

Status of a few skulking warblers in Himachal Pradesh, India

C. Abhinav, Himanshu C., Dipender Othangba, Piyush Dogra, Mohammad Abdus Shakur & Amir Jaspa

Abhinav, C., Himanshu, C., Othangba, D., Dogra, P., Shakur, M. A., & Jaspa, A., 202X. Status of a few skulking warblers in Himachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 22 (X):XX–XX

C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: drabhinav.c@gmail.com [CA] [Corresponding Author]

Himanshu C., Village Bainkuan, P.O. Jamniwala, Tehsil Paonta Sahib District Sirmaur 173025, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: hc.7123@gmail.com [HC]

Dipender Othangba, Village & P.O. Jobrang, District Lahaul and Spiti, 175133, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: othangba@gmail.com [DO]

Piyush Dogra, House No. 338 D, Civil Bazar, Dharamsala, District Kangra 176215, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: piyushdogra83@gmail.com [PD]

Mohammad Abdus Shakur, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, 560012, Karnataka, India. E-mail: abdusshakur.mohammad@gmail.com [MAS]

Amir Jaspa, Village Jasrath, Lahaul & Spiti District, 175139, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: spider00001@gmail.com [AJ]

Manuscript received on 07 February 2026.

Old World warblers constitute a large assemblage of small, primarily insectivorous birds that generally exhibit inconspicuous plumage. This note discusses the status of a few warblers in Himachal Pradesh, belonging to *Acrocephalidae* (reed warblers and allies), *Locustellidae* (grassbirds and allies), *Phylloscopidae* (leaf warblers), *Cettiidae* (bush warblers and allies), and *Sylviidae* (sylviid warblers and allies). All species included here share broadly similar habitats, appearance, and behaviour. Most are small, drab, brownish birds inhabiting reeds, marshes, thickets, and dense scrub. They are typically skulking in nature, forage close to the ground, and often avoid flushing when alarmed, instead escaping by walking or scurrying through vegetation in a mouse-like manner. Due to their secretive behaviour and nondescript appearance, these warblers are often overlooked, particularly in regions where they are uncommon or unexpected.

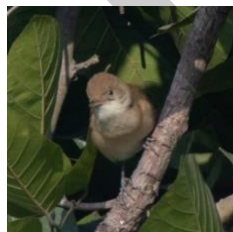
In Himachal Pradesh, many of these warblers have been historically considered absent or rare to uncommon (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Dhadwal 2019; Praveen 2025). But recent evidences, particularly from observations made by us around Pong Lake, show that some of these warblers are in fact regular but may have been previously overlooked. At Pong Lake, we recorded a couple of species on open flats, but the majority were encountered at two specific localities with marshy, reed-dominated habitat. The marshes around Shah Nehar Barrage Lake (32.96°N, 75.90°E; c. 350 m asl), at the outflow of the Pong Dam, constitute a significant habitat for warblers, supporting large numbers of individuals of multiple species of warblers. Several ponds occur along the road skirting the lake, each bordered by dense reed growth, providing suitable habitat. This area was visited infrequently, approximately 2–5 times per year. The second major locality is at Nagrota Surian (32.039°N, 76.064°E; c. 440 m asl). Here, several shallow ponds have been excavated by the Forest Department in the flats surrounding Pong Lake. The *Acacia* sp. trees planted in the past around this spot have since matured, and a small patch of *Ipomoea* sp. reeds developed around one of the ponds. This offers a suitable habitat for various warblers. Although this patch was small, it was visited more frequently (15–20 times per year). The reeds persisted in this form for about five years before disappearing more recently. A few species were seen in other parts of the state.

We discuss the status of ten warblers in this note. The species that were recorded only on a few occasions are presented with individual sighting details. However, for species with a relatively higher number of records, only the broader patterns of occurrence are discussed. None of the species was recorded with sufficient frequency to warrant a detailed quantitative analysis.

Thick-billed Warbler *Arundinax aedon*

The nominate race of Thick-billed Warbler breeds in south-central Siberia and adjacent north-western Mongolia (Dyrce 2020a). In Indian subcontinent, it winters in Nepal, east to north-eastern India, Bangladesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and south-western India, roughly south of Goa, southern Deccan and sporadically in northern peninsula, Gujarat, and central India (Praveen 2025; eBird 2026a). In northern India, there are only infrequent winter records from the plains of Uttar Pradesh and eastern Uttarakhand, but none from Himachal Pradesh (Dhadwal 2019; eBird 2026a) or western Uttarakhand, except for a photograph from Chohta (Panchal 2017). This is the closest record to Himachal Pradesh and involved a single bird in May, presumably in return passage.

