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## The Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* from the South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, and a review of its status in mainland India

At 0830 h on 22 February 2022, I was birding in Jela Sadar (22.36°N, 88.39°E), commonly known as the Baruipur marshes of the South 24 Parganas District, West Bengal. I came to a reed-bed and I felt it was the type of habitat where I could try my luck for a Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata*, which had been recorded in the same district at the Joka wetlands (Ray 2010a–c). It was a reed patch with backdrop of a dry grassland, water at the base and dry pith-branch skeletons lying thud on the water. I observed a small *Locustella* warbler foraging silently at the base of the reeds on the pith branches. I played the song of a Lanceolated Warbler—it did not respond with a call or song but showed movements in sync with the song being played. It emerged from cover and I took a few snaps [264, 265] and tried to still understand if the bird was responding to the song I was playing or not. I played the call again, and this time it responded with a sound that was not the same that I was playing, but with a typical Grasshopper Warbler's *tik tik tik*.

On 23 February 2022, I took Rounak Patra, Pampa Mistri, and Arnab Ray Choudhury to check out the bird. There was thick fog in the early morning, but we managed to see the bird, and Pampa Mistri recorded its call. It was an exact match to the playback



264. Lanceolated Warbler Baruipur Marshes, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. February 2022



265. Lanceolated Warbler Baruipur Marshes, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. February 2022

**Table 1.** An assessment of Lanceolated Warbler reports from mainland India

No	Locality	Year	Details	Assessment
1	Etawah, Uttar Pradesh	Pre-1889 (?)	The westernmost specimen seen by Oates (1889: 353–354). Most likely the 'specimens examined' and listed as 'vagrant Uttar' by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012: 487). I have not been able to trace this specimen.	Accepted as the specimen has been examined.
2	Terai region of San Pakwa, Morang District, eastern Nepal	23 February 1938	This specimen was collected by Lt.-Col. F. M. Bailey (Biswas 1969: 782–783); Most likely the 'specimens examined' and listed as 'vagrant ... Nepal terai' by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012: 487). In this regard, Praveen Jayadevan mentions: "There is a skin from Nepal in Natural History Museum, London (Y28-31) ( <i>lanceolata</i> draw has Nepal written), but I did not examine it physically. As there are no other Nepal skins, I believe this should be it" (Praveen Jayadevan, <i>pers comm.</i> , email, dated 8 December 2022). Probably included as 'vagrant' based on this specimen in Inskipp et al. (2016: 581, 587).	Accepted as the specimen has been examined.
3	Cherrapunji, Khasi hills, Meghalaya	06 October 1953	Specimen collected by Thakur Rupchand (RupChand, 1953) (UMMZ#187094)	Accepted based on validated, traceable specimen.
4	Kachchh, Gujarat	Undated	Donahue (1968) mentioned a specimen in the BNHS Collection, but Ganpule (2016) treated it as unconfirmed as it was not listed in the BNHS catalogue (Abdulali 1986).	Unconfirmed – specimen, if it exists, need re-examination.
5	Unknown locality	February 1880	Specimen in Museum and Institute of Zoology, Polish Academy of Sciences. (Iwan 2017).	Unconfirmed – as the exact location unknown. the record states that the location is India at large. But, not specifically where it is from.
6	Saldi, Amreli, Gujarat (21.58°N,71.32°E)	6 December 2013	Joshi (2013a, b) saw, and recorded a heavily streaked <i>Locustella</i> concurrently with a calling Common Grasshopper Warbler in the same season. Call recordings are available online on Xeno-Canto (XC157298).	Unconfirmed as lacking in detail.
7	Saldi, Amreli, Gujarat (21.58°N,71.32°E)	29 November 2014, 1 Dec 2014	Possibly the same bird as previous year, photographs also circulated in social media. However, based on available evidence and documentation, there is still uncertainty whether the physical features and call sonograms are within the known variations of Common Grasshopper Warbler <i>Locustella naevia</i> . Photographs are available online in Facebook (Bansal 2014).	Unconfirmed as opinion on the identity is not unanimous.
8	New Delhi	17 August 1962	Donahue's (1968: 425) specimen, collected at New Delhi on 17 August 1962 at Michigan State University, was re-examined, and confirmed as a Grasshopper Warbler by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012: 487).	Rejected
9	Chaupahari, Birbhum, West Bengal	March 2021	A boldly marked <i>Locustella</i> was photographed by Mandal (2021). Its identity is inconclusive, and this record has been treated as a probable Lanceolated Warbler or a Common Grasshopper Warbler, as experts are unable to convincingly identify the individual.	Unconfirmed as documentation is inadequate.
10	Joka wetlands, South 24 Parganas District (22.44°N, 88.30°E)	07, 13, 20, and 24 March 2010	Bird was observed stopping over at the place for about a month probably on passage and was photographed over several days. (Ray 2010a–c; Bhatia 2010) [267]	Accepted; also finds a mention as a map pointer on the distribution map (Grimmett et al. 2011).
11	Baruipur Marshes, Jela Sadar, South 24 Parganas District	13 March 2019	Manna (2019) saw the bird and heard it.	Unconfirmed, as lacking in evidence.
12	Baruipur Marshes, Jela Sadar, South 24 Parganas (22.36°N,88.39°E)	22 February to 30 March 2022	This record.	Accepted.

