amounts, generally causing confusion, and potentially leading to misidentifications (Haass 2014; Callaghan 2018; Thomas 2023; Hollstein 2024; Rojas 2024). These two species are a highly confusing Mollymawk species pair at this age showing much overlap in plumage characteristics (Haass 2014), therefore we looked in to fine plumage and other characteristics of this bird to confirm its identification. Bill structure was of greater use in identification rather than overall bill colour since both species show overlaps in bill color variations, therefore not diagnostic (Haass 2014, 20; Carboneras et al. 2020). The bill shows a narrower culminicorn resulting in a pinched structure to the bill, and the naricorn appears to extending membranous up to the feathered face from the nostril **[131]**. This bill structure is shown by Grey-headed Albatross, rather than Black-browed, which shows a more elevated and uniformly formed culminicorn lacking the membranous naricorn (Haass 2014). In addition, there seems to be no pale halo in-between the maxillary unguis and the culminicorn, and also some photographs clearly show the upper edge of the culminicorn to be pale **[131]**, a diagnostic feature of first cycle Grey-headed Albatross, when present (Haass 2014). Additionally, photographs show an inconspicuous pale crescent behind the eye **[131]**, another characteristic of the Grey-headed Albatross (Haass 2014). Structurally, the bird also appears stout with a thicker neck than a typical Black-browed again favoring Grey-headed (Haass 2014; Harrison et al. 2021).

The occurrence of this species at this latitude is quite remarkable and shows to how much of an extent vagrancy could take place. This is probably the first report of this species in the Northern Hemisphere. Interestingly, the only other albatross reported from the Indian Subcontinent, a beached Light-mantled Albatross *Phoebetria palpebrate*, was recovered in September 2022 from Anthoniyapuram beach, Rameswaram Island, Tamil Nadu, India, approximately 38 nautical miles (70 km) from this location, over the other side of the Palk Strait (Byju & Raveendran 2022).

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Identification of the *Phylloscopus burkii* complex in India and notes on the occurrence of Bianchi's Warbler *Phylloscopus valentini* in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh

The *Phylloscopus burkii* complex of 'Golden-spectacled' warblers from the mountains of Southern and Southeastern Asia is a group of at least six sympatric sister species – Grey-crowned Warbler *P. tephrocephalus*, Martens's Warbler *P. omeiensis*, Alström's Warbler *P. soror*, Bianchi's Warbler *P. valentini*, Green-crowned Warbler *P. burkii*, and Whistler's Warbler *P. whistleri*. The group consists of sibling species with complex evolutionary histories resulting in elevational segregation of distinct forms at different altitudes throughout the mountains of Asia. Extreme similarities in plumage, habitat preference, and behaviour make field identification of members of this complex challenging (Opaev & Kolesnikova 2019) and presents a classic case of cryptic speciation because members of the complex differ more in vocalizations and DNA sequences than plumage (Alström & Olsson 1999). Of the six warblers in the complex, three have been well-documented in India (Grey-crowned, Green-crowned, and Whistler's), while there have been no confirmed records of Alström's, Martens's, or Bianchi's Warblers (Praveen & Jayapal 2024). I present evidence for the occurrence of a fourth member of the complex in India, Bianchi's Warbler, with additional notes on identifying Alström's and Martens's Warblers, which may also occur in parts of Northeast India.

Bianchi's Warbler *P. valentini* is a polytypic species with two currently recognized subspecies: *P. v. valentini* in central and southern China, parts of northern Myanmar and Southeast Asia; *P. v. latouchei* in southern and south-eastern China, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (Alström 2020a). It is the largest member of this complex and breeds on the highest mountain slopes among all members of the complex (Martens et al. 2003; Alström 2020a).

Based on past evidence, the presence of Bianchi's Warbler in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India has been uncertain due to its co-occurrence with a number of its congeners such as the nominate and *nemoralis* subspecies of Whistler's Warbler, Grey-crowned Warbler, and Green-crowned Warbler (Praveen 2022)[1]. Throughout a large part of their breeding ranges, species from this complex are arranged in a vertical sequence in the individual mountain ranges, encountering one another at contact zones that are often sharply defined (Martens et al. 2003). However, overlap in wintering grounds makes identification challenging.

