The Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Lanceolated Wabler *Locustella lanceolata* from Majuli Island, Assam, India

The Majuli Island (26.966°N, 94.173°E; *c.*84 m asl) in the Brahmaputra River, located in the Majuli District in Assam, India, is one of the largest river islands in the world. It comprises a large riverine island with innumerable small islets, locally called 'chapori', and is surrounded by the Brahmaputra River in the south and Subansiri and Kherkatia Xuti rivers in the north. It has been designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in 2004 and as a Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) in 2017 (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Assam State Biodiversity Board 2017). The topography of the area is flat floodplain with lakes (beels) and marshes on the one hand and anthropogenic structures such as embankments and roads on the other; it has over 155 small, medium, and large wetlands, and about 20 islets surround the mainland which contain large tracts of riparian grasslands and few riparian forests and which support high avian diversity (Bordoloi & Hazarika 2015; BirdLife International 2025). In this note, we document the sightings of two species from Majuli Island, Assam, both scare winter visitors to India: Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* and Lanceolated Wabler *Locustella lanceolata*.

Black-browed Reed Warbler

On 22 December 2024, at approximately 1555 h, a Black-browed Reed Warbler (BBRW, hereinafter) was spotted at the edge of the Vereki Beel (26.932°N, 94.138°E; *c.*100 m asl), a local wetland dominated by Water Hyacinth *Pontederia crassipes.* While watching a Rusty-rumped Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*, an unfamiliar bird was briefly seen perched on Water Hyacinth leaves feeding on small insects, before it retreated into cover. It appeared in sight again after 5–10 sec on top of the Water Hyacinth plants in the open. It was initially misidentified as a Paddyfield Warbler *A. agricola,* but was apparently less warmly coloured in comparison. When observed with binoculars, it was noted that the bird showed a pale supercilium and prominent blackish lateral crown-stripes, the latter feature notably stronger than that of other *Acrocephlus* spp. in the area. It was photographed and identified as a Black-browed Reed Warbler **[279]**. The bird was constantly vocalising while foraging with a *trrrrrt-trrrrrt* call, somewhat like an Aberrant Bush Warbler *Horornis flavolivaceus.* Two more individuals of BBRW were seen in the same patch, and all birds mostly preferred the edges of the wetlands.

BBRW breeds in south-eastern Russia, adjacent north-eastern China, eastern Mongolia, and northern Japan; and winters from parts of north-eastern India and Bangladesh, east to southern and south-eastern China, south to Malay Peninsula and much of Southeast Asia (Dyrcz 2020). In India, BBRW is reported from southern West Bengal, eastern Jharkhand, Manipur, and Assam, along with a historical record from Ladakh (eBird 2025a). In Assam, the species has been regularly reported from the following Districts: Kamrup Metropolitan, Morigaon, Nagaon, and Tinsukia, along with a very recent report from Jorhat District (eBird 2025b). Though our record is not unexpected, there are no previous records of the species from Majuli Island, Assam.

Lanceolated Wabler

In a large patch of grassland dominated by *Phragmites karka* in the Bongaon area (26.952°N, 94.284°E; *c.*110 m asl) of Majuli Island, bordered by fallow fields, overrun with *Xanthium strumarium*

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279. Black-browed Reed Warbler perched on *Pontederia crassipes*, dated 22 December 2024.

and interspersed with *Ipomoea carnea*, a Lanceolated Warbler (LAWA, hereinafter) was encountered on 26 March 2025 **[280]**. At around 1500 h, playback of the song of Lanceolated Warbler song was used at several sites of the area to detect its presence. Initially, a few Spotted Bush Warbler *L. thoracica* and Baikal Bush warbler *L. davidi* responded to the song with the typical *tchek tchek* call that is usually given by *Locutella* warblers in the non-breeding season. However, at around 1530 h, a different vocal response was heard from an *Ipomoea* spp. patch surrounded by *Xanthium* spp. tracts. Compared to the call of the other *Locustella* spp., this call sounded faster and shorter. The bird was briefly seen calling and hopping around in the ground among dense bushes. When observed with the binoculars, clear streaks on the upperparts of the bird were visible, which gave an impression of a miniature Bristled Grassbird *Schoenicola striatus*. Later, it was observed that the streaks on the back of the bird extended to the sides and the chest, a feature which ruled out the Grasshopper Warbler *L. naevia*. During subsequent playbacks, the bird responded with a much faster and shorter burst of *tchek-tchek tchek-tchek* call ending in a slower pace lasting less than 3 sec, which may probably serve as its alarm call (Chattopadhyay 2023). This was found to be a diagnostic call of the species during our observation. Six more individuals were found on 30 March 2025 in the *Phragmites* spp. patches of the area, mostly preferring the edges.

LAWA breeds across a wide range from north-eastern Europe east through Russia, parts of Mongolia and north-eastern China,

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280. Lanceolated Warbler perched on *Ipomoea carnea*, dated 30 March 2025.

east to northern parts of Japan; and it winters in north-eastern parts India, Bangladesh and parts of Southeast Asia (Pearson 2024). In mainland India, the species has been recorded recently from Gujarat (eBird 2025a) and northern Odisha (see elsewhere in this issue); but its status in these regions remains unclear.

Our record of the species from Bongaon area of Majuli Island in March 2025, along with previous records of the species from Maguri Beel in Tinsukia District, Assam, dated March 2019 (Sen 2019) and December 2022 (Pratim 2022), suggests that the species is likely to be wintering in suitable habitats in Assam. Moreover, the species has been regularly recorded from parts of Bangladesh during winter season (during December and February) (eBird 2025a). This also suggests that the species probably has a more widespread range in winter than is currently known.

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A Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* from Sikkim, India

On 12 April 2024 at 0840 h, a Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* was photographed near the Old Silk Route view point at Zuluk, eastern Sikkim. The location was moderately crowded with tourists, and the weather was cold but pleasant following light snowfall the previous night. The bird was located after following its distinctive high-pitched *tsi-tsi-tsi* call. It was perched on a *Salix* tree near a mountain cliff (27.257°N, 88.787°E; *c.*3000 m asl). Key field features included a blackish head and crown, orange breast extending to the flanks, black, white, and orange streaks on back and wings, prominent white wing bars, pale belly, and a yellowish conical bill with grey tip **[281]**. The identification was confirmed using Rasmussen & Anderton (2012).

This is the first photographic record of the species from Sikkim. It has not been listed in Stevens (1923), Acharya & Vijayan (2011), or Chettri et al. (2021). No records were found on eBird also.

Arindam Sinha

281. Brambling photographed from Zuluk, Sikkim, India.

The Brambling breeds in northern and north-eastern Europe, eastwards to eastern Russia (Chukotka), south to north-eastern Kazakhstan, central and south-eastern Altai, Tuva, southern Lake Baikal region and winters in west, central, and southern Europe, northern Africa, the Middle East, and south-western, central, and eastern Asia (Clement & Arkhipov 2020). In India, the bird has been reported from Gilgit, Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, and Himachal Pradesh; sporadically to Uttarakhand and Arunachal Pradesh and one record from Delhi region (Praveen 2025). The closest confirmed records of the species from the present sighting are from Darjeeling District, West Bengal, where the species has been documented on at least six occasions between 2021–2024 (Rana 2021; Subba 2023; Beck 2024; Dey 2024; Mitra 2024; Syangbo 2024).

It remains unclear whether the present individual is a vagrant or represents a part of a small overlooked migratory population in the Sikkim-Darjeeling region. Systematic surveys and long-term monitoring in the region would help clarify its status.

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