we used. However, the bird was very secretive. We could not elicit a vocal response from it on a subsequent visit in the late afternoon. Over the next few days, birders were unable to spot the bird. We began to assume that it used this area as a stop-over site on passage migration. On 5 March 2022, I again saw and photographed a Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* in a different patch of the same large grassland. The very next day, some birders saw, and photographed, a Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* near its initial location, and heard a second bird. Apparently, more than one individual uses this area for quite some time, during its passage migration, as several birds were

observed, and documented, by multiple observers till 30 March 2022 (seven days during 10–30 March 2022).

### Field observations

The Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* is a lance-headed (tapering head with a flattened forehead) bird that doesn't show a rounded head in any posture, unlike a Common/Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella lanceolata/Helopsaltes certhiola*, it has bold, dark streaking on the underparts right up to the throat, which the latter lacks. A lack of white-tipped tail rectrices differentiates it from a Pallas's Grasshopper



Fig. 1. Photographic and specimen records of Lanceolated Warbler.



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Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola*. (A juvenile Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Helopsaltes certhiola* may have scattered streaking on underparts, but it is mostly on its flanks; also, irrespective of its age, a Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler's *Helopsaltes certhiola* tail tips are always white.) Call recording is tricky, as the bird only calls when a playback is used, and stops calling when the playback is stopped! Its song is a continuous grasshopper-like buzz (Fig. 3), and the call is a variation of a disjointed or quick repeated *tik tik tik* (Fig. 2).

The Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* is the smallest, and most heavily marked *Locustella* sp. It is a long-distance

migrant, with its non-breeding grounds reportedly extending from the north-eastern parts of the Indian Subcontinent, eastwards to Myanmar and Indo-China, southwards to the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra; also northern Philippines, North Borneo, and western Java. It is a regular in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. Though there are several recent records from the latter (eBird 2022), its presence on the the Indian mainland remains poorly documented due to its secretive habits.

All references to historical and recent records are included in Table 1. Apart from these, there are several references in historical texts that are not supported by actual records. Oates (1889)

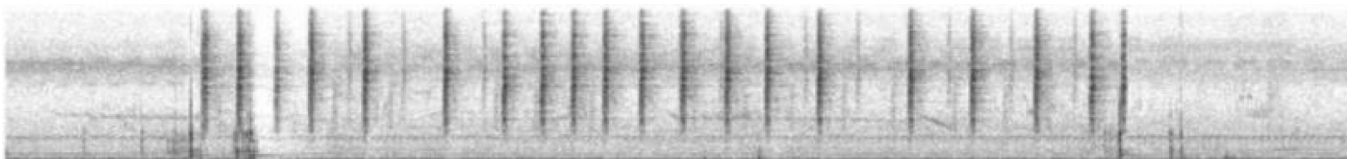


Fig. 2. Call of Lanceolated Warbler, Baruipur Marshes, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal (Mistri 2022)

