

Additional Sight Records of *Phylloscopus* warblers in the Saurashtra region of Gujarat

Prasad Ganpule: C/o. Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp Nazarbaug Station, Morbi-363642, Gujarat. E-mail: prasadganpule@gmail.com

According to Parasharya *et al* (2004), there are eight species of *Phylloscopus* warblers occurring in Gujarat. Due to the difficulties in identification of these generally hyper-active and skulking birds, there are very few published sight records and other literature about these birds here. It is a challenge to even get good photographs.

I present here some of my significant sight records of these warblers observed over the last four years.

Tytler's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus tytleri*

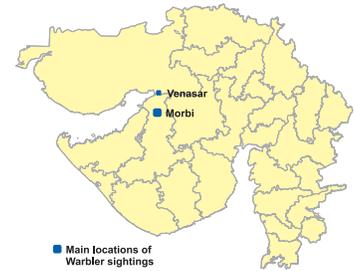


Photo: Prasad Ganpule

On the 13th September 2008, on the outskirts of Morbi, Rajkot District, Gujarat, (22°49'N 70°50'E) I heard a loud call from a tree. The call was a loud 'pee' called out four or five times followed by an equally loud 'pee-swee' repeated at least five or six times. I searched for the bird and found a small green colored warbler at a height of around 10 to 12 feet. At first I thought that it was a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) but the call was very different from a Greenish Warbler's regular call. (A Greenish Warbler winters in my garden and I am quite familiar with its call.)

The bird had olive greenish upper parts without any wing-bar. It had a long dark bill with a pale base to lower mandible, prominent supercilium and eye stripe. The underparts were whitish with yellow streaks. I took some images and referred to the reference books (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005, Grimmett *et al* 1998, Kazmierczak 2000) and identified the bird as a Tytler's Leaf Warbler (*P. tytleri*) based on its call and long beak. This individual was seen for two days.

On September 18th 2008 at around 08:00 hrs, when I was observing a Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) on a Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) tree near the same place mentioned above, when I heard the same loud call from the tree. I searched for the bird and found the warbler in the tree. This seemed to be a different individual than the one I had observed a few days before.



Description: This bird had olive green upper parts. It had no wing bar. The underparts were grayish with yellowish wash on belly. The throat was gray. It had a long supercilium with a prominent long eye-stripe. The bill was long with a pale base of lower mandible. I took some photographs of the bird and tried to record its call on my mobile phone but the high pitched 'swee' call could not be recorded. The bird was seen for three days. I referred to the reference books and again identified the bird as a Tytler's Leaf Warbler based on its call, long beak and plumage. This individual looked to be an immature Tytler's Leaf Warbler based on the gray washed neck and breast and yellowish underparts. This individual was seen for three days.

The Tytler's Leaf Warbler is a Near Threatened species (Birdlife International 2011) and is not shown to occur in Gujarat (Rasmussen 1998). There are no records for Gujarat in other published literature that I have access to. Ali (1955) collected specimens from the Surat Dangs and mentioned that "Not uncommon where the specimens were collected" and this could be the reason it is mentioned in Parasharya *et al* (2004) but this record is from the State of Maharashtra in Dhule District and not in Gujarat. Further details of this record are mentioned in Prasad (2003). It is possible that since this record was noted before the formation of Gujarat State in 1960, it is included in Parasharya *et al* (2004).

The sighting of two Tytler's Leaf Warblers here shows that this species does occur in Gujarat. It could be occurring in the South Gujarat area as well and needs further study.



"Perhaps the time has come when our species should consciously embrace the very forces against which we 'struggled' to survive. That would be our final attainment as living organisms and prove to be what evolution has been all about."

Large-billed Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus magnirostris*

Photo : Prasad Ganpule



On 1st November 2009 at around 17:00 hrs, I went to the Little Rann Of Kutch towards its western end near the village of Venasar (23° 20' N 71° 15' E). The area is a dried mud flat with a fresh water lake on one side.

I noticed a warbler in a clump of *Prosopis juliflora* trees. It was like a Greenish Warbler but it was noticeably larger in size and more sluggish in its movements. It was olive-greenish in colour. It had distinct lower wing-bar with a large dark bill. It had a prominent supercilium with a broad dark eye line almost as large as the eye. It did not call during the time I observed it. I was able to take two photographs and referred to Grimmett *et al* (1998) and identified it as a Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*) on the basis of large bill, sluggish movement and very broad, dark eye stripe along with the larger size, dark bill and general plumage.

The Large-billed Leaf Warbler is known to be breed in the Himalayas and it winters in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka {Grimmett *et al* (1998)}. There are no published records of its occurrence in Gujarat. Further observations are needed to ascertain its present status in Gujarat - either a vagrant or as a passage migrant.

Mountain Chiffchaff: *Phylloscopus sindianus*

On 8th January 2008 at around 10:00 hrs while birdwatching in a farm near my home town of Morbi, I observed a Chiffchaff which seemed different from a Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*). This particular bird had prominent white supercilium in front of eye meeting over the bill, grayish upper parts without any olive tinge and whitish underparts with very faint creamish tinge to the flanks. The bent of wing was whitish. I managed to take one photograph and identified

it as a Mountain Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus sindianus*). I did not hear any call from this bird.