On 07 February 2025, HC was birding in a small patch of mixed broadleaved forest near Paonta Sahib (30.461°N, 77.587°E; c. 410 m asl), Sirmaur District, Himachal Pradesh when a large warbler was observed foraging in the middle storey [1, 2]. The bird could not be identified immediately, and several photographs were taken before it disappeared into dense undergrowth after a few minutes. Examination of the photographs revealed a plain face lacking a distinct supercilium or eye-stripe, a robust build, a long-graduated tail, and a conspicuously thick bill, confirming its identity as a Thick-billed Warbler.



[1] Thick-billed Warbler at Paonta Sahib, Sirmaur District on 07 February 2025 showing a plain face and a thick bill. Photo: Himanshu C.



[2] Thick-billed Warbler at Paonta Sahib, Sirmaur District on 07 February 2025 showing a plain face and robust build. Photo: Himanshu C.

This is the first record of Thick-billed Warbler for Himachal Pradesh and, to the best of our knowledge, the northernmost record of the species in India.

Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata*

The Booted Warbler breeds in eastern Europe and western Asia (Svensson 2020). In India, it winters throughout peninsular India from Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal, south till Kanyakumari, and sporadically in Indo-Gangetic plains, Rajasthan but more regular during passage migration (Praveen 2025). Grimmett et al. (2011) provided no records from Himachal Pradesh. den Besten (2004) reported only three individuals in his 90 visits to the Pong Lake between 2001 to 2003. A record from Nagrota Surian in October 2017 (Dhadwal 2019) was supported by a photograph that is here reassessed as depicting a Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*. Additional passage records exist from Ramgarh Fort, Solan District (Warren 1996), and Nahan, Sirmaur District (Vikrant 2016, 2018a), both during spring migration. However, these records are not supported by media so are not independently verifiable. An unusual winter record was reported from Pong Lake on 18 December 2017, again without any photo evidence (Sharma 2017).

In the present study, the Booted Warbler was first recorded by CA at Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 10 September 2012. The bird was identified by the supercilium extending behind the eye, square-ended tail, pale legs, and a pale base to the lower mandible. It was recorded subsequently on 19 May 2013 in the flats around the lake at Nagrota Surian. With increased familiarity with the species and more regular visits since 2015, it has been recorded during every autumn migration season at Pong Lake, from late August to early October [3]. It was typically encountered in scrub around the lake, occasionally within scrub inside *Acacia* plantations at Nagrota Surian, and on a few occasions at Sthana. One to three individuals were recorded at least once during each autumn season, with three individuals on 24 September 2016 and 01 September 2024 and a maximum of four on 16 August 2026. During spring migration, the species was less frequently encountered by us, with only three records over the past decade. A Booted Warbler was photographed at Jobrang, Lahaul, Lahaul & Spiti District on 07 September 2025 by DS, also during autumn migration season.

These observations indicate that the species is a regular passage migrant, mainly during autumn, in small numbers at Pong Lake in Himachal Pradesh and possibly also in other parts of the state, as indicated by the Lahaul record.



[3] Booted Warbler at Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 29 August 2020 showing a black tipped bill and prominent supercilium. Photo: C. Abhinav

Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama*

The Sykes's Warbler breeds from lower River Volga east to eastern Kazakhstan and extreme western China, and south to southern Iran, Afghanistan and western Pakistan (Svensson & Kirwan 2020). It winters throughout India, except the Himalaya and north-eastern India, mainly from about Delhi region, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, and south to entire peninsula; and mainly seen during migration across the northern part of the country (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025).