During my master's dissertation fieldwork from 01 December 2023 to 15 March 2024 at Namdapha National Park in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, I recorded 19 observations of at least three individuals that I believed were Bianchi's Warblers. Although the contact calls of Bianchi's Warbler help differentiate the species from most other warblers in this complex, the challenge, on the field, was to separate Bianchi's Warbler from the extremely similar *nemoralis* subspecies of the Whistler's Warbler whose contact calls are not safely separable from the calls of Bianchi's Warbler from current knowledge (Rheindt 2006). A close observation of multiple individuals making the particular contact calls revealed that while some had extensive greyish median crown stripes with grey tones bleeding well below the black lateral crown stripes on

1 Two past submissions to *Indian BIRDS* with claims of Bianchi's Warbler from Namdapha region were rejected due to insufficient details - Editors

either side, other individuals were found to have more greenish-tinged median crown stripes with little to no grey extending below the black lateral crown stripes. I suspected that the former were Bianchi's Warblers while the latter were Whistler's Warblers.

One such individual with extensive grey below lateral crown stripes, extending to ear coverts, was photographed **[132]** and its call was recorded (Fig. 1) at a location (27.531°N, 96.423°E) between Haldibari and Hornbill camps on 10 January 2024 at 1105 h (Urs 2024). I repeatedly encountered this particular individual wintering in the area for a month between December 2023 and January 2024 before it was photographed and recorded on 10 January 2024. A second individual was present in the area, but images could not be obtained. Both birds constantly made the distinct '*cheew*' contact call, with the highest frequency of the primary call peaking at 4kHz and an average note duration of 0.11 sec. From the considerable grey wash below crown stripes, both individuals were most likely to be Bianchi's Warblers. Many other individuals making the characteristic contact calls were encountered on the trail running from Deban (27.504°N, 96.391°E) to Haldibari camp (27.524°N, 96.399°E). Though I had extended views of many of the birds showing greyish tones below lateral crown stripes, photographs and recordings of these individuals could not be obtained. I also encountered multiple Whistler's Warblers whose calls were similar to that of Bianchi's, but the extent of grey below the lateral crown stripes was very limited or absent **[133]**. From field observations of the two species, I found no behavioural differences between Bianchi's and Whistler's Warblers—both preferred areas with dense undergrowth and foraged in the lower to middle storeys in dense, broadleaved forest.

All: Ronith Urs

132. Bianchi's Warbler *P. valentini* from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh on 10 January 2024 (see vocalization of the same bird in Fig. 1) showing grey wash below the crown stripe.

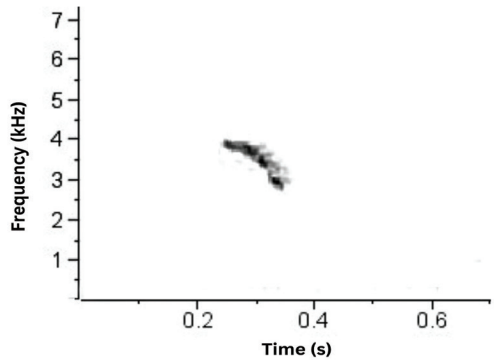

Fig. 1. Call spectrogram of the Bianchi's Warbler *P. valentini* in **[1]** from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh on 10 January 2024.

133. Whistler's Warbler *P. w. nemoralis* from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh on 28 January 2024 showing little to no grey below lateral crown stripes.

A review of Whistler's Warblers was conducted using images from the Macaulay Library from regions where there is no expected overlap with Bianchi's Warbler to see if there were any noticeable plumage variations. I reviewed a total of 511 observations with images and found that the Whistler's Warblers in parts of central and western Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, and Uttarakhand, where Bianchi's Warbler is most certainly absent, had no noticeable amount of grey extending below lateral crown stripes and greyish median crown stripes (e.g., Das 2023; Hacker 2023). In contrast, nearly all the 49 observations of Bianchi's Warblers from the Yunnan region and Thailand had noticeable grey tones bleeding below lateral crown stripes, many with grey extending far below the rear of the crown along the ear coverts (e.g., Jearwattanakanok 2020; Li 2020). The crown pattern of the bird I photographed on 10 January 2024 matched that of a typical Bianchi's Warbler and is far too grey for a Whistler's Warbler **[134]**.

