

15. ON THE SINGING POSTURE OF THE STRONGFOOTED BUSH
WARBLER (*CETTIA FORTIPES*)

Strongfooted Bush Warbler (*Cettia fortipes*) is very vocal in the breeding season, and in W. Himalayas its song is commonly heard in summer. But the extremely shy and retiring nature of this warbler makes it one of the hardest birds to observe. It is notorious for singing within a few feet of the observer without making itself visible; the ventriloquistic nature of the song further adds to the difficulty. Thus it is not surprising that the peculiar singing posture, which is described below, and its significance has not been recorded before.

On 29th May, 1985, in the Overa wildlife sanctuary, Kashmir at a height of 7500', I came across a *Cettia fortipes* singing from a thicket. The bird was visible from the outside and was presumably unaware of my presence. I approached it very cautiously, moving only when it was singing and stopping every time it ceased singing. By this method I was able to reach within 10 feet of the bird. Through binoculars, minute details of its plumage were visible and also the orange coloured ring we had put on its leg a few days earlier. The singing bird was perched on a twig hunch-backed, with plumage slightly fluffed out, tail depressed and wings drooped. I watched the bird for about 35 song sequences and noticed no variation in the singing posture which is as follows: As it starts to sing the initial whistle, the body is slowly tilted forward to an angle of 45° to the perch, and by the time the whistle ends it has fully stretched itself for-

ward. At the final outburst of notes, the head bobs furiously, the tail is jerked and it appears that each sequence is sung at its loudest. The song of the bird has been described as 'amazing', 'fascinating', etc. It is a long drawn ventriloquistic whistle followed by two rapid explosive notes, sometimes four. From my observations I found that there is extremely low degree of variation in the songs in one individual, as well as between other individuals of the species.

Much emphasis seems to be laid on the powerful song in the breeding biology of this species as this drab coloured warbler does not make itself conspicuous even while singing. Thus it seems very important that the male should execute its song perfectly and at its maximum vocal capacity; the above mentioned posture seems to have been evolved for that. It, therefore, does not seem to be any kind of display but essentially a body movement evolved to facilitate this peculiar kind of singing. There is strong selection against aberrant and variable songs in such cases, as that may fail to attract a female. This may lead to distinctive songs and rigid postures. It is also very interesting to note that all the *Cettia* warblers are skulkers in habit and have developed songs peculiar to each species, which have high recognition value. A study to see whether all members of this genus have developed special postures for singing will be an interesting topic.

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