On 14 June 2025, CA, DO, and AJ were birding in a scrub patch along the Spiti River near Kaza, Lahaul & Spiti District, Himachal Pradesh (32.212°N, 78.074°E; c. 3,595 m asl), while searching for a Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* that had been observed at the same site on the previous day (Abhinav et al. 2026). The habitat comprised dense stands of Tamarisk *Tamarix* sp., interspersed with a few scattered *Salix* trees. DO first detected an unfamiliar vocalisation from within the dense scrub, but the bird remained concealed despite prolonged observation. Playback of calls of several potentially occurring warbler species elicited no response until the call of Sykes's Warbler was played, upon which the bird responded immediately and briefly approached the observers, allowing partial views. After continued observation, the bird was seen several times at close range, and a few diagnostic photographs were obtained [4]. In the field, the bird appeared slightly larger and paler than the superficially similar Booted Warbler. Subsequent examination of the photographs revealed several diagnostic features, including a relatively longer bill lacking a distinct dark tip to the pale lower mandible; instead, only a slight darkening was visible immediately before the tip. The forehead and crown appeared flatter and more sloping than in Booted Warbler, while the tail was proportionately longer. The supercilium was prominent in front of the eye but became indistinct behind it. These features, together with the bird's vocal response to playback, confirmed its identification as Sykes's Warbler. The photographs were also examined by James Eaton, who independently confirmed the identification (pers. comm., 30 June 2025).

There are no previous records of the species from Himachal Pradesh (Dhadwal 2019; eBird 2026), making this the first record for the state. Although noteworthy, its occurrence is not entirely unexpected, as the species is a regular passage migrant through parts of northern India and has been recorded from Ladakh, which supports similar high-altitude arid habitats, as well as neighbouring Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir, and Chandigarh (Ali & Ripley 1987; eBird 2026).



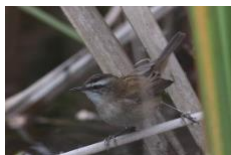
[4] The Sykes's Warbler at Kaza, Lahaul & Spiti District on 14 June 2025 showing a longer bill lacking a distinct dark tip and a flatter forehead and crown. Photo: Mohammad Abdus Shakur

Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*

The Moustached Warbler breeds from Turkey, Levant, eastern Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, southern Russia and Iran east to eastern Kazakhstan (Dyrce 2020b). It winters in the Indo-Gangetic plains from Jammu till Bihar, to Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and north-western Maharashtra (Praveen 2025). Dhadwal (2019) listed it as a rare winter visitor to the Shah Nehar Barrage. den Besten (2004) reported only three records from Pong Lake and a single record from below Dharamsala at c.750 m, perhaps from reedbeds around rivulets in the Gaggal area or similar surrounding locations, based on the altitude, and treated the species as a vagrant. Grimmett et al. (2011) provided no records from Himachal Pradesh.

On 03 December 2013, CA recorded a warbler with conspicuous facial markings at Sthana. The whitish supercilium was prominent, bordered above by the dark sides of the crown and below by a dark eye-stripe. The rufous-brown upperparts were lightly streaked. These features confirmed its identification as a Moustached Warbler. Subsequently, the species was recorded regularly at different locations in Sthana during winter. Over the next 13 years, it was recorded in seven winters between October and March [5]. A maximum of five individuals was noted on 25 January 2015, while three birds were recorded on 07 March 2019 and four on 23 December 2019. On other occasions, one or two individuals were typically observed. On 28 October 2019, a Moustached Warbler was recorded in a small patch of reeds around a pond at Nagrota Surian and was observed on several occasions at the same site over the following two months.

These repeated observations indicate that the species winters in the reedbeds around Pong Lake in small numbers and should not be considered a vagrant in Himachal Pradesh. This is in line with the fact that the species regularly winters in the suitable habitats in the Himalayan foothills from Jammu to North-east India (eBird 2026b).



[5] A Moustached Warbler at Sthana, Pong Lake on 23 December 2019 showing distinct facial markings. Photo: C. Abhinav

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*

The Paddyfield Warbler breeds in central Eurasia (Dyrce 2020c) and is a winter visitor to low lying areas across the country from Jammu & Kashmir till southern Kerala, and from Gujarat in west to the north-eastern India (Praveen 2025). In the low-lying areas of Himachal Pradesh, however, the species has been documented on very few occasions historically as is borne out by the scarcity of (eBird 2026c) records. A specimen was collected from the Police Range in Dharamsala on 07 May 1921 (Whistler 1926). Grimmett et al. (2011) depict only a single record from western Himachal Pradesh, likely corresponding to Whistler's specimen. den Besten (2004) reported 13 individuals from Pong Lake. Dhadwal (2019) considered the species common in the Shivaliks and foothills, and in the Shah Nehar Barrage and Nagrota Surian areas of Pong Lake.

