

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*

