

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

VOL. XXIX

No. 3 & 4

March-April 1989





Water fowl Census in progress at the Tailur tank;

40 species of birds summing upto nearly 4,400 birds were counted at this tank (*article on. page 2*).



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EDITORIAL

Here we are in Kodaikanal (19.3.89) and I am in the process of preparing this Newsletter and posting it to Beryl D'Rosario in Bangalore, who will then send it on after making it legible (and I hope intelligible), to S.Sridhar of Navbharath Enterprises, who will then request Dr. Joseph George to correct errors, for final despatch. What a long route to follow! But I am encouraged by Aamir Ali's recent letter in which he refers to a correspondent of the Manchester Guardian " who lived in some remote village in England where he had to cycle to the Post Office to collect his mail, and yet he managed to write up-to-date comments on current news." I wish your Editor had the qualities of Guy Wint.

Waterfowl Census in Bangalore

S.Subramanya, whose article appears in this issue, must be congratulated for the detailed census which he and his colleagues have presented. I hope that several of our readers in Bangalore will send reprints of this article to the concerned officials (by name and designation wherever possible) requesting them to stop the further destruction

of the tanks of Bangalore, not merely for the visual beauty they provide by the presence of avians, but also as part of the natural system for conserving water. During the fifteen years that we were in Bangalore we had the mortification of seeing several tanks reclaimed or destroyed by official and non-official agencies, and Bangalore's tragic decline of ground water - on which the population is now so dependent - can be attributed largely to the disregard shown to these ancient water holding areas. The Lakshman Rau Committee's Report emphasises the need to save these tanks, and there is some recognition in Vidhana Soudha that our wetlands must be saved. B.K. Chakrapani, a keen member of the census team, is now in the Department of Environment and Ecology, and we can only hope that he will be able to influence the Government in the right direction.

Incidentally, I was interested to read Subramanya's remark about munias nesting in acacia trees planted on the edges of tanks. I noticed this also in Dodda-Gubbi where the Forest Department has raised a good stretch of acacia trees.

Newsletter Finances

The headache of finding the money to keep the Newsletter going has been generously taken over by S. Sridhar, the publisher of this Newsletter. Many of you might have seen Sridhar's splendid bird photographs in Frontline. What the respective costs of printing vs. cyclostyling a Newsletter are not clear yet, but if our advertisers continue to help we can soar along. This is the time to acknowledge our debt also to people like Ashok Kumar (Hightech Magnets & Metals (Pvt) Ltd., B-5/22 Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi - 110 029) who has over the years sent us handsome donations. In a recent letter he said: "Before leaving Dubai, I put together an effort to raise money for the Newsletter.... I got together Rs.2000/- which should help to keep the Newsletter in print". We shall certainly make every effort to do so.

Field Identification of Warblers

Warblers are some of the most difficult species to identify, and it is therefore particularly gratifying that M.B. Krishna has taken the trouble to draw attention to the significant points which can aid the identification of the different species. I hope that later on others will take upon themselves the task of dealing similarly with other groups of birds.

WATERFOWL CENSUS IN BANGALORE 1989

By S.Subramanya, 326, Chitramala Apartments, Byrsandra, Bangalore 560 011.

Compared to previous years, the Third Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl

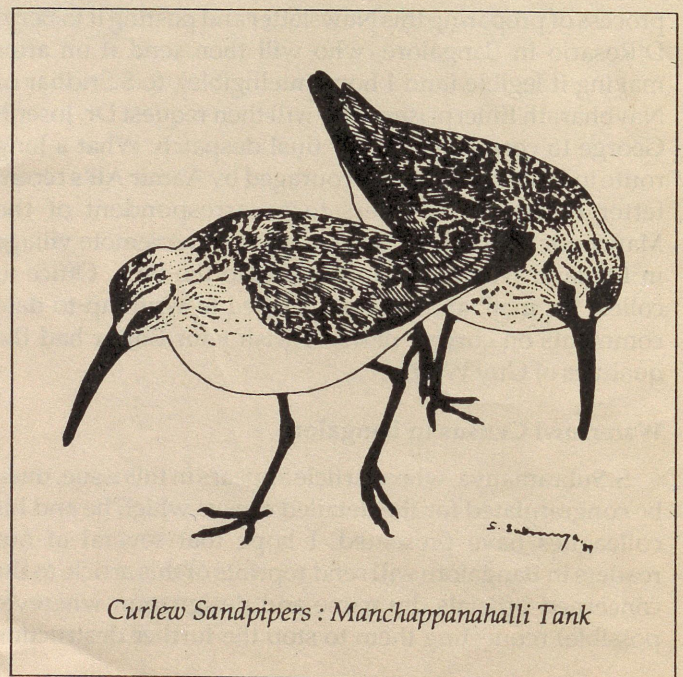
Census was a great success in Bangalore. Between 8th and 22nd January we covered 91 tanks in and around Bangalore City with an addition of 57 tanks to previous years coverage. This was something which we, an informal group of birdwatchers, had not hoped to achieve. The census coverage during 1987 and 88 was limited largely by the lack of suitable transport. The 33 tanks we censused in 1988 was better than what we could do the previous year.

It all started in October 1988 when one of our colleagues, Mr. B.K.Chakrapani suggested that we approach the State Forest Department to help us out with transport so that more number of tanks could be covered. Another reason for approaching the Forest Department was that very recently the Department had been entrusted with the welfare of the tanks in and around Bangalore. Hence we presumed that the authorities would be interested to know more about their tanks through our endeavour. When approached, Mr.Yellappa Reddy, Conservator of Forests (Research and Utilization) readily agreed to meet our transport and other material requirements for the ensuing census. After a series of deliberations that followed, we decided to turn a mere waterfowl census into something more useful - a survey to collect information on the status of each tank as waterfowl habitat. With this objective fixed firmly in our minds, preparations went on in top gear, beginning three months in advance.

For ease of coverage we divided Bangalore into North and South zones. All the tanks that fell on either sides of all major roads leading out of the city were considered. We decided to detour from the highways wherever necessary. Limiting the range of coverage to a radius of approximately 30 Km from the city all the tanks larger than 10 ha. were listed. The tally stood at 109 possible tanks. In addition to counting birds, we were to collect data pertinent to the nature of the wetland (water depth, permanency, source, etc.,) and samples for physical and chemical properties of water (aided by laboratory analysis), aquatic vegetation (submerged, emergent and floating), plankton, pollution (sewage and effluents), utilisation of the wetland by local people, threats and disturbances to birds and tanks (poaching, encroachment, etc.,) and urban developmental activities. A week before the commencement of the census we had finalised an itinerary for the entire census period. Two lectures on the identification of waterfowl in addition to one on methodology and field procedures were arranged for the

benefit of our members (By Dr. S.Subramanya and B.K.Chakrapani respectively - Ed.). On 8th January, we spent the whole day at Tailur tank counting birds and teaching beginners the 'census field-craft'. At Tailur we counted 40 species of birds totalling upto nearly 4400 birds (260 Little Cormorants, 200 Egrets, 6 Barheaded Geese, 708 Pintails, 700 Common Teals, 440 Wigeons, 180 Shovellers, 427 Cotton Teals, 354 Blacktailed Godwits, 93 Marsh Sandpipers, 147 Whiskered Terns ...). Between 9th and 22nd, covering an average of 6 tanks a day, we censused 91 tanks and counted nearly 37,700 birds of 51 species. Nearly 87% of the birds counted were migrants. South Bangalore tanks were almost twice richer in birds (25,600 birds, 88.8% migrants) than North Bangalore tanks (86.4% migrants).