During the present study, Paddyfield Warbler was recorded regularly in the reedbeds at Sthana around Shah Nehar Barrage Lake. Individuals were identified by the dark border above the whitish supercilium, a distinct dark eye-stripe, and relatively warm-toned upperparts. Call playback was used on several occasions to confirm identification. One to three individuals were recorded regularly during the winter season, with a maximum of three birds on 31 January 2022 [6].



[6] A Paddyfield Warbler at Sthana, Pong Lake on 27 March 2022 showing warm upperparts and distinct supercilium with faint black border. Photo: C. Abhinav

These observations confirm that the species winters regularly at Pong Lake in small numbers as may have been expected from its larger regional distribution, supporting past findings (den Besten 2004). However, it was not found to be common at Pong Lake or elsewhere in the state during the present study.

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*

The Grasshopper Warbler breeds in much of Europe and eastwards till central Asia (Pearson & Kirwan 2020). It winters in Gujarat, Western Ghats, Central Indian highlands, southern Eastern Ghats, southern West Bengal, and in passage it is seen across northern India. except the drier parts of Rajasthan, eastern, and north-eastern India (Praveen 2025). Whistler (1926) reported it as a spring passage migrant in Kangra District, recording single birds on 03 and 09 May 1921 and 07 May 1922 among coarse grass on a bush-covered hillside at Dharamsala. He also suspected that multiple birds flushed from wheat fields near Dari, on the outskirts of Dharamsala, on 02 May 1921 belonged to this species. Jones (1919) procured a specimen from Shimla at c.2,130 m asl on 25 May 1914, and later described the species as a spring and autumn migrant in Shimla during May and August (Jones 1948). Grimmett et al. (2011) mapped two records from Himachal Pradesh, which coincide with Dharamsala and Shimla regions, and these likely represent the above historical records. den Besten (2004) recorded the species once at Pong Lake, while Dhadwal (2019) listed it as a rare passage migrant, recording it in agricultural fields at Nagrota Surian. There is a sight record of the species from Villa Round, Nahan, Sirmaur District that occurred on 21 April 2018 (Vikrant 2018b).

On 23 April 2017, CA was scanning the flats around Pong Lake at Nagrota Surian for passage migrants when a small olive-brown bird was observed hopping in short grass [7]. On closer approach, bold streaking on the upperparts, fine streaking on the underparts, a fairly long and graduated tail, a well-streaked vent, and a faint supercilium were noted. Based on these characters, the bird was identified as a Grasshopper Warbler. Continued scanning revealed three additional individuals within a radius of c. 500 m, including one bird with a yellowish face and underparts [8]. This individual was initially presumed to be immature, but subsequent reference to literature confirmed it as the yellow morph of Grasshopper Warbler. Thus, two morphs of the species were present at the site. The birds were presumed to be migrating together, as none were observed during a subsequent visit.



[7] A Grasshopper Warbler at Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 23 April 2017. Photo: C. Abhinav



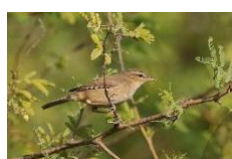
[8] A yellow morph individual of Grasshopper Warbler recorded on same date as [7]. Photo: Photo: C. Abhinav

The species was not recorded again in the following years, supporting its status as a rare passage migrant in Himachal Pradesh, much like its status in most northern Indian states.

Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*

The Dusky Warbler breeds in central and eastern Siberia, Mongolia, north-central and north-eastern China, Russian Far East and Sakhalin (Clement 2020a). It winters from Uttarakhand (rarely further west) and northern Uttar Pradesh, and east to eastern Jharkhand, Odisha and north-eastern India and it stragglers widely in peninsular India up till central Kerala and southern Tamil Nadu (Praveen 2025). Grimmer et al. (2011) mapped a single record from western Himachal Pradesh, which could not be traced. den Besten (2004) did not record the species but included it in the checklist of Kangra District without citing a source, which likely corresponds to the same record mapped by Grimmer et al. (2011). Dhadwal (2019) reported Dusky Warbler from Pong Lake during the winter of 2016. A recent record is also available from Lahaul, Lahaul & Spiti District, however the photos and details are unavailable (Spiti 2023; Shiv Kumar pers. comm. dated 07 February 2026).