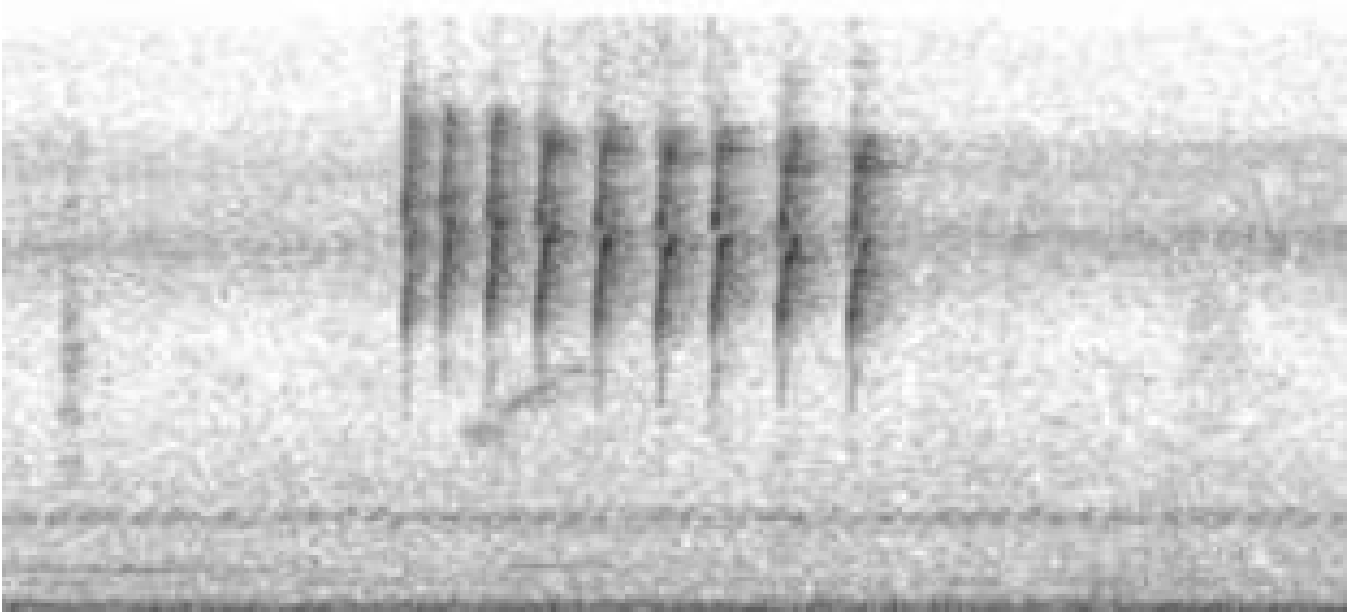


Fig. 3. Probable Sub-song or alarm call of Lanceolated Warbler, Baruipur Marshes, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal (Mistri 2022).



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267. Lanceolated Warbler in Joka Wetlands, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. March 2010.

includes it as a winter visitor to eastern portions of India, and states it probably extends through Bengal. Baker (1924: 401) stated it was rare beyond eastern Odisha and Bengal, indicating that it was present in both these localities. Ali & Ripley (1987) additionally mentioned Assam, but do not cite the source. Biswas (1969) said that it was a regular winter visitor in the plains of northern Bengal, not far from the Morang District of Nepal. However, it is important to note that in extant geography, the Morang District of Nepal is situated quite far from northern West Bengal.

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### Critically Endangered White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* in eastern Arunachal Pradesh: A status update

The White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* is categorised as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2022). It is presently distributed in northern Myanmar through Bhutan and north-eastern India (Price & Goodman 2015). It is presumed to be extinct in Nepal, Bangladesh, and other areas of India. Its range has been rapidly declining due to habitat loss, human disturbances, hunting, and other anthropogenic pressures (Price & Goodman 2015). In India, the Namdapha Tiger Reserve and Walong, both in Arunachal Pradesh, are the only sites that hold a nesting population of the species (Reddy et al. 2021).

Easternmost Arunachal Pradesh has diverse vegetation types, from subtropical broad-leaved forests to subtropical pine forests, temperate broad-leaved forests, alpine meadows, and perennial snow (Naniwadekar & Datta 2013) varying with elevations that range from 200–4,500 msl (Lodhi et al. 2014; Srinivasan 2010). However, because location and person-specific land cover classification algorithms are used autonomously for image classification in GIS, the mapping outputs mostly depend on the expert's or user's choices. When such disparate maps are compared globally, it may actually result in a description of a particular land cover category that is confusing (Lodhi et al. 2014). Namdapha and Kamlang Tiger Reserves are the only protected areas in the region. Few areas are categorised as Reserve Forests, but a majority of areas are unclassified forests governed by the local communities. To identify the White-bellied