Considering the distribution and abundance of waterbirds in the inland Peninsula, as indicated by Salim Ali and from our own observations in the past, the tanks that we surveyed had their own share of 'uncommon species and spectacular numbers' by Bangalore standards. In Hoskote tank alone, more than 6,000 ducks were counted, while at Hennagara there were about 5,000 ducks. Much to our amazement, over 500 Little Grebes were seen at Vartur tank. In Budigereammmani tank and Hoskote tanks 42 and 23 Barheaded Geese were counted respectively. Other interesting bird counts were as follows: Cattle Egrets: 548 (Hebbal) ; Common Teals: 401 (Singanayakanahalli); Garganey: 2087 (Budigereammmani), 1400 (Lalbagh); Shovellers: 123 (Puttenahalli); Common



Curlew Sandpipers : Manchappanahalli Tank

Pochards: 190 (Dodda Begur), 47 (Chikkajala); Cotton Teals: 150 (Anneswara); Blackwinged Stilts: 557 (Hennur), 249 (Rampura), 189 (Kalkere), 116 (Chikka Begur); Little Ringed Plovers: 159 (Kalkere), 149 (Arehalli); Kentish Plovers: 190 (Kalkere); Blacktailed Godwits: 123 (Dodda Gubbi); Redshanks: 3 (Dodda Gubbi); Marsh Sandpipers: 272 (Kalkere), 46 (Dodda Gubbi); Little Stints: 557 (Hennur), 249 (Rampura), 189 (Kalkere), 116 (Chikka Begur); Curlew Sandpipers: 8 (Manchappanahalli); Ruff & Reeve: 104 (Kalkere); Brownheaded Gulls: 22 (Rampura), 10 (Yelchahalli).

Our observations revealed that village irrigation tanks which are important waterfowl habitats in this part of the country are far from safe for birds. Sewage eutrophication has already affected 7% of the tanks rendering their water green in 4.5%. At least 10% of the tanks already have or can be suspected to have effluents other than sewage. Only a mere 13% of the tanks had clear water, while the rest had muddy or murky water due to high silt deposition. Mud lifting was present in 61% of the tanks with 47% being associated with brick making in the immediate vicinity. In most of the cases, this is indiscriminate with pits being dug in all zones of the tank. As a consequence, sloping shorelines and vegetation are destroyed. In addition, the shoreline of 39% of the tanks has been encroached by agricultural fields. Birds in 36% of tanks are being hunted. At Dodda Tumkur tank we came across two live 'Clap Traps' (a door-like large wooden frame (2x4 m) with two overlapping nylon nets that can be activated by a pull string mechanism) for capturing waders and ducks like Pintail and Garganey which come to the shoreline for preening. Four more such trapping points in use were discovered. Our discussions with villagers indicate that poaching is well organised. Muzzle loading guns with lead pellets are used to shoot ducks. Birds hit by these pellets may not die immediately but do so eventually because of lead poisoning. Hunters with rifles are mostly city dwellers and they frequent tanks purely for blood sport. If the preferred ducks are not available, they are quite content with shooting down a Pond Heron. In addition to all these threats, the proximity of built-up areas leads to additional disturbance. Nearly 21% of the tanks have this dubious distinction.

Under social forestry programme the Forest Department has been planting the foreshore area with *Acacia nilotica* to meet the fuel wood requirement of villagers. During our survey we found birds using these stands of *A. nilotica* for various purposes. Wherever isolated plants were found in deep water (>1M) it served as a nesting site for Coots and feeding perches for Pond Heron, Grey Heron and Small Blue Kingfisher. Even Little Cormorants were enticed to such situations and they could be seen drying wings while perched on such plants.

Whenever a dense impenetrable stand of this acacia was present, waders and ducks used it as a refuge. Whitethroated Munias have taken to nesting in such dense stands. At Jakkur every plant had at least one nest and the munias appeared to be nesting in loose colonies.

Everyone of us involved in the census thoroughly enjoyed being out in the field counting birds. We hope that the status report that we plan to bring out shortly would catch the attention of the concerned authorities and elicit suitable action wherever required and help save these wetlands.

(The team: B.K.Chakrapani, U. Harish Kumar, Dr. Joseph George, S. Karthikeyan, M.B.Krishna, A.Madhusudhan, O.C.Naveein, Milind Desai, J.N.Prasad, A.K.Raju, A.Shanta Manohar, S.Sridhar, N.Srinivasan and S.Subramanya)

THANK YOU, MR. FUTEHALLY!

Joseph George, 189, First Cross Road, Mahalakshmi Layout, Bangalore 560 086.

A large number of Birdwatchers of Bangalore were delighted to accept an invitation from Mr. & Mrs. Zafar Futehally and assemble at their farm on the outskirts of Bangalore on 25th February 1989 for tea and birdwatching. We have had several outings (and sumptuous treats from Mrs. Futehally) at their farm and nearby Dodda Gubbi tank in the last few years but the present one was special because Mr. & Mrs. Futehally were moving shortly to Kodaikanal.

The trees and plants were in full bloom and birds were calling from all sides. A party of Haircrested Drongos was sighted on the tall trees, one of which was a Moulmein Rosewood in a violet haze of flowers. There was much to see and listen to and it was difficult to get all the Birdwatchers together for a group photograph! Altogether it was a pleasant time but we also felt sad at the thought of parting.

Mr. & Mrs. Futehally came to Bangalore 15 years ago. Right from the time they arrived, Mr. Futehally has been closely associated with the birdwatching activities here. He for several years took the responsibility of organising our birdwatching outings which was in addition to his duties as Editor of the Newsletter.

Mr. Futehally has been a guiding spirit to the Birdwatchers of Bangalore, as elsewhere, and was always available for discussion and helpful advice. He encouraged young Birdwatchers to contribute to the

Newsletter and whenever a good effort came through he never failed to show his appreciation.

The Newsletter as everyone knows is the brainchild of Mr.Futehally and he has seen it through thick and thin all these years. When it was started the hope was expressed that it would grow into a first rate Ornithological Journal.

Before leaving Bangalore, Mr.Futehally was able to take an important step towards this goal by getting the Newsletter printed through the kind co-operation of Mr.S.Sridhar, himself one of our Birdwatching Group.

While at Bangalore, Mr.Futehally was very much concerned with the environment and birdlife of Bangalore. He spared no efforts to inform and educate the public and motivate the authorities to take remedial and protective measures to conserve our natural heritage.

