

belly (Grimmett et al. 2011), it was identified as Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga albiventer* [154].

The Oriental Darter has a widespread distribution throughout the Indian subcontinent, however it is unrecorded in the extreme northern regions (Grimmett et al. 2011). The species is listed in a historical checklist as occurring for the erstwhile provinces of J&K and adjacent areas but without any details or location (Ward 1907). There are also some recent reports of the species from J&K, however none of these are supplemented with evidence, such as descriptions or photographs (Mundkur & Taylor 1993; Kotwal et al. 2009; Islam & Rahmani 2004; Rahmani et al. 2015). The species has been regularly reported from neighbouring regions: Praveen (2017) reported one individual from Pong Dam area, at Shah Nehar barrage, Himachal Pradesh (31.56°N, 75.58°E); Grimmett et al. (2011) also mapped its occurrence at Pong Dam; Sehgal (2017) reported one individual from Keshopur Wetland, Gurdaspur, Punjab (32.08°N, 75.40°E).

The Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler is resident in the Himalaya mountains from western Himachal Pradesh to Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, and montane areas south of the River Brahmaputra in Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In addition to our record, another sighting was recently reported by Ayoub (2021), who photographed one individual from Mahore, Reasi, J&K (33.31°N, 74.85°E); a location c.110 km north-west from Macchedi. After the initial sighting at Macchedi in 2020, the species was also subsequently reported on 16 January 2021 and 26 January 2022 at the same location (Chibber 2021; Kumar 2022). We could not find any previous records of the species from J&K, however, it is listed in an unpublished checklist for Overa Sanctuary [= Overa-Aru Wildlife Sanctuary] without any evidence or details of



153. Oriental Darter in flight.



154. Scaly-breasted Wren Babbler.

its occurrence (Price et al. 2004). There are many confirmed records of the species from the neighbouring State of Himachal Pradesh, and nearest from Kalhel, Chamba (32.73°N, 76.11°E), where Gaston (1979) reported one individual. Our records of the two species, though not unexpected for the region, appear to be the first photographic documentation from J&K.

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A Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* from the Thar Desert region of Rajasthan, India

The Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* is a small passerine that migrates to South Asia in the non-breeding season. In India, the subspecies *L. n. straminea* winters mainly in southern Western Ghats and Central India, usually in the lowlands but up to at least 1,800 m asl in the Western Ghats. It is an early autumn migrant, reaching north-west part of the region of South Asia by August, and on passage found in, at least, north-western, central and north-eastern Afghanistan, Pakistan and most of India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species occurs in tall grassland, reedbeds, sedges, wetland margins, and grassy tamarisk areas (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). One of the earliest records of the species from the Indian Subcontinent is from Gilgit, of an adult female collected, in September (Biddulph 1881). It was first recorded for

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