On 02 December 2025, Ashwani Bhatia photographed a warbler bathing in a water puddle near the above-mentioned shallow ponds at Nagrota Surian (Bhatia 2025). The bird was identified as Dusky Warbler based on the prominent black eyestripe and lores, and the yellow base to the lower mandible. On 05 December 2025, CA visited the site and observed the bird [9] bathing alongside Common Chiffchaff. At a distance, it closely resembled the chiffchaffs; however, it repeatedly uttered the characteristic harsh *chuk-chuk-chuk* call, facilitating identification. The bird was observed feeding primarily on the branches of *Acacia* sp. trees, occasionally descending to the ground in open areas and low scrub. Call playback was used to confirm identification, eliciting a response in which the bird gave the same song interspersed with harsh calls. The site was revisited on 21 December 2025, when two individuals were recorded in the *Acacia* trees. The puddle had dried by then, and bathing behaviour was not observed.



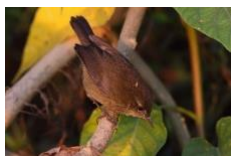
[9] The Dusky Warbler at Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 05 December 2025 showing a prominent black eyestripe and lores. Photo: C. Abhinav

These winter records of Dusky Warbler are significant, given the paucity of reliable records from Himachal Pradesh and generally from west and northwest of Uttarakhand. The species may be overlooked in the state due to its close resemblance to other similar warblers.

Smoky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuligiventer*

The Smoky Warbler breeds in the Himalaya from Uttarakhand east to Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh and to southern and west-central China (Clement 2020b). It winters in the adjacent terai and plains from about Delhi region, south till north Chambal valley, east through Gangetic plains to the states of north-eastern India (Praveen 2025). Grimmer et al. (2011) did not depict any records from Himachal Pradesh. den Besten (2004) recorded the species once at Pong Lake, and Dhadwal (2019) reported a single record from 2008. No additional records could be traced, and none are currently available on eBird west of Uttarakhand (eBird 2026d).

On 28 October 2019, CA and PD visited Nagrota Surian. In the small patches of *Ipomoea* sp. thickets at the periphery of shallow ponds, a small, chiffchaff-like warbler was observed [10]. It appeared noticeably darker overall and frequently uttered a *chuk-chuk* call reminiscent of reed warblers. The darker plumage, dull yellow suffusion on the central underparts, and vocalisations distinguished it from the Common Chiffchaff, which was present in large numbers at the site. It was separated from Dusky Warbler by its less contrasting facial pattern and uniformly darker coloration. The bird remained in the same patch and was recorded again on 09 November and 13 December 2019. On 23 December 2019, two Smoky Warblers were recorded in the reeds at Sthana village along the periphery of Shah Nehar Barrage Lake. Although the species was not observed again at Nagrota Surian in subsequent years, after the near-complete loss of the *Ipomoea* patch, it was recorded twice at Sthana, on 21 October 2020 and 03 November 2023.



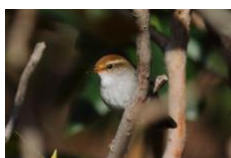
[10] A Smoky Warbler at Nagrota Surian, Pong Lake on 28 October 2019 showing darker upperparts than Dusky Warbler. Photo: C. Abhinav.

These multiple records suggest that the Smoky Warbler is not merely a vagrant in Himachal Pradesh but likely a scarce winter visitor to the plains of Kangra District.

Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major*

The Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler breeds in the Himalaya from Uttarakhand east to Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, central and eastern Qinghai, southeastern Tibet, Sichuan, northwestern Yunnan in China and winters in the adjacent lower elevations (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Clement et al. 2024; Praveen 2025). The species has been recorded only once previously in Himachal Pradesh, from the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu District. Two individuals, presumed to be a breeding pair, in juniper scrub at c. 3,500 m asl on 15 June 2019, at a site c. 2 km from Gumtrao on the trail between Gumtrao and Dhel in GHNP, was documented (Mohan et al. 2020). No other records from the state could be traced.