The departure of the Futehallys from Bangalore for Kodaikanal is a loss to the Birdwatchers here but our loss is their gain as Mr.Futehally is bound to give a fillip to the Birdwatching activity there. We wish to thank Mr.& Mrs.Futehally for all the help and encouragement they gave us during their stay in our midst. We also wish them many happy years of Birdwatching in Kodaikanal.

FIELD IDENTIFICATION OF SOUTH INDIAN WARBLERS.

M.B.Krishna, 10, Ranga Rao Road, Shankarapuram, Bangalore 560 004.

Sketches by S.Subramanya.

Field identification of warblers presents some initial difficulties because of the lack of prominent differences between species and genera in their colour, colour patterns or in other features. As a group, they are very active birds but shy of human presence and given to a lot of sulking. This necessitates patient, methodical observation, and making fieldnotes and sketches which many birdwatchers tend not to do. Moreover what is wanting in our bird books is a more detailed description for distinguishing confusable species with emphasis being given to structural features also. Hence it becomes necessary that one goes through the species accounts more carefully and extract the maximum information possible. For example, it might become necessary to go through the section entitled "Museum Diagnosis" in the Handbook to get more information instead of skipping it altogether for field identification purposes. It might also become necessary to look into the measurements of the structures given to get an idea of the proportions though one need not attach much importance to finer differences in the length for field identification. What is important here is the gross differences as can be made out in the field using binoculars and telescopes if necessary. This article is a compilation of such information covering South Indian Warblers only, from relevant sources supplemented by personal observations wherever possible. Its validity, usefulness and relevance has to be evaluated by the reader who wishes to make use of it. As such this is only a beginning. A basic familiarity with the group is assumed.

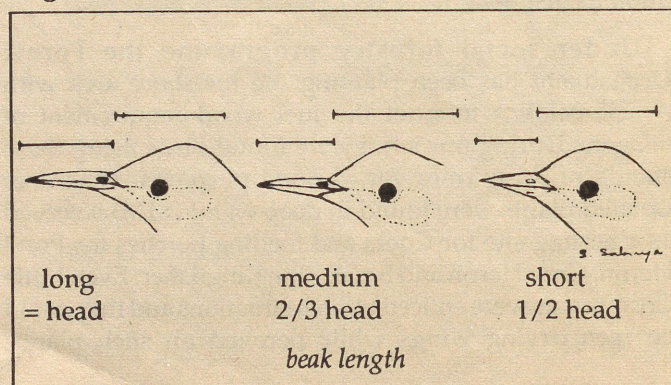
This article consists of three sections. The first deals with defining the terms used in the rest of the article and

elucidating the variations in characteristics found in the subfamily. The second is an overview to help recognise the genera. The third is an attempt to rationalise and systematise the approach for the identification of the major groups.

TERMS USED AND VARIATIONS IN THE CHARACTERISTICS IN THE SUBFAMILY

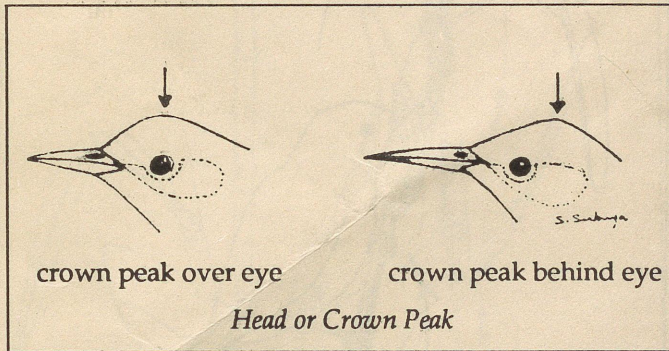
BEAK LENGTH:

Beak length is taken relative to the size of the head. An imaginary line drawn along the length of the beak extending to the back of the head provides the reference line. If the distance from the beak tip to its base is equal to the distance from the beak base to the back of the head (in profile), then the beak is said to be equal to the head. This is the case in the genera *Orthotomus* and *Acrocephalus*. In *Cisticola*, *Prinia* and *Hippolais* the beak is just two thirds the length of the head. In the other genera it is only half.



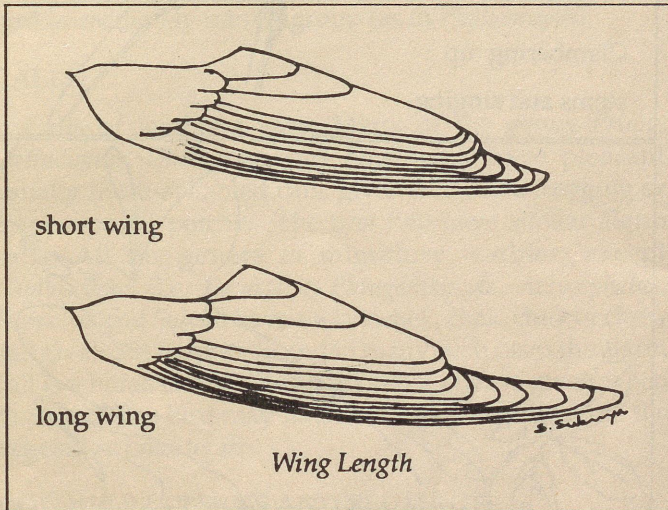
HEAD PEAK :

The shape of the head can vary. It could be rounded or angular. The topmost point of the head may fall over or behind the eye giving characteristic shapes to the head - especially the crown. For example, in *Acrocephalus* the peak falls behind the eye while in *Hippolais* it is just over the eye.



WING LENGTH AND SHAPE :

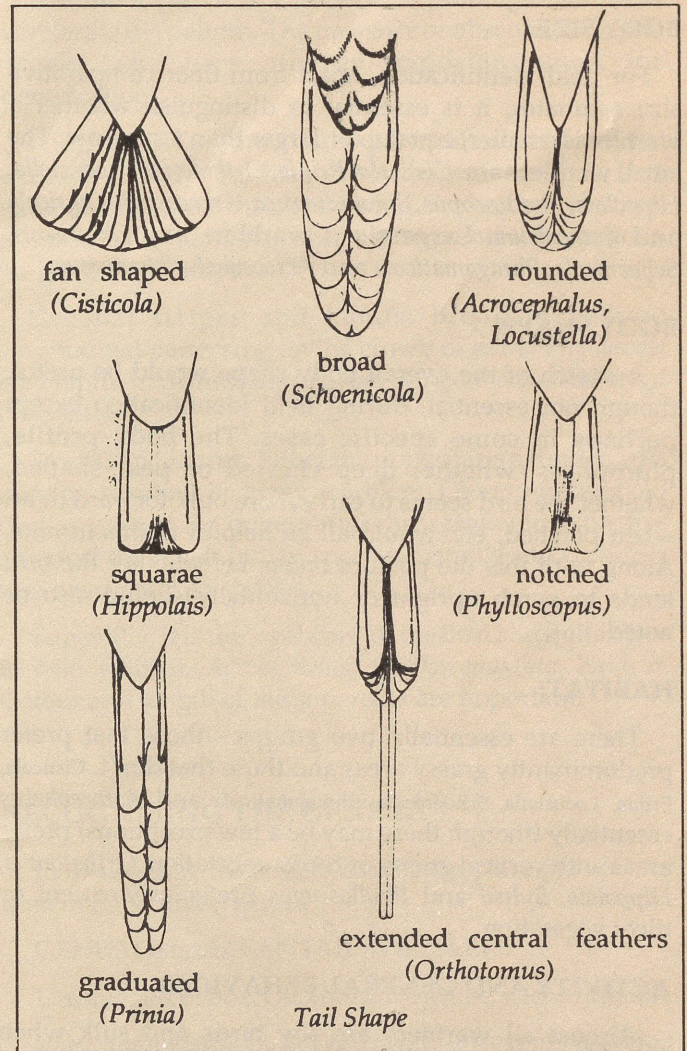
If the primaries extend much beyond the secondaries in a closed wing, then it is called a long wing. If not, it is short. The differences in the lengths of the various primaries determines the shape of the wing, i.e., whether it is rounded or pointed. In many genera, a 'wing formula' is used to distinguish the species in the hand. This expresses the ratio in the length of some of the primary feathers.