There are no records of the Mountain Chiffchaff for Gujarat in the literature that I have access to but it is shown to winter in Sind region of Pakistan which is near the Kutch region of Gujarat (Kazmierczak 2000, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It is likely that it may be occurring in Gujarat but is overlooked due to identification difficulties. Baker (1997) states that "in worn plumage, may be extremely difficult if not impossible to separate from *P. c. tristis*, unless call note is heard." It may be difficult to identify this in the field with certainty but I am fairly confident that this was a Mountain Chiffchaff.

Bright-green Warbler: *Phylloscopus nitidus*



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

This sub-species of the Greenish Warbler was recently separated and given full species status (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The occurrence of this sub-species in Gujarat is not well documented but it is said to be an autumn passage migrant through Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). While the Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus*) is a fairly common winter visitor and passage migrant in Gujarat, the status of the Bright-green Warbler is unclear but it is given as migrant in Parasharya *et al* (2004). Ali (1955) collected specimens from Kutch in Bhuj & Khavda in October and early November and from Waghai in the Surat Dangs in April.

I observed a single Bright-green Warbler on 26th October 2010 near the town of Morbi at around 08:00 hrs. This could be identified by the stouter bill with a pale lower mandible, brighter green upper parts, yellowish supercilium and yellow streaked breast and underparts. The lower wing bar was



"Down the millennia it has been the dynamic forces of the Universe that have shaped our individualities be we can eagle, a tiger or a Bodhisatva."

Warblers in Saurashtra....

prominent and a faint upper wing bar could also be seen. It had a distinct three note call, which is different from the call of Greenish Warbler. I took some images and re-confirmed the identification. The bird was seen only for one day. However I have been observing the regular wintering of Bright-green Warbler in Morbi for the past three years. A single individual was seen in Morbi from December to March in winters of 2012-2013, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, thus confirming it as a winter migrant here.

Tickell's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus affinis*

The Tickell's Leaf Warbler breeds in the Himalayas and winters in Central India and the Western Ghats. There are a very few records of this bird in Gujarat as per the literature available to me, with a single sighting reported by Akthar & Tiwari (1995).

On 17th October 2010, I was bird watching near Morbi when my attention was drawn towards a warbler uttering a hard 'chip' call. Being familiar with the call of Greenish Warbler, I immediately recognized that this call was different from the call of the Greenish Warbler. I observed the bird in detail. It had lemon yellow underparts with a bold, prominent lemon yellow supercilium. It had a dark eye-stripe with a pale lower mandible. I took two photos and confirmed the identity as a Tickell's Leaf warbler by referring to the reference books. The similar Olivaceous Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) does not have lemon yellow colour to its underparts and has different



Photo: Prasad Ganpule

habits. I went back to the same place the next day but it was not seen again. It is possible that this warbler may have been overlooked and it could be an uncommon winter visitor or a passage migrant. The date of this sighting is indicative of this particular bird being a passage migrant.

Hume's Leaf Warbler: *Phylloscopus Humei*

I have been observing a Hume's Leaf Warbler in Morbi area near my home regularly for the last five winters, since November 2008. I have seen it here from about the last week of November up to the last week of February. It was seen this year also. I have also heard it in two other locations near Morbi. Other locations outside Morbi where I have observed the Hume's Leaf Warbler are:

Randarda Lake, Rajkot: while bird watching here with Ashokbhai Mashru and others on 26 Jan 2012, we observed and photographed two Hume's Leaf Warblers. Its distinctive call was also noted.

Near Thangadh, Dist. Surendranagar District: A single individual was seen in Mandav Vidi near Thangadh on two occasions. The first on December 2008 and the second on 3 Jan 2010.

Halvad, Dist. Surendranagar: A single individual was seen and heard in a temple grove near Halvad in Jan 2012.

Recent field guides like Kazmierczak (2000), Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) and Grimmett *et al* (2011) show its occurrence in South Gujarat and up to Bhavnagar area but there are no records shown for Saurashtra region. Recently there have been reports from Kutch (Bhopale 2010) and from Gir (Bishop 2010).

It seems Hume's Leaf Warbler is more widely distributed in Saurashtra than previously thought. The above records from Rajkot, Junagadh and Surendranagar district show that it is a widely distributed winter migrant to the area and that it could be occurring in well wooded areas with trees in other parts of the region.

Conclusion:

The sighting of these six species of *Phylloscopus* Warblers is significant considering that two species viz. Large-billed Leaf Warbler and Mountain Chiffchaff reported here are new to Gujarat and the Tytler's Leaf Warbler can also be said to be a new species based on the data given above.

More species of *Phylloscopus* warblers could be occurring here. Observers should be on the lookout for Plain Leaf-warbler (*P.neglectus*), which could be occurring in Kutch. The call of these birds can be a good way of identifying them. With proper observations and photographs along with their call, there should not be much difficulty in the identification of these



"The time has come now to concentrate on disciplining our urges and converting passion in to compassion, love and understanding."

wonderful birds. I urge other bird watchers here to be on the lookout for the various warblers occurring here.

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“We all are concerned about the immediate security of our families. How can then, declining numbers of insects or of vultures take any precedence over human needs? What meaning does bird watching have in a highly competitive world? Are any of us able to provide clear answers? I regret the conservation groups have totally failed to provide reasonable answers. Nor, for that matter, have we been able to evolve demonstrable models proving that our concerns are not esoteric but highly pragmatic.”



“The passion and concern for birds among other living forms, laid the bedrock for the world conservation movement.”