134. Comparison between the crown pattern of Bianchi's Warbler (left) and *nemoralis* Whistler's Warbler from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh.

On current knowledge, a diagnostic feature that separates Bianchi's and both *nemoralis* and *whistleri* Whistler's Warbler is the tail pattern (Alström & Olsson 1999), although obtaining views and images of the spread tail can prove challenging on the field. While Bianchi's lacks any white on the fourth outer rectrices (R4) of its tail feathers, Whistler's shows white on R4. To help distinguish between the species in the future, I have included a table with notable differences below.

Table 1. Differences between the subspecies of Whistler's Warbler and Bianchi's Warbler.

	Whistler's Warbler - *nemoralis*	Whistler's Warbler - nominate	Bianchi's Warbler
Median crown stripe	Greyish-green	Greyish-green	Grey
Colour below lateral crown stripes	Greenish, can have a slight grey wash in some individuals	Greenish	Extensive grey wash, often no contrast between median crown stripe
Amount of white on the tail	White on R6, R5 and R4	White on R6, R5 and R4	White on R6 & R5. Absent on R4

Images of the spread tail for this particular individual could not be obtained, but partially spread photographs of the undertail were examined on an individual seen on 10 January 2024 **[135]**. From the image, the presence or absence of white on R4 cannot be safely determined, although a review of a sequence of images indicates that the tip of the feather immediately below R5 appears fully dark. However, the extent of white on R6 and R5, along with the presence of a wing-bar and the call, can be used to eliminate other extralimital warblers such as Alström's Warbler and Martens's Warbler. A majority of Alström's Warblers lack a well-defined wing-bar and do not have as much white on the tail (Alström & Olsson 1999, Alström 2020b). Martens's Warbler has a more contrasting head pattern with greyer median crown stripe and darker lateral crown stripes reaching further towards the bill (Alström 2020c). While some of these features are difficult to determine from field observations and photographs, vocalizations (Fig. 1, 2) help reliably separate Bianchi's from Alström's and Martens's Warblers. It is important to note that features such as calls, shorter gaps between notes, the presence of a wing-bar, habitat, and behavioural differences alone are insufficient to conclusively identify Bianchi's Warbler in the field.

Ronith Urs

135. Undertail of Bianchi's Warbler from Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh. While the extent of white on R5 and R6 is clear, the feather immediately below R5 appears fully dark.

A comparison of vocalizations of all six members of this complex (Fig. 2) revealed distinct differences in call structure, in addition to previously described differences in song (Alström & Olsson 1999; Martens et al. 2003; Opaev & Kolesnikova 2019). In wintering grounds and during passage, where birds are less likely to sing, calls can serve as a more reliable way to distinguish between species in the complex. Hence, birders seeking out Bianchi's, Alström's, and Martens's Warblers in Northeast India, especially in the eastern parts bordering Myanmar and China, are advised to try to obtain images of the spread undertail, crown pattern, and record vocalizations for a conclusive identification. Based on multiple characteristics documented for my Namdapha bird, it can be safely identified as a Bianchi's Warbler, an addition to South Asia, while several others I recorded were probably of this species.

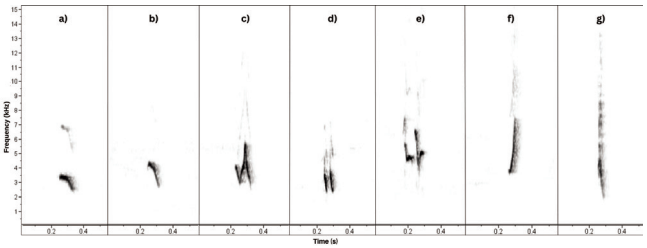

Fig 2. Call spectrograms of the members of the *P. burkii* complex: a) Bianchi's Warbler, Hubei, China (Bo Shunqi); b) Whistler's Warbler ssp. *nemoralis*, Arunachal Pradesh, India (Abidur Rahman); c) Whistler's Warbler ssp. *whistleri*, Uttarakhand, India (Andrew Spencer); d) Grey-crowned Warbler, Sichuan, China (Geoff Carey); e) Alstrom's Warbler, Hong Kong, China (Geoff Carey) f) Green-crowned Warbler, West Bengal, India (Richard Fleming); g) Martens's Warbler, Yunnan, China (Ray Tsu).