TAIL :

The tail shows a lot of variation in this subfamily. The differences lie in the shape, length and the way it is held.

If the length of the tail is more than the length of the wing, then it is said to be a long tail. It could be held in line with the body, or held cocked; it could be long or short,



graduated, rounded, fanshaped, square or notched. The undertail coverts can also show a lot of variation. It could be very long extending to more than two thirds of the tail as in *Locustella*, or short, blunt and within half to a third of the tail as in *Hippolais*, or intermediate as in *Acrocephalus*.

- Long tailed : graduated- *Prinia, Orthotomus*
Chaetornis, Schoenicola,
Phragamaticola.
- fan-tailed *Cisticola.*
- rounded *Locustella, Acrocephalus.*
- Short-tailed: square *Hippolais.*
- notched *Phylloscopus.*
- slightly rounded *Sylvia.*

BODY SIZE:

For field identification, apart from finer comparative size estimates, it is essential to distinguish whether a warbler is smaller, equal to or larger than a sparrow. The small warblers are: *Cisticola*, *Prinia*, *Orthotomus*, *Locustella*, *Hippolais*, *Phylloscopus*, *Sylvia curruca*, *Acrocephalus agricola* and *dumetorum*. Large sized warblers are: *Chaetornis*, *Schoenicola*, *Phragmaticola* and *Acrocephalus stentoreus*.

BODY SHAPE:

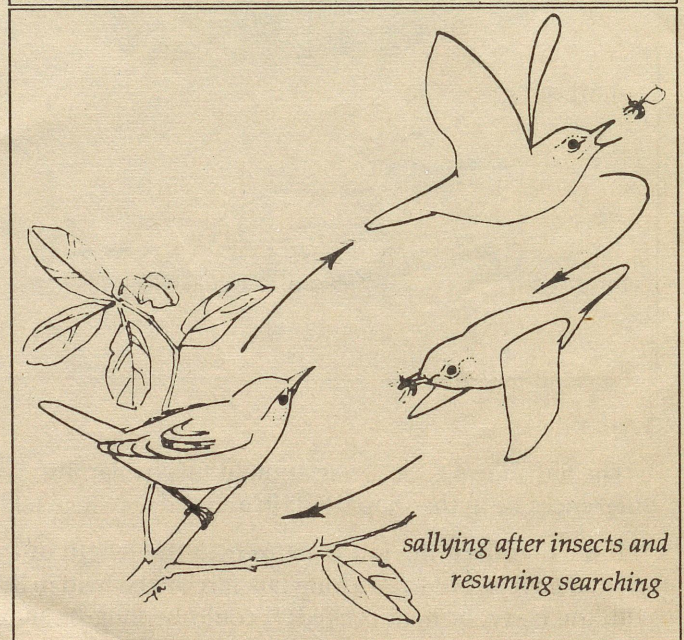
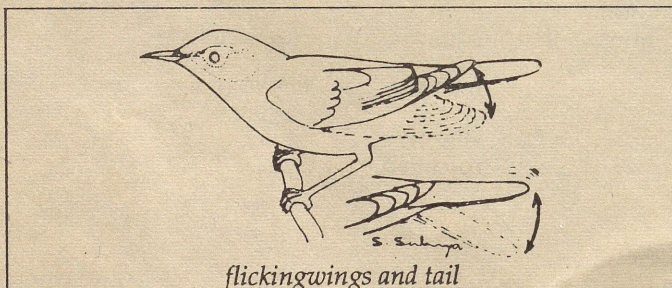
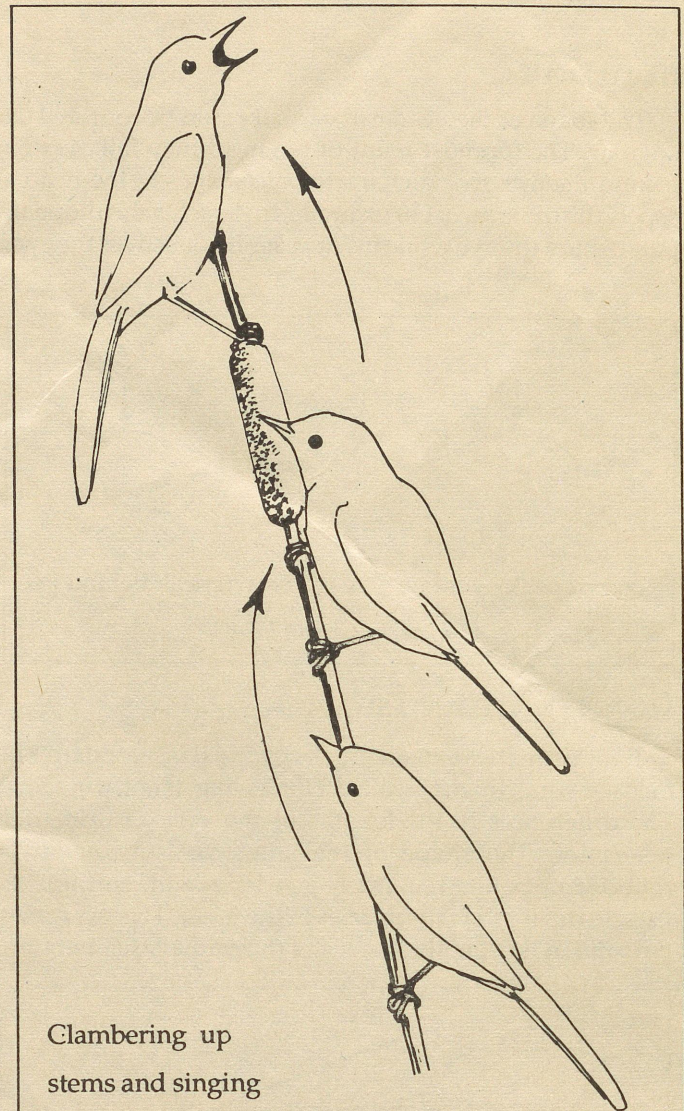
A sketch of the overall body shape would be useful, though not essential, during field identification except perhaps in some specific cases. The body profile, plumpness, whether deep chested or pear shaped, whether the bird seems to carry more bulk forward or aft when perched, etc. would all be helpful points to note. Along with this the posture taken, i.e. whether the bird tends to perch upright or horizontally should also be noted.

