

11. A NOTE ON THE ENDEMIC BROADTAILED GRASS WARBLER

On a brief visit to Upper Kodayar, Ashambu Hills, Tamilnadu, in September 1992, I had the good fortune of encountering one of the rarely seen endemic birds of the Western Ghats - the Broadtailed Grass Warbler (*Schoenicola platyura*). This bird is found in the grassy areas in the hills of Western Ghats south of Belgaum (Karnataka state) between 900 m to 2000 m (HANDBOOK Vol 8. pg 93-94). The only encounter I had earlier had with this bird was at the Poochippara area in the Silent Valley National Park in Kerala, in December 1990, in a grassy area.

The altitude at Upper Kodayar is over 1500 m and the habitat is mainly grassland-shola forest type. On 10th September, I saw a single bird on a Lantana bush opposite the Staff Quarters, close to the reservoir, where the habitat is greatly disturbed. The bird appeared to have a tail moult and we could see the fine markings on the tail. When it called, we could make out the pinkish mouth.

On the next day, we visited the Seventh Saddle area, *en route* to Muthukuzhi. Here, from among the tall grass and low bushes, we could hear single noted "pink" calls. We stopped to take a closer look and we saw atleast three individuals of the Broadtailed Grass Warbler. The birds were calling the single-noted calls as well as a series of warbling notes that

sounded like those of a lark. A few mimicking notes were also heard. The calls were uttered while perched as well as in flight. The birds took off from their perches at angles of 45° to about 15 m in the air, singing for brief periods and then diving back into cover. Though they were shy, we managed to get good views of the bird and we could see the dark mouths of the singing birds, a feature also seen by R. Kannan at Grass Hills, Annamalai, Tamilnadu (pers. comm).

The breeding season of this bird has been described in the HANDBOOK (Ali & Ripley, 1987) as March-May and July-September. The presence of singing and displaying birds in mid-September indicates that the nesting season may well extend further. More observations are needed to determine this.

I am grateful to my colleague and good friend T. Ganesh for hosting me during my stay at Kodayar and accompanying me to the field.

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REFERENCE

ALI, S. & S.D. RIPLEY (1987): Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan. Compact Edition, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

12. WHITEBROWED BLUE FLYCATCHER (*MUSCICAPA SUPERCILIARIS*) DELINEATION OF ITS WINTERING RANGE IN WEST INDIA

This attractive little flycatcher is a summer breeding bird of the middle elevations of the entire Himalayan range. It winters over a wide area of the Indian peninsula rather vaguely indicated in the HANDBOOK and the SYNOPSIS thus: "In Central India from Delhi south to Northern Maharashtra, Southeastern Karnataka, Northwestern Andhra, Orissa, Bengal and Bihar. Recorded from

Bahawalpur in Pakistan (no date)."

One supposes that it is absent from the Western Ghats and the plateau country of Marathwada, Andhra and Karnataka. Presumably Abu and the hills of eastern Gujarat are in the range though the species does not figure in the Gujarat list. It therefore seems worth recording two sightings from Gujarat.

Shri Lalsinhbhai Raol, a highly competent

birdwatcher spoke to me about a drawing given to him by Dr. Bakul Trivedi who made it during a WWF-I outing to the Jessor Hills just south of Mt. Abu. The prominent white eyebrow, blue upperparts and white underparts with a prominent greyish band broken by white on the chest were shown.

Lalsinbhai and Dr. Trivedi went out birding to Himmatnagar on 5th February and in a grove of trees edging the river at Shareneswar temple, Dr. Trivedi pointed out his puzzle bird. Lalsinbhai has seen the Whitebrowed Blue Flycatcher in the Himalaya. Lalsinbhai mentions Redbreasted Flycatchers also being around. The two species are

the same size, have very similar calls and demonstrate common mannerisms, and though the males are distinctive, the females resemble each other. These facts suggest why the Blue may have been given a go by.

Shareneswar is between the towns of Idar and Vijaynagar in Sabar Kantha (Himmatnagar) District northeast of Ahmedabad.

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13. NOTES ON GREEN MUNIA

Seven species of munia are found in the Indian subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987). Of these, the Green munia (*Estrilda formosa*) is listed as threatened in India (Collar, Crossby and Stattersfield 1994).

The green munia is an endemic species, very locally and unevenly distributed. It is found mainly in central India from Mt. Abu, Gwalior, Jhansi and Surguja south to Mahabaleshwar, district Adilabad and upto the Vishakhapatnam Ghats. It is also recorded from Lucknow and Lahore and from Bihar (Ali & Ripley 1983). In recent years nothing has been reported on the species, although it is a popular cage bird.

I conducted a short survey between 5-7 June, 1994, on the species around Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh. According to the information gathered from local bird trappers, the species has been largely wiped out from near Jhansi although a few populations do exist near Tikamgarh. An extensive two day search on the Chatarpur road resulted in locating a small population in a nearby village, (name of the village

is not given for obvious reasons). An isolated population of about 60 to 70 birds was seen in a stony, arid wasteland. They appear to move around in a limited area of about 1 sq. km.

The survey was done in the non-breeding season. The maximum flock size was seven. The first bird was sighted at 0545 hrs and I could observe them almost throughout the day. Bimodal activity pattern of feeding was noticed. Most of the long-duration sightings were in the afternoon when the birds used to gather and rest in *Ipomea* shrubs. The birds were seen reaching the resting site from 0900 hrs where they remained till 1500 hrs. The resting site was comparatively cool due to water and presence of vegetation. The day resting site was shaded by tall, dense *Ficus* trees.

It was seen that the Green Munia mostly keep to themselves while resting and foraging. It was also observed that they never roosted communally with the Red munia (*Estrilda amandava*) or other species in congregation in the sugarcane field. This is also confirmed by trappers who catch many species of



Lavkumar, K S. 1996. "Whitebrowed blue flycatcher (*Muscicapa superciliaris*) delineation of its wintering range in West India." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 93, 587–588.

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