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The Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisea* from the south-western coasts of South Asia in Sri Lanka and India in 2024

The Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisea* is a trans-continental migrant with the longest ever recorded migration amongst birds (Hatch et al. 2020). However, the species is very rare in the Indian Ocean compared to the Atlantic and the Pacific, the last two being meridional, connecting the poles (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen et al. 2014; eBird 2024). However, the year 2024 was rather unusual as three separate sightings of Arctic Terns were recorded from Sri Lanka and Kerala. We report the details of each of these sightings and discusses these finds.

Morawala beach, Sri Lanka

On 28 July 2024, at 0749 h, DMJ and MEJ were sea-watching at Gary's point (7.205°N, 79.818°E), Morawala Beach on the western coast of Sri Lanka when DMJ noticed a small *Sterna* tern feeding and moving south along with Bridled- *Onychoprion anaethetus*, Sooty- *O. fuscatus*, and Great Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii* **[136]**. It had a very evident white rump **[137]**. Structure and flight pattern were noticed to be slightly different from a Common Tern *S. hirundo*. Hence, DMJ suspected the possibility of this being an Arctic tern (vs a Roseate Tern *S. dougallii* where the rump doesn't contrast strongly with upperparts) and took some images and a video clip. While making their way back from Morawala, DMJ looked at those images and identified it as an Arctic Tern based on small round head, short red bill, and narrow dark trailing edge on underwing.

Images were sent to Moditha Hiranya Kodikara Arachchi and Gary Allport who confirmed our identification. Photographs were posted in Facebook triggering other birders in South Asia about the possible presence of Arctic Terns in Arabian Sea.

Dinidu Maleen Jayathilake

136. Arctic Tern following a mixed tern flock with a juvenile Sooty Tern (first bird), Great Crested Tern, and two Bridled Terns.

137. Arctic Tern in adult breeding plumage showing full dark cap, small rounded head, short red bill, white trailing edge to secondaries, and a clean white rump.

Both: Dinidu Maleen Jayathilake

138. Arctic Tern showing narrow dark trailing edge to upper primaries.

Mappila Bay, Kannur, Kerala, India

On 31 July 2024, at around 1540 h, NE was sea-watching at Mappila Bay (11.854°N, 75.376°E), Kannur District, Kerala on a windy day with heavy rains. He observed a group of terns that he had also spotted in the morning when rains had prevented him from taking pictures. The group primarily consisted of Common Terns, Bridled Terns, and crested terns *Thalasseus sp.* apart from five Lesser Noddies *Anous tenuirostris*. Focusing on photographing Common Terns, he suspected the presence of other species, including Roseate Terns and White-cheeked Terns *S repressa*. Given the Arctic Tern sighting from Sri Lanka, he also considered the possibility of their presence along the Kerala coast. Amidst the Common Terns, he captured images of a tern that appeared a bit smaller from others. The bird was flying from southeast to north, *c.*50 m offshore and at 15–20 m above sea surface.

The photographs showed a Common-like Tern with grey back, white rump and long white tail streamers with a white front and dark hood **[139–141]**. However, the bill was decidedly shorter than any Common Tern **[139]**, all the secondaries on the right wing had a white trailing edge (left wing secondaries were moulting), primaries showed translucence, darkish carpal bar, and sharply defined dark tips to primaries were visible in both upper and under side **[150, 141]**. Considering the time of the year, such a plumage is most likely of a young bird, probably a second-calendar-year. A couple of days later, expert ornithologists in Western Palearctic and Australia, consulted by Praveen J,