

below canopy height. It seemed to consist of a rough platform with a cup of mosses and lichen being constructed on it. Both birds were observed adding small pieces of moss and lichen to the nest, although only one would leave the immediate area at any time to gather material from nearby trees, while its mate, usually the male, remained close to the nest.

The date, nest site, situation and construction all seem to be similar to nests described for other minivet species Campephagidae, which are placed high in a tree on a horizontal branch and have a woven cup lined with lichens as their basic structure (Ali and Ripley 1984).

This is the first nest of Short-billed Minivet recorded from Nepal (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985), and apparently for anywhere within its range (Ali and Ripley 1984).

I would like to thank Rodney Martins for comments on this note.

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Bristled Grass Warbler *Chaetornis striatus* new to and breeding in Nepal, and its separation from Large Grass Warbler *Graminicola bengalensis*

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On 6 May 1986, while birdwatching near Meghauli, at the western end of Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal, P.J.H. found what he believed to be a Bristled Grass Warbler *Chaetornis striatus* in the riverine grassland bordering the Rapti River, just inside the park. An extensive search of the area produced a minimum of five individuals. He was joined on 9 May 1986 by D.M.T. who was also able to observe these birds perching openly on the tops of grass stems, performing prolonged song flights and, on 13 May, nest building.

The presence of a species previously unrecorded from Nepal in such a well-watched area left us puzzled, especially since several birds were present, indicating an established colony. Identification appeared straightforward from the plates in Ali and Ripley (1983), but absolute certainty was confounded by the unavailability of further information about this species or Large Grass Warbler *Graminicola bengalensis*, a species regularly recorded at Chitwan but which we had not encountered at that time.

Subsequent examination of skins at the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, confirmed that differences between the two species are indeed as marked as depicted in Ali and Ripley (1983) and were in accordance with the plates and limited descriptions given in Ali and Ripley (1972). On the basis of the information below, future observers at Chitwan should have little difficulty in separating them, given adequate views.

DESCRIPTION

The fact that the birds were actively breeding made observations relatively easy and we were able to compile the following notes.

Generally a large buffy-fawn warbler with a distinctive song and bill shape. Size about that of Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, though no direct comparison was made. When perched, appeared upright, flat-crowned and somewhat long-necked. Upperparts buffy-fawn, crown slightly richer brown indistinctly streaked darker. Mantle and scapulars heavily streaked blackish, recalling Striated Warbler *Megalurus palustris*. Tertiaries long, dark blackish brown, fringed pale buff and contrasting with uniformly paler greater coverts and remiges. Faint whitish orbital ring and thin off-white supercilium contrasting with plain brown cheeks and ear-coverts. Throat white. Rest of underparts washed with greyish-buff of variable strength, becoming white on the belly and vent. Tail long, graduated and broad. Upper surface of tail dull brown, with numerous fine dark bars. Feathers tipped buffy white on upperside and clean white on underside. Central tail feathers paler, creating a two-tone effect to the tail as a whole when fanned. Uppertail coverts and, more indistinctly, rump regularly streaked darker. The wings appeared rather short, especially during song flight.

The dark bill appeared distinctly short and thick creating the curious impression of a large warbler with a shrike-like bill. Legs were fleshy pink, eye dark.

The song, based on two somewhat sparrow-like notes arranged in pairs, was incessantly repeated in song flight: 'ji jee' (pitch rising) . . . 'jee ji' (pitch falling) etc., with a c.0.5s interval between each pair of notes. Calls noted were a strong, harsh 'cha' and a soft 'zip'.

The song flights were often of about a minute's duration. The birds would leave the top of a grass stem where they had been perching and cover a wide circle, about 3m above the tops of the grass, in a gently undulating flight in

which the wings were 'whirred' in the manner of a babbler Timaliidae.

IDENTIFICATION POINTS

Coloration of the crown and mantle

In Large Grass Warbler the crown is blackish, with paler (light brown) streaking, and the mantle is blackish with silvery white streaking. This general coloration contrasts with the paler brown wings. The coloration and appearance of the upperparts of Bristled Grass Warbler is more similar to Striated Warbler – pale buff-brown with *darker* streaking arising from thicker pale fringes. This pattern creates no significant contrast with the wings.

Tail coloration and relative length of undertail coverts

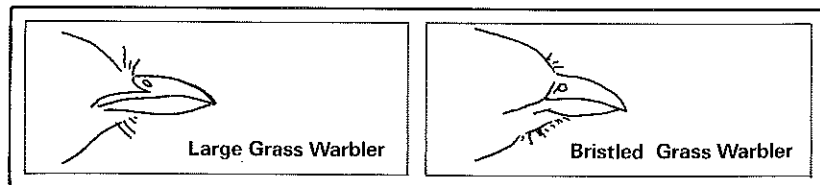
Large Grass Warbler has a more uniformly coloured, dark blackish brown tail. Only a few skins examined showed slightly paler webs to some inner feathers. Bristled Grass Warbler by contrast has a dull brown tail, with numerous fine dark bars, and has distinctly paler fringes to the inner feathers, presumably causing the two-tone effect noted in the field. Furthermore the tips of the uppertail feathers appear a distinctly duller and dirtier white than those of the undertail. The tail tips of Large Grass Warbler, however, are a similar clean white on both upper- and undertail surfaces. The undertail coverts of Bristled Grass Warbler extend to roughly half the total tail-length and thus appear far longer than those of Large Grass Warbler, which has short undertail coverts extending only about a quarter of the total tail-length.

Bill structure

Bristled Grass Warbler has a noticeably deeper bill, which thus appears proportionately shorter, though this feature is not nearly as marked as suggested in Ali and Ripley (1972), which depicts Large Grass Warbler with an exaggeratedly fine bill. The actual shape and structure of the bills of the two species are as illustrated in the Figure.

Two Large Grass Warblers, perhaps a pair, were observed together in the

Figure. A comparison of the bills of Large Grass Warbler and Bristled Grass Warbler.



same area shortly before our visit by A. Goodwin (verbally) and one was seen nearby by P. J. H. during our stay. These were very shy and skulking, though they do sing from exposed grass stems and have a display fight like that of Bristled Grass Warbler (Ali and Ripley 1972; C. Inskipp and T. P. Inskipp verbally), a species which is itself skulking except in the breeding season.

Bristled Grass Warbler breeds locally throughout the Indian subcontinent in grassland habitats similar to that at Chitwan and was listed by Inskipp and Inskipp (1985) as a species which could occur in Nepal. It is unclear whether the species has previously been overlooked, whether it is a late-arriving summer visitor to the area, occurring at a time when there have been fewer observers, or whether it has recently colonised the area.

We would like to thank Graham Cowles and Peter Colston for arranging access to the British Museum skin collection at Tring and Rodney Martins and Craig Robson for comments on this paper.

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Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala*: a new species for Nepal

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In the early morning of 6 March 1987, a party of birdwatchers was working an area of damp rice-fields between Biratnagar and Itahari in the lowlands of south-eastern Nepal with the intention of finding Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*.

After finding numerous Common Snipe *G. gallinago* we eventually flushed two or three Pintail Snipe and were following them up to try and obtain views of them on the ground, when a distinctly larger snipe was silently