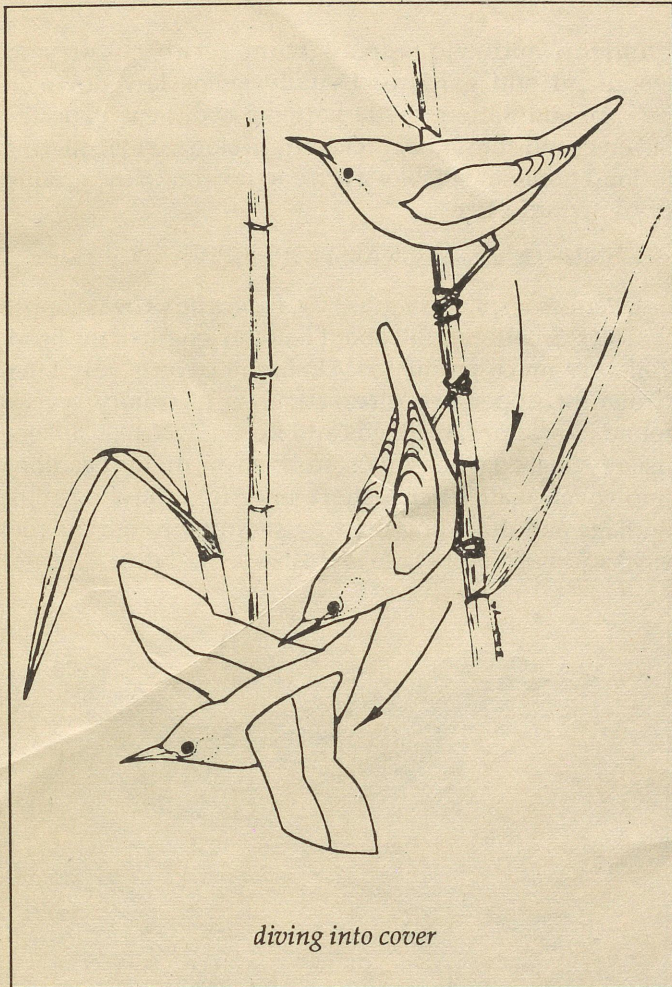
HABITAT:

There are essentially two groups - those that prefer predominantly grassy areas and those that don't. *Cisticola*, *Prinia*, *Locustella*, *Schoenicola*, *Phragmaticola* and *Acrocephalus* essentially (though there may be a few exceptions) prefer areas with vertical grassy or reedy vegetation. *Orthotomus*, *Hippolais*, *Sylvia* and *Phylloscopus* prefer arborescent or dicot vegetation.

ACTIVITY AND GENERAL BEHAVIOUR:

Almost all warblers are shy birds and sulk when disturbed. There are a few behavioural traits or "mannerisms" which are of some importance in field identification. Such behaviours include flushing, flicking wings and tail, clambering up stems or hopping amongst twigs, making short sallies, etc. Many call constantly when foraging. Grassland warblers tend to clamber up reeds or stems and call from exposed perches in the evenings and mornings. *Hippolais*, *Sylvia* and *Phylloscopus* tend to leave their perches frequently to make short sallies or flights after flying insects and insects flushed by their incessant movements like flicking open wings and tail, etc. Such behaviour is very characteristic and help in placing the





diving into cover

bird immediately into its group (as in *Phylloscopus*).

CALLS:

Calls of warblers vary. Many of the genus *Prinia*, *Orthotomus*, *Chaetornis* and *Phylloscopus* have pleasant usually multi-syllabled calls given out while foraging or from exposed perches. The first two have similar alarm calls. All the genera of migratory warblers except *Phylloscopus* (i.e. *Locustella*, *Phragamaticola*, *Acrocephalus*, *Hippolais* and *Sylvia*) have a tek, tschek, chek, chuk or churr call given out frequently and in many such cases the alarm call is a harsh churr. The alarm is not always given when disturbed. The bird may flush, only to disappear into the vegetation once again.

COLOUR PATTERNS AND PLUMAGE:

Most of the warblers are sober coloured birds with almost no bright colours on them. Warblers of grassland and dry regions are predominantly brown while greens predominate in woodland warblers (like many *Phylloscopi*). Almost all have a dorsal-ventral colour difference and are paler below.

The most important aspect of plumage colour in warblers is the pattern. The presence or absence of stripes, streaks, and bars provide important clues for identification.

Wing bars: These are usually paler coloured edgings to secondary covert feathers. They appear as short bars across the length of the closed wing. Presence or absence, colour and the number are important points to be noted in the genus *Phylloscopus*.

Coronal stripes and bands: Broad or narrow longitudinal patterning on the crown of many *Phylloscopi* are helpful in distinguishing species; ex. *P.occipitalis* from *P.trochiloides*.

Streaks and stripes: Either the upperparts or underparts may be streaked in many warblers. *Chaetornis* has bold dark streaks on the upperparts which makes it distinctive amongst the South Indian species. *Cisticola* and *Locustella* also have streaked species.

Supercilia: It is the 'eyebrow' of the bird and quite often is pale whitish. *Acrocephalus*, *Phylloscopus* etc. have it. Colour and length of the supercilia are important.

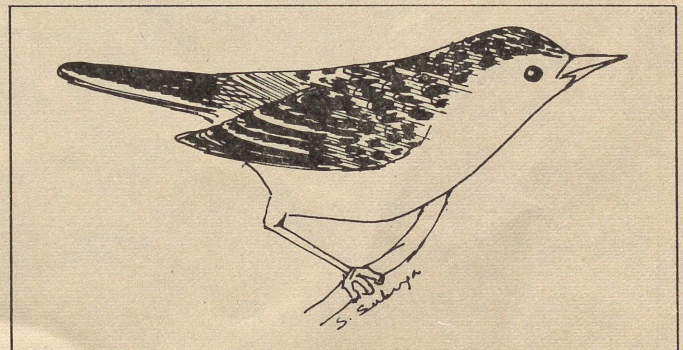
RECOGNISING THE GENERA

In this section the objective is to help place the warbler seen into its correct genus.