The following year, CA attempted to locate the species on the opposite side of the same mountain range, approaching from the Sainj Valley rather than the Tirthan Valley. On 14 June 2020, CA ascended from Dhel towards Dhel Pass, which connects to Gumtrao on the opposite side. After crossing the treeline, suitable habitat was encountered at Shupakhani, characterised by *Rhododendron* sp. scrub (31.736°N, 77.470°E; c. 3,760 m asl). A call suspected to belong to Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler was heard, following which playback of the species' song was used. The bird responded immediately, approached closer, and after a few minutes delivered its song from within the shrubs, matching available recordings. The individual remained shy and largely concealed, but briefly showed itself after prolonged observation [11]. A second individual, silent and at some distance, was also observed. Photographs obtained during the encounter showed rufous lores, a key feature distinguishing this species from the similar Grey-sided Bush Warbler *C. brunnifrons*. An individual was again seen at the same location on the following day.



[11] A Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler at Shupakhani, Great Himalayan National Park on 14 June 2020 showing rufous lores. Photo: C. Abhinav

This observation constitutes only the second record for the state and further supports the occurrence of the species in GHNP during the breeding season. The Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler might be breeding elsewhere and may also be wintering in the foothills and adjacent plains in the suitable habitats, but is likely under-recorded due to its close resemblance to Grey-sided Bush Warbler and retiring nature.

Eastern Orphean Warbler *Curruca crassirostris*

The Eastern Orphean Warbler breeds from south-eastern Europe to central Asia and southwards to south-eastern Iran and Balochistan (del Hoyo et al. 2021). In India it mainly winters in western states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, and in Delhi region, central India, western Odisha, Deccan, south till Tamil Nadu and is sporadic in Gangetic plains of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and southern West Bengal, as well as in western coastal India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Praveen 2025). Records from Himachal Pradesh are few. Whistler (1926) recorded a single individual on 25 October 1922 at 335 m asl in open scrub jungle at Damtal, Kangra District, a record that is likely to be the sole record depicted by Grimmett et al. (2011) from the state. Multiple males were recorded from Villa Round Park, Nahan, Sirmour District, during December 2015 (Abhinav & Vikrant 2020). The species was not reported by den Besten (2004) or Dhadwal (2011), while Dhadwal (2019) listed it as a passage migrant based on a 2014 record. A male Eastern Orphean Warbler in Bilaspur District was recorded, near the Punjab border close to Anandpur Sahib, in January 2024 (Bhatti 2024).

On 23 August 2020, CA and PD were birding in the above-mentioned patch of *Acacia* sp. trees at Nagrota Surian. While observing Lesser Whitethroats *C. curruca* in the canopy, a similar but noticeably larger warbler was detected. The bird was shy and initially did not allow clear views; however, after prolonged observation, several photographs were obtained. The larger bill, more robust build, and darker crown confirmed its identity as Eastern Orphean Warbler, constituting the first photographic record of the species for Himachal Pradesh. In subsequent autumns, the species was recorded annually either at this site or in an adjacent *Acacia* plantation. Typically, a single individual was observed during late August and early September; however, in some years, repeated sightings from the same patch suggested that the bird may remain at the site for several days. Alternatively, these observations could represent multiple passage migrants. A maximum of three individuals was recorded at the same location on 01 September 2024.

In late September 2023, CA, PD and Manoj Sharma visited Spiti Valley to explore its avifauna. On 15 September while birding in a poplar plantation at Rangrik Na (32.267°N, 78.024°E; c. 3,660 m asl), CA observed a large warbler in the Seabuckthorn *Hippophae* sp., bushes. The bird was larger than nearby Lesser Whitethroats, and photographs taken during the observation confirmed its identification as Eastern Orphean Warbler. On 11 May 2026, DO and Raj Rawal visited Chokhang in Lahaul, Lahaul & Spiti District. A few kilometres before the village, they stopped at a site (32.661°N, 76.792°E; c. 3,160 m asl) for birding, where they heard an unfamiliar vocalisation coming from a Juniper tree. After waiting for some time, a whitethroat appeared, revealing its conspicuous black head [12], which led to its identification as a male Eastern Orphean Warbler (Rawal 2026). The bird was photographed and observed feeding in the stunted trees and surrounding bushes. It remained at the site and was subsequently observed on three more occasions, with the last sighting on 28 May 2026.



