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Status of the Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Tamil Nadu, India

The Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* is a small migratory passerine that breeds across much of temperate Europe and the western Palearctic and winters in South Asia, northern and western Africa. The wintering grounds in India include lake and marsh edges, thick grass and tamarisk scrub, rice fields, and grassy slopes with scattered bushes; lowlands, to 1,800 m in Western Ghats (Pearson et al. 2020). It winters in southern Western Ghats between October and February (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and is considered an uncommon winter migrant in Kerala (Sashikumar et al. 2011). I document an observation of this species from Nilgiris and assess the existing records from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu to suggest its status.

We saw a Grasshopper Warbler at Koranur, Ebbanad, The Nilgiris (11.486°N, 76.785°E; c.1,865 asl) on 23 November 2022 at 0952 h among scattered tea bushes. The bird was spotted on the way to a vulture vantage point count. While walking along the trail in tea plantations, a Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocosus* flew up and sat upon a tea bush, and that time, we heard an unfamiliar call from the inside of the bush. After a few minutes, the bird came out and foraged on the top of the bush. We photographed the species and readily identified it as a Grasshopper Warbler using the field guide (Grimmett et al. 2011). It had clear, dark streaks on the upperparts and whitish throat, which made us think this is a Grasshopper Warbler.

Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) map the entire southern Western Ghats of Kerala and adjoining Tamil Nadu as its winter range. We reviewed past literature using Pittie (2024) and accessed online portals such as www.gbif.org, www.indiabiodiversityportal.org, www.ebird.org and www.inaturalist.org to enlist all available records of this species from Tamil Nadu. We additionally searched social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to find any more records but found none. The records we compiled (Table 1) indicate that it is a rare bird in the state, with records in the winter months from November to February. According to the records of the Thiruvananthapuram Natural History Museum, it is believed to have a male Grasshopper Warbler specimen on display that was collected on 05 April 1901 from Muthukuly [=Muthukuzhy] in Kalakkad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tirunelveli District.



Karthikeyan R

180. Grasshopper Warbler from Nilgiris showing streaked upperparts and a longish graduated tail and whitish throat.

However, the warbler specimens are not currently in good condition for identification (Praveen J., in email dated 27 July 2024). Grasshopper Warbler is not unexpected in The Nilgiris, as it has been recorded just outside its territorial boundaries in Sispara of the Silent Valley NP, Kerala (Sashikumar et al. 2011). While most records of the species from Kerala until 2010 were from Munnar hills and Silent Valley, both adjacent to similar habitats in Tamil Nadu, several additional sites have been documented recently (eBird 2024), including lowlands. Hence, the lack of records from Tamil Nadu is somewhat surprising.

Table 1. Records of Grasshopper Warbler from Tamil Nadu

Sl No.	Date	Reference	Districts	Remarks
1	21 February 1997	Raman (1997)	Tirunelveli	Sighting with detailed field notes including all diagnostic features.
2	15 March 2018	Joshi (2018)	Coimbatore	Seen and call recording available.
3	13 March 2020	Jambu (2020)	Coimbatore	Sighting of a <i>Locustella</i> warbler considered this species on range and habitat.
4	13 February 2021	Joshi (2021)	Dindigul	Call heard but further details unavailable.
5	23 November 2022	This work	The Nilgiris	Photographed.

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Black-throated Parrotbill *Suthora nipalensis* from the East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya

On 21 April 2024, JB, MK, and RS were birdwatching along the Mawkdok Dympep Valley while traveling towards Sohra. At around 1100 h, we reached Khatarshnong Laitkroh (25.393°N, 91.766°E; 1780 m asl), where a flock of small birds grabbed our attention. The birds were observed and photographed [181]. They were Black-throated Parrotbill *Suthora nipalensis*. Identification was straightforward as no other similar-looking species exists. They were feeding on small seeds in a mixed flock with Green-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga nipalensis* and Whiskered Yuhinas *Yuhina flavicollis* (Baishya 2024). There were ten Black-throated Parrotbills in the flock. We observed these restless birds for about five minutes before they flew out of sight down the hill. The weather was sunny, and the sky was clear, with a temperature of 23°C. The habitat was subtropical broadleaf forest. The birds were foraging on bamboo and small seeding bushes.

The Black-throated Parrotbill is found in the Central and Eastern Himalaya and adjoining Southeast Asia. This species is variable across its large range, and ten subspecies are recognized, with six occurring in the Indian subcontinent (Robson 2023). The race that is extant over much of its range in Northeast India (excluding Mizoram and possibly southern Manipur) is the grey-breasted form named *poliotis*. This race is distinctively marked with grey cheeks and breast. The birds we saw had grey cheeks and breasts that matched the *poliotis* subspecies.

Our sighting is the first report of this species in eBird from Meghalaya, and we did not find any other recent records from Meghalaya on the internet. Historical literature and records show this species is known to occur in Meghalaya. According to Blyth (1851), the type locality for this race is Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills. He considered it a full species, 'Grey-breasted Parrotbill' *Suthora poliotis*. It was subsequently reported in historical checklists for the Khasi Hills and Meghalaya (Stuart Baker 1907; Stuart Baker 1923; Mazumdar & Roy 1995). Stewart G. collected eggs of "*Paradoxornis nipalensis*" (older taxonomy) from the

Khasi Hills in 1905 (Vertnet 2024a). Walter Koelz collected multiple specimens of this species from the Khasi Hills between 1949 & 1952 (Vertnet 2024b).

The lack of recent sightings of this species in Meghalaya is probably due to habitat destruction and hunting. However, with increased birdwatching and conservation awareness in the region, there is hope that species known to occur but lacking recent records will continue to be discovered, thereby offering hope for their recovery. This region has faced substantial habitat destruction from agriculture, mining, and timber extraction. This highlights the critical need for intensified conservation efforts to preserve the region's rich biodiversity.



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181. Black-throated Parrotbill from East Khasi Hills.

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