GENUS *Cisticola*: FANTAIL WARBLERS

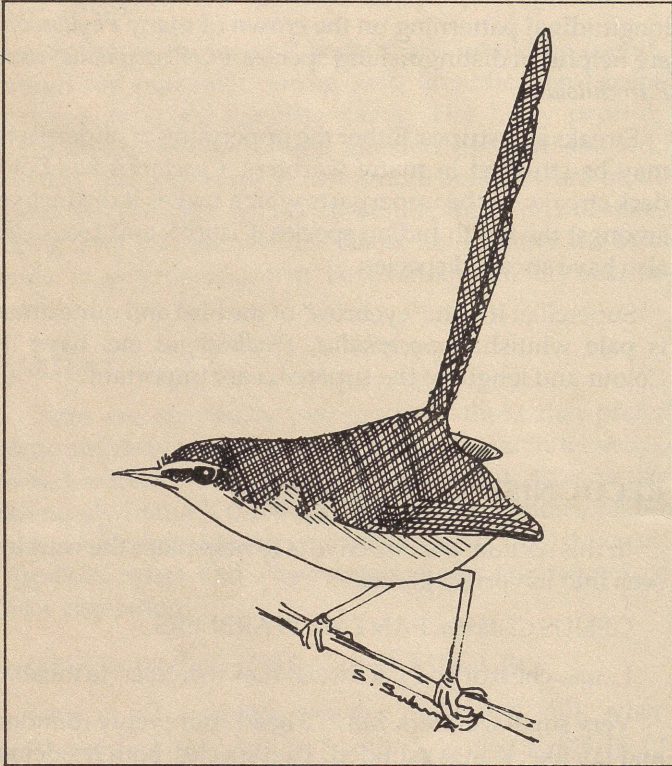
L.cista=chest or box; *Gk.kistos*=rock rose; *colo*=to inhabit.

Very small warblers. Bill 2/3 head. Tail evenly rounded and fan like. Wings rounded. Two species, both residents. Found in tall grass, predominantly wet (Paddy) cultivation, low scrub, and similar habitats. The short rounded tail is frequently jerked open like a fan. Singly or loose parties. They are unobtrusive in tall grass but flushed when approached and disturbed. Individuals mount to the top of grass blade or stem to sing or have a display flight.



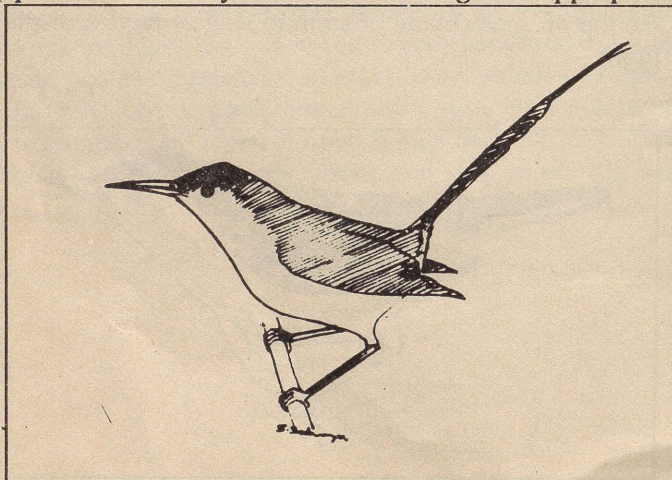
GENUS *Prinia*: LONGTAILED (OR WREN-) WARBLERS

Size small. Bill $2/3$ head. Tail long and graduated. Wings rounded and feeble. Four resident species preferring grassland, scrub with grass, cereal and millet cultivations, and gardens. Hop, flit, clamber and creep about among grass and bushes in a characteristic erratic and jerky manner, tail erect and loosely flicked up, down and sideways.



GENUS *Orthotomus*: TAILOR BIRD

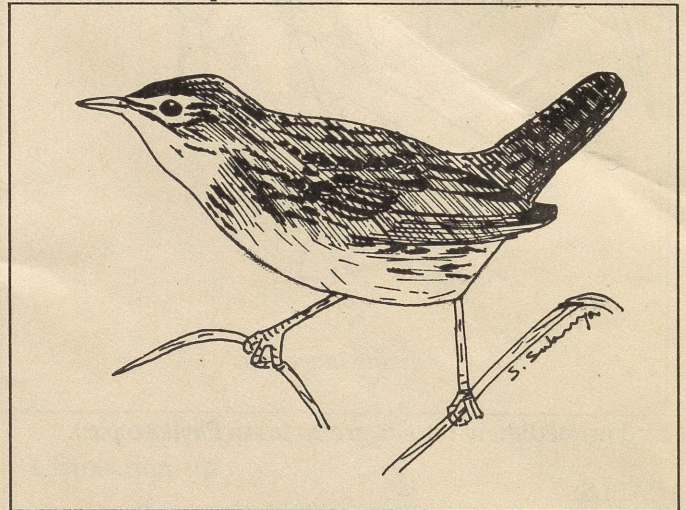
Small size. Bill equal to head in length. Tail long and graduated. Wings very short and rounded. One resident species with rusty head and olive green upperparts.



Common and widespread from scrub country to woodland and gardens. Usually keeps low down in herbage and undergrowth, hopping about energetically, tail erect and constantly flicked from side to side, uttering its loud familiar call. Not averse to hop on to the ground or go up into a tree.

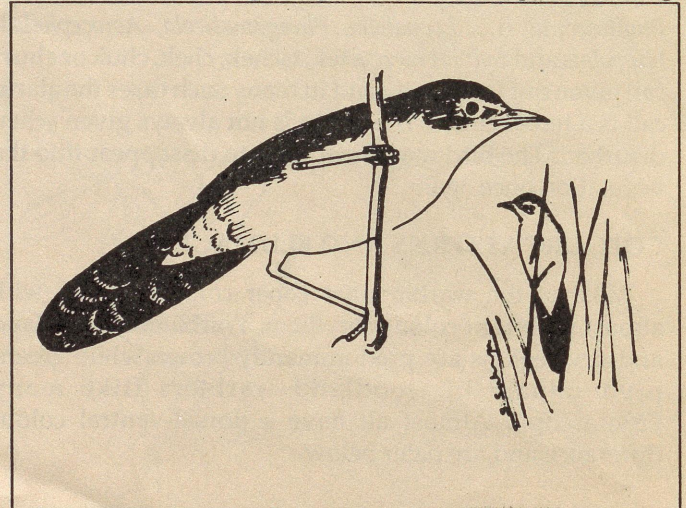
GENUS *Locustella*: GRASSHOPPER WARBLERS

L. locusta = spiklet of grass; Fr. *Locustelle* = Grasshopper Warbler. Small size. Bill about half the length of the head. Tail very much graduated. Undertail coverts very long. Crown or upperparts streaked. Two migratory species found in swamps, reedbeds and ricefields. Great sulkers, usually flushed when almost trodden on, diving headlong into cover again after a short jerky flight low over the herbage and threading the way swiftly through the root stocks. Almost impossible to flush a second time.