[12] An adult male Eastern Orphean Warbler at Lahaul, Lahaul & Spiti district on 11 May 2026. Photo: Dipender Othangba

These records, particularly those from Pong Lake, suggest that the Eastern Orphean Warbler could be a regular passage migrant in Himachal Pradesh, occurring in small numbers in suitable habitats, with possible wintering in the southern parts of the state. The record from Spiti Valley is likely the first from the Trans-Himalayan region.

Acknowledgements

CA thank James Eaton for confirming the identification of Sykes's Warbler and Ashwani Bhatia, Ankit Vikrant, Shiv Kumar, Garry Bhatti, and Raj Rawal for sharing their records.

References

- Abhinav, C., & Vikrant, A., 2020. Status of *Sylvia* warblers in Himachal Pradesh, India. *Indian Birds* 16 (1):20–25.
- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press, Delhi. Pp. i–xlii, 1 l., 1–737, 52 ll.
- Bhatia, A., 2025. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S287176001>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Bhatti, G., 2024. Webpage URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=7320128724747379&set=pb.100002509730609.-2207520000&type=3>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Clement, P., 2020a. Dusky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/duswar1/cur/introduction>.
- Clement, P., 2020b. Smoky Warbler (*Phylloscopus fuligiventer*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/smowar1/cur/introduction>.
- Clement, P., Kirwan, G. M., & Sharma, P., 2024. Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler (*Cettia major*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/cebwar1/cur/introduction>.
- del Hoyo, J., Collar, N., Kirwan, G. M., & Christie, D., 2021. Eastern Orphean Warbler (*Curruca crassirostris*), version 1.1. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/eaowar2/cur/introduction>.
- den Besten, J. W., 2004. *Birds of Kangra*, 1st edn. Moonpeak Publishers & Mosaic Books, Dharamsala & New Delhi. Pp. 1–176.
- Dhadwal, D. S., 2011. *Wild wings: Pong & its birds*. Published by the author, Kangra, India. Pp. I–VIII, 1–149.
- Dhadwal, D. S., 2019. *Birds of Himachal Pradesh (Passerine)*. Published by the author, India. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–340.
- Dyrce, A., 2020a. Thick-billed Warbler (*Arundinax aedon*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/mouwar1/cur/introduction>.
- Dyrce, A., 2020b. Moustached Warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/mouwar1/cur/introduction>.
- Dyrce, A., 2020c. Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/padwar1/cur/introduction>.
- eBird, 2026a. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/thbwar1>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- eBird, 2026. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/sykwar2>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- eBird, 2026b. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/mouwar1>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- eBird, 2026c. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/padwar1>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- eBird, 2026d. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/map/smowar1>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, 2nd edn. Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm, London. Pp. 1–528.
- Jones, A. E., 1919. A list of birds found in the Simla Hills, 1908–1918. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 26 (2):601–620.
- Jones, A. E., 1948. The birds of the Simla and adjacent hills. Part III. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 47 (3):409–432.
- Mohan, A., Muralidhar, A., & Singh, B., 2020. Gould's Shortwing *Heteroxenicus stellatus* and Chestnut-crowned Bush Warbler *Cettia major* in the Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh. *Indian Birds* 15 (6):185–187.
- Panchal, M., 2017. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S65186464>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Pearson, D., & Kirwan, G. M., 2020. Common Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/cogwar1/cur/introduction>.
- Praveen, J., 2025. *Birds of India - The New Synopsis*. Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysuru, India. Pp. i–xlvii, 1–468.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*, 2nd edn. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683.
- Rawal, W. L. W. R., 2026. Webpage URL: <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1382178627264888&set=a.229333915882704>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Sharma, V., 2017. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S41174315>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Spiti, S. K. L., 2023. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S133968965>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Svensson, L., 2020. Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/boowar1/cur/introduction>.
- Svensson, L., & Kirwan, G. M., 2020. Syke's Warbler (*Iduna rama*), version 1.0. In: *Birds of the World*. (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, & E. De Juana, eds). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/sykwar2/cur/introduction>.
- Vikrant, A., 2016. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S29559981>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Vikrant, A., 2018a. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S44770270>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Vikrant, A., 2018b. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S45541013>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Warren, L. and C., 1996. Webpage URL: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S13711497>. [Accessed on 4 October 2026].
- Whistler, H., 1926. A note on the birds of Kulu. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 31 (2):458–485.