

A record of Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* from Tso Kar, Ladakh, India

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We were on a 12-day birding trip in Ladakh, India, from 08 to 19 September 2016, as part of a trip for Avifauna Nature Tours, Sweden. Having spent a week in Rumbak Valley, with just above 50 bird species in total and some nice views of mammals, including the snow leopard *Panthera uncia*, we were quite eager to get to more birdy areas. Passing through the Tanglangla Pass (5330 m asl), and entering the dry valley of Tso Kar Lake (33.31°N, 77.96°E), brought us to new habitats with high expectations.

The subsequent morning (18 September) was clear and freezing cold. We had a good breakfast before leaving the camp, following the eastern side of Tso Kar. Being nearly into autumn, the valley was quite interesting in terms of the passage migrants that included Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*, Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*, Greater Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla*, Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*, etc.

In the late morning, we found ourselves searching for Ground Tit *Pseudopodoces humilis* at the ruined stone buildings at the southern side of the freshwater Startsapuk Tso Lake (33.24°N, 78.04°E). A Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* lurked in the low and scattered bushes. To get a better view, we followed it as it flew down towards the lakeside. Before reaching it, PN flushed another warbler of clearly different colouration. "Hey, this is some kind of a green warbler!" he shouted. The new bird was easy to find in the sparse vegetation and could, within a second, be identified as a Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix*, one of the most distinctive species in this numerous genus, due to its contrasting greenish back and wings, strongly yellow face and throat, and snow white breast and belly. At first, we didn't realise the significance of the record, although GP, being an experienced birder on the Indian Subcontinent, immediately raised his eyebrows, and was quite eager to take a good look at the bird. Just in case, HP fired away some record shots [128]. We watched the bird for approximately two minutes, as it was reaching for insects in the few straws and bushes available, while jumping and running on the ground. Feeling content with the identification and observation as such, we then left the bird and carried on birding.

From the photographs and impressions in the field, it appeared to be a fairly large and elegant *Phylloscopus* with long wings with seven primary tips visible past the tertials and



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128. Wood Warbler.

secondaries. No wing-bars. Ground colour of wings greyish-black, edged yellowish-green to form obvious wing panel. Similar pattern on tail. Eye-stripe reaching behind eye, crown, back and mantle plain greenish. Blackish lores dividing yellow supercilium, brightest in front of eye, and throat. Breast, belly and under tail coverts clean white. Legs dark grey, bill blackish with yellow gape/base.

While discussing this find with others in mailing lists, it was realised that this species, probably the same individual, was photographed a couple of days prior to our observation at the same site and the photographs was lying unidentified until we announced ours. This particular bird appears to be the first one to get documented for India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen *et al.* 2016), and most interestingly by two independent sets of observers in such a sparsely watched area!

References

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Editorial comment: The Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* is accepted for the India Checklist based upon the two notes published here.