts faintly yellowish. The upper parts had a greyish-green cast and the under parts and vent were essentially white with a grey wash to the breast and flanks. Two yellowish wing bars and the head pattern of a greyish-white crown stripe and two broad dusky olive coronal bands were very distinctive on the bird.

Western Crowned Warblers breed in the western Himalayas: Safed Koh, Chitral and Swat, and Baltistan, east to Garhwal and Kumaon, and winter in the Indian peninsula from southern Gujarat (Surat Dangs) and north-western Maharashtra (Dhulia), Madhya Pradesh (Raipur), and the Eastern Ghats (Visakhapatnam) south to the southern-most hills; more common on the western side

of the peninsula (Ali & Ripley 1988) but winter distribution elsewhere is uncertain (Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

From the available literature it is not possible to determine its status in Rajasthan. None of the 20 specimens in the collection of Bombay Natural History Society is from Rajasthan (Abdulali 1986). The distribution map in Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) indicates that it is a passage migrant through eastern and southern Rajasthan but does not refer to any record. Kazmierczak (2000) shows only isolated record(s) from Bharatpur during passage. Although Ali & Ripley (1988) note that it is recorded on passage in Rajasthan, and refer to, "records from Rajasthan on 22 July," they have not indicated the location of these records in the state. While listing it in, "the list of birds ringed from Bharatpur bird sanctuary," Saxena (1975) has erroneously ascribed its status as resident in Bharatpur.

Thus the above sightings of the species in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary constitute the first wintering record of the species in Rajasthan. It is possible that Western Crowned Warbler winters more regularly in other suitable parts of southern Rajasthan and further reports are encouraged. It has been seen as late as December in Delhi and it has been suggested that odd individuals might winter there (Harvey *et al.* 2006), so a similar situation might pertain to Rajasthan.

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