GENUS *Schoenicola*: BROADTAILED GRASS WARBLER

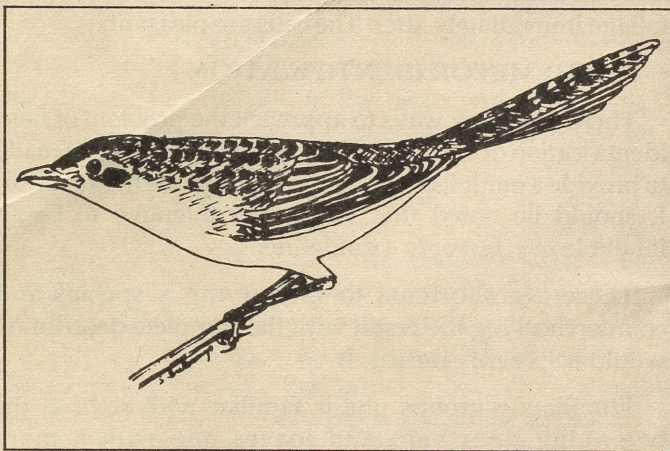
Gk. *schoinos* = rush or sedge; *colo* = to inhabit. Size large. Bill half of head. Wings long and well developed. Tail long,



broad and graduated; looks large. Undertail darker. One resident species found in marshy depressions with high grass and reeds. Perches vertically and keeps tail down. Whenever the bird clambers up a reed stem and perches upright, it appears as though the bird is weighed down by its tail. Habits very similar to *Chaetornis* but an invertebrate sulker like *Locustella*, flushing with difficulty only when almost trodden on and diving into cover to disappear from view. Flight indirect and topheavy like that of a *Prinia*, the broad graduated tail conspicuous on the wing.

GENUS *Chaetornis*: BRISTLED GRASS WARBLER

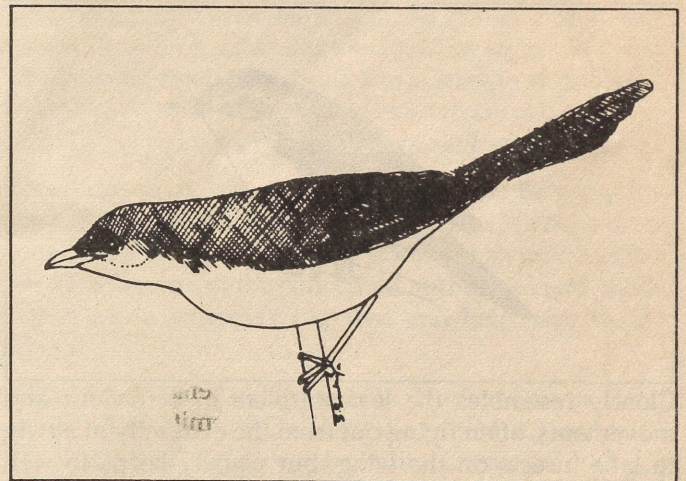
Gk. *chaite* = mane or flowing hair; *ornis* = bird. A large warbler with a stout bill half the length of the head and tail equal to wing. Strong rictal bristles arranged in a vertical row in front of eye. Feathers of breast sometimes dark



shafted, but stiff, forming a 'necklace'. The only warbler with bold dark brown streaks on back. One resident endemic species preferring coarse grassland and cultivation with bushes. Keeps singly or in pairs sulking or moving swiftly through grass, occasionally exposing itself at the top, tumbling headlong into cover on disturbance and difficult to flush again. Calls pleasant. Rather similar to a Common Babbler on its fleeting glimpse.

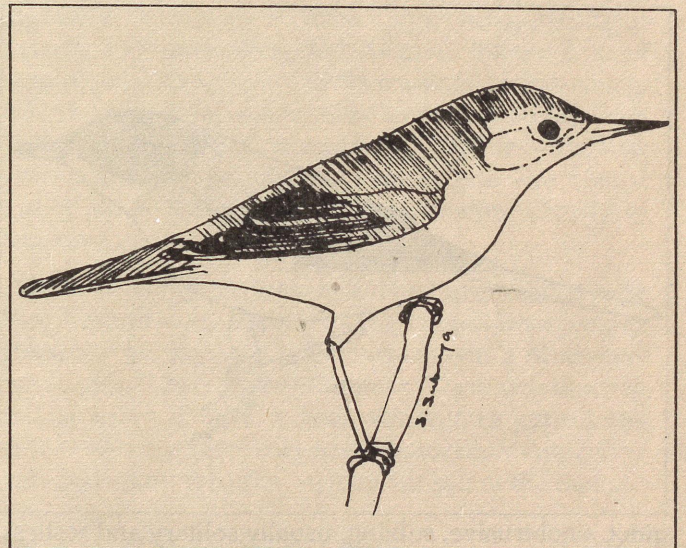
GENUS *Phragmaticola*: THICKBILLED WARBLER

Gk. *phragama* = hedge or fence; *colo* = to inhabit. The only species *P. aedon* is now shifted to *Acrocephalus* (Ripley 1982). Bulbul sized. Bill wide and short; half the length of the head. Tail very much graduated with narrow feathers. Wings pointed. One migratory species preferring marshy places, secondary growth in forest clearings, tea and coffee plantations. Solitary, rather secretive and usually first seen when flying from one bush to another. Hops about in the undergrowth and reeds close to the ground, occasionally making short sallies after flying insects. Looks like the Great Reed Warbler, but with shorter beak and nosupercilium.



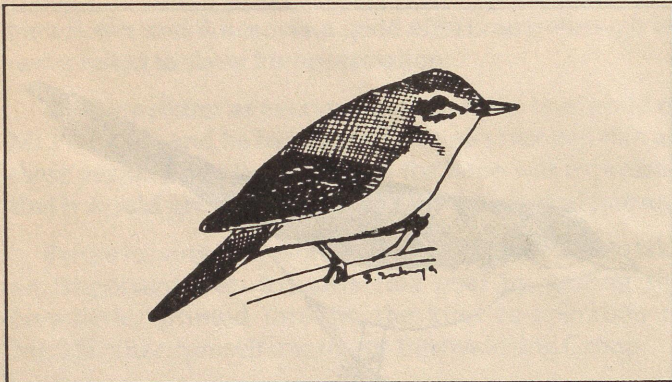
GENUS *Acrocephalus*: REED WARBLERS

Gk. name refers to pointed head ?. Sizes varied. Bill slender and equal to head. Tail rounded. Three species, the smaller two being migratory. Found in reed beds and bushes in damp places. One species also found commonly in gardens and far from water. Keeps singly within thick cover, calling frequently and hopping from stem to stem, clinging sideways and often lunging to snap up tiny insects.



GENUS *Hippolais*: TREE WARBLER

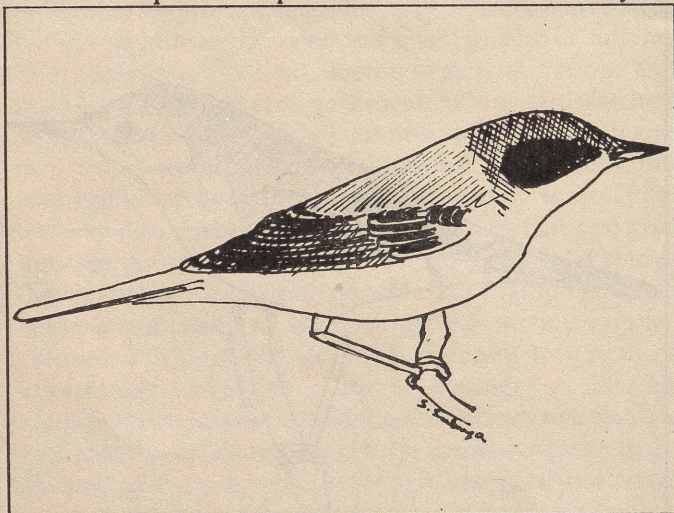
Size small. Bill about 2/3 head. Tail square or rounded at edges. Undertail coverts short. The body often appears plump and has a rather flat back and tail line, extended by a prominent head. When perched they often appear to carry more bulk forward of the legs than aft, looking sometimes short tailed in the field. Both completely upright and horizontal postures are adopted by moving and perched birds. There is often a hint of clumsiness or carelessness in their acrobatic progress through cover.



Closely resembles the leaf warblers in behaviour and movements, often flying out from the extremity of a twig to take insects on the wing, but usually keeps to well within the canopy. One migratory species found in Acacia scrub and deciduous woodland.

GENUS *Sylvia*: WHITETHROAT AND ORPHEAN WARBLER

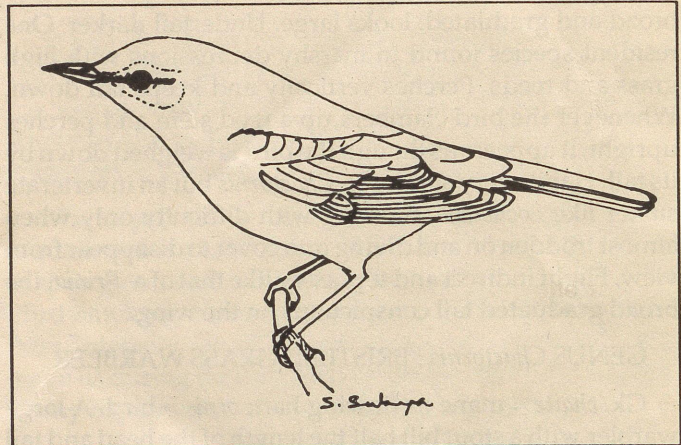
L. silva = forest. Small to medium sized warblers. Bill half the length of the head. Tail square or slightly rounded. Two migratory species found in scrub and semidesert. Both the species have characteristic plumages with pure white throats contrasting with dark cheeks (as in Whitethroat) or dark head cap (as in Orphean Warbler). In habits they are



quiet, unobtrusive, sulking, usually solitary and restless. Along with tree warblers, Whitethroats have a habit of lunging out to seize an insect just out of reach, nearly toppling over in the attempt, then quickly steadying themselves on the wings.

GENUS *Phylloscopus*: WILLOW OR LEAF WARBLERS

Gk. phyllos = leaf and *skopos* = watcher. Very small and very active warblers. Tail square or notched, not long. Four to eight migratory species found from deciduous woodland to evergreen forest. In this group difficulties arise in observing the birds not because they sulk, which



they do not, but because they are so active. They flick wings and tail almost continuously and make short sallies after fleeting insects, resuming searching amidst the foliage immediately after. The calls are pleasant.

A SCHEME FOR IDENTIFICATION

There are many ways to approach the problem of field identification of warblers. Here an attempt has been made to provide a guideline for identification of the major groups. It should be noted that this is not intended to be an infallible key, but only a guideline.

There are shortcuts to identifying a species and counterchecking the result with the complete description would help verify the result.

Eliminating groups one is familiar with right at the beginning does help and leaves one with a more manageable set of alternatives.

1. Small sized warblers equal to or smaller than a sparrow ... 5.
 _Large sized warblers: larger than a sparrow; about bulbul size ... 2.
2. Bill long: as long as head... *Acrocephalus stentoreus*
 _Bill short: about half the length of the head... 3.
3. Upperparts boldly marked with dark dot like streaks *Chaetornis striatus*
 -Upperparts not marked with spots, streaks, etc. 4
4. Huge: bulbul size. Length about 20cm. No supercilium *Phragmaticola aedon*
 -Smaller: length about 17cms. Between sparrow and Bulbul in size; short indistinct supercilium; tail broad. *Schoenicola platyura*
5. Bill as long as head ... 6.
 _Bill 2/3 of head... 7.
 _Bill 1/2 of head.. ... 8.

6. Upperparts brown. Colour of head same as that of upper parts. *Acrocephalus*
 -Upperparts green. Colour of head rusty and not same as upperparts. . . . *Orthotomus*
7. Wings long; tail shorter than wing. Undertail coverts short, less than half to a third of the tail . . . *Hippolais*
 -Wings short: tail fanshaped and rounded, equal to or shorter than wing. Undertail coverts normal. . *Cisticola*
 -Wings short: tail longer than wing, graduated and often held cocked. Undertail coverts normal.. *Prinia*
8. Tail rounded, undertail coverts very long. Head/upperparts streaked . . . *Locustella*
 -Tail square, not long: undertail coverts normal. Throat white, contrasting with dark cheeks or dark head cap *Sylvia*
 -Tail square or notched, not long: undertail coverts normal. Upperparts greenish or brownish, with or without wing bars and coronal stripes. Supercilium present Very active warblers *Phylloscopus*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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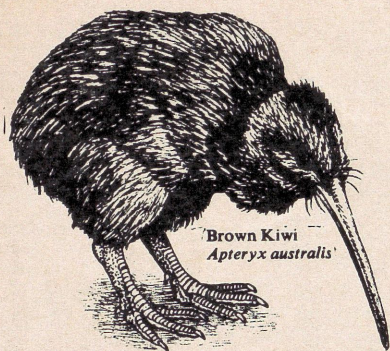
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Birdwatchers met Mr. Futehally at his farm residence at Doddagubbi on the outskirts of Bangalore on 25th February 1989

(article on page-3)

Cover : Ashy wren warbler at nest
(Photo by S. Sridhar)



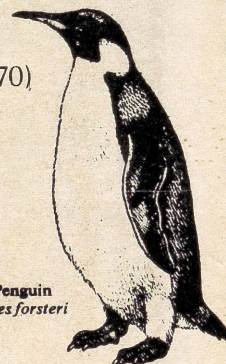
Brown Kiwi
Apteryx australis

20th INTERNATIONAL ORNITHOLOGICAL CONGRESS 1990.

The 20th International Ornithological Congress will take place in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 2 - 9 December 1990. The Congress programme will include 7 plenary lectures, 48 symposia, contributed papers (spoken and poster), workshops, round-table discussions and films. There will be a mid-Congress excursion day. Longer tours are planned to interesting ornithological sites in New Zealand before and after the Congress, including the post Congress cruises to sub-antarctic islands.

The Second and Final Circular of the Congress will be available from 1 October 1989 and will include the registration papers and forms for submitting papers. In later 1990 New Zealand will also host the 20th World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation in Hamilton on 21 - 27 November 1990 and a Pacific Festival of Nature Films in Dunedin on 27 November - 1 December 1990. Requests for this Final Circular, which includes information on the above events, should be sent to :

Dr. Ben D. Bell, Secretary - General,
20th International Ornithological Congress,
School of Biological Sciences,
Victoria University of Wellington,
P.O. Box 600, Wellington, New Zealand,
(Telex NZ30882 VUWLIB ; Facsimile NZ 64-4-712070)



Emperor Penguin
Aptenodytes forsteri

Editor : ZAFAR FUTEHALLY