

Letter to the Editor

Sichuan Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti* missing in the 'India Checklist'

The Sichuan Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti* is now known to be a regular winter visitor to north-eastern India. I thought I found a new species for the country (Praveen *et al.* 2016) when I recorded its call in Saiha (22.49°N, 92.97°E), Mizoram, on 16 February 2015 (Vercruyse 2015). However, team leaders from Birdquest had apparently found it before me, in Namdapha (Robson 2012; Jännes 2014), and the Mishmi Hills (Robson 2012) in Arunachal Pradesh. Though I did not have a recording with me in the field, for comparison, I am familiar with the call of this species from South-east Asia. I heard them at Shirui Peak (25.11°N, 94.43°E), Manipur, during 19–24 January 2015; and in Murlen (23.66°N, 93.28°E), and Phawngpui (22.65°N, 92.99°E) national parks in Mizoram during 08–18 February 2015. It took me some time to see a bird call and record one. Field descriptions won't be of much use, I'm afraid, as they look just like "the others", especially in worn plumage.

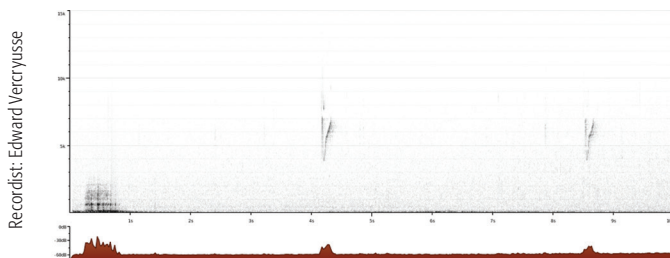


Fig. 1. Sonogram of Sichuan Leaf Warbler, Mizoram. Source: Xeno Canto #346297.

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Responses

We agree with you that all the 'unconfirmed reports' of the Lemon-rumped/Pallas's Leaf Warbler from extreme north-eastern India could be the Sichuan Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus forresti*; a recent split from *P. proregulus*/*P. chloronotus* (also accepted in Dickinson & Christidis 2014 as Forrest's Leaf Warbler). The Sichuan Leaf Warbler has not been formally reported from India till now, except in the trip reports you have quoted. As per Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and Alström (2017), the Lemon-rumped Warbler *P. chloronotus* is found in north-eastern India. The subspecies '*newtoni*', recognised by Ali & Ripley (1987), is considered a junior synonym and is said to occur in the entire north-eastern India, summering in Arunachal and wintering in the hills of north-eastern India. There are many specimens from Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram attributed to the Lemon-rumped Warbler (<http://portal.vternet.org/search?q=Phylloscopus+proregulus+country:%22India%22>).

We are not suggesting that the ID of the sonogram is wrong—in fact, it matches well with the ones depicted for the Sichuan Leaf Warbler in Martens (2011), and Boesman (2016). We are only worried that the story is incomplete without explaining the status of '*newtoni*' birds, which are documented as the standard Lemon-rumped Warblers in north-eastern India (Ali & Ripley 1987; Alström 2017; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). We are sure you would agree with us that any 'first for the country' report

ought to be based on solid evidence that conclusively eliminates all potential confusion species so that it is not challenged in future.

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As regards the *newtoni* subspecies of the Lemon-rumped Warbler *P. chloronotus*, the present situation is relatively easy to answer. Since a good number of years '*newtoni*' is regarded as a junior synonym of nominate *P. chloronotus*. The type locality of *newtoni* is Darjeeling; that of *chloronotus* is Nepal. So all recent authors do not consider *newtoni* any longer, as I did (Martens 2010). But this does not resolve the actual skin collection problem. All these skins from north-eastern India may indeed either belong to *P. chloronotus* or *P. forresti* and I feel the new records of *forresti* in India are quite correct. According to my own field research in China, *P. forresti* breeds, at least, in south-eastern Yunnan down to the Gaoligong Mountains close to the Myanmar border. So in the Indian parts close to that area, breeding birds may well be *forresti*, and certainly so the wintering birds. The eastern area limit of *P. chloronotus* in the Indian Himalayas is still unknown, another local problem that may be easily resolved by Indian birders by getting new song recordings and/or fresh tissue samples for molecular genetic sequencing.

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