

Recent sighting records of Common Grasshopper-Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) from Maharashtra

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Sightings near Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra:

On 26 January 2014 the first author (RK) photographed an unattractive warbler in tall dried grass (see habitat photo-2) along the marshy fringe of the creek near Padle village (near Dombivli East) in Thane district of Maharashtra, in which it was camouflaged perfectly. The photograph was identified as Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* because of the dark spots on olive-grey crown and pale and almost unmarked underparts with buffy breast and flanks (Rasmussen, and Anderton, 2012). It is a Least Concern species in the IUCN database.

He visited the same place again on 7 December 2014 and photographed a bird again (see photograph-1). Next Sunday on 14 December 2014 the bird was seen again in the same habitat. On 21 December 2014, he recorded the call of the warbler near Bhopar village, which is one or two kilometres away from the first site by crows flight. The call was a high pitched trilling call (like some insect). Out of the four sightings mentioned in this note, the bird came out to the bush top and called continuously for few seconds on two occasions. The habitat (see photograph of the habitat-2) where it was found is also used by some of the commoner species like, Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*, Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*, Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* and Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*. The first two being the biggest foil as they keep diverting our attention because of the continuous their chattering habits.

He used the call replay method and one of calls available on xeno-canto website (<http://www.xeno-canto.org>) was used. This particular call was recorded in Europe in it's breeding range. The warbler's did not seem to react to the calls.

Sighting at Sonawale Village, Murbad, Thane Dist. Maharashtra: The author (AB) was looking for nocturnal birds at Sonawale Village, Murbad, Thane Dist. Maharashtra during a night trail. As he and his birder friends were passing from near a patch of reeds, one bird was disturbed by his movements and flew and perched in somewhat open branches between the reeds for some time. Only a few record shots were taken before it disappeared into the dense reeds. From the photographs the bird was later identified as Common Grasshopper-warbler. He was accompanied by birder friends, namely, Prateik Kulkarni, Sushant More, who also took pictures of the bird. This site is adjoining the hill range of Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary in Maharashtra.

The habitat was near a freshwater pond spread across around one acre. The pond is partially covered by different types of hydrophytes which include *Pistia* and other reeds. It has a tree cover on one side and paddy fields on other sides. Despite it being near human habitat it remains largely undisturbed.

Table-1: Recent sighting records of Grasshopper Warbler from India

Sr.	Location	Date	Peer Birder	Source/Remark
1.	Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, Maharashtra	18 November 2006	Adesh Shivkar and Sanal Nair	Kasambe <i>et al.</i> (2010)
2.	Gandhari area near Kalyan, district Thane, Maharashtra	December 2009	Nikhil Sawant	<i>Pers. comm.</i>
3.	Khandas, Mahabaleshwar (Bhimashankar range), Maharashtra	27 January 2013	Author (AB)	Self observation.
4.	Murbad, Maharashtra	16 March 2013	Author (AB)	Self observation.
5.	Revdanda near Alibag, district Raigad, Maharashtra	Not available	Nikhil Bhopale	FB group Birds of Thane and Raigad District
6.	Padle Village, Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra	26 January 2014	Author (RK)	Self observation.
7.	Padle Village, Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra	7 December 2014	Author (RK)	Self observation with son Master Vedant Kasambe.
8.	Padle Village, Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra	14 December 2014	Author (RK)	With birders Mayuresh Khatavkar and Kuldeep Shukla.
9.	Bhopar Village, Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra	21 December 2014	Author (RK)	Call recorded with son Master Vedant Kasambe.
10.	Bhopar Village, Dombivli (East), distt. Thane, Maharashtra	25 December 2014	Author (RK)	Self observation with son Master Vedant Kasambe.
11.	Khandas, Mahabaleshwar (Bhimashankar range), Maharashtra	1 January 2015	Pravin Vishe	<i>Pers. comm.</i>

Table-2: Recent records from other places in India from Internet:

Sr.	Location	Date	Peer Birder	Source/Remark
1.	Bhindawas Lake in Haryana	8 April 2007	Abhijit Menon-Sen	http://orientalbirdimages.org
2.	Village Ranika Singhola, Sohna, Gurgaon, Haryana	22 September 2009	Abhishek Verma	http://orientalbirdimages.org
3.	Joka marshes, near Kolkata, West Bengal	March 2010	Kshounish Sankar Ray	FB group Indian Birds
4.	Basai Wetlands, Gurgaon, Delhi	2 September 2012	Sudeshna Dey and Kanwar B. Singh	FB group Indian Birds
5.	Saldi pond, Amreli, Gujarat	22 January 2014	Vir Joshi	http://www.xeno-canto.org
6.	Silent Valley National Park, Kerala	February 2014	P.B. Biju	FB group Indian Birds
7.	Lake Gardens Housing Complex in Kolkata, West Bengal	14 May 2014	Mitali Das	FB group Indian Birds
8.	Saldi pond, Amreli, Gujarat	6 December 2014	Arpit Deomurari and Komal Matieda	http://ebird.org

Discussion:

Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* is a winter visitor to India. According to Grimmett *et al.* (2011) it is widespread winter visitor. The Birds of South Asia (Rasmussen, and Anderton, 2012) mention it as 'winter visitor mainly in southern Western Ghats and Central India.

Prasad (2003) who has published an annotated checklist of the birds of Western Maharashtra mentions it as a 'rare winter visitor'. The published literature also mentions it as a rare winter visitor in Western Maharashtra (Abdulali 1981, Monga 2006). There are few records from Western Maharashtra, like, from Pune (Mahabal & Lamba 1987); Ghoti in Nashik district; at Kalyan in Thane district, at Panvel in Raigad district, and specimens in BNHS collection (Abdulali 1986). A senior birder, Shashank Dalvi has seen two birds at Alibag-Roha, in Raigad district on 10 November 2002 (as posted on birdsofbombay@yahoogleroups.com).

We feel that because of the skulking behaviour and dull colouration, the bird generally gets neglected. The birds may not be as rare as they seem to be and intentionally looking for it in suitable habitats may result into more sighting records in Western Maharashtra. We request other birders to look for this rarity with more caution.

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Photo-1: Grasshopper Warbler by Dr. Raju Kasambe



Photo-2: Habitat of Common Grasshopper Warbler in Thane district, Maharashtra. Photo by Dr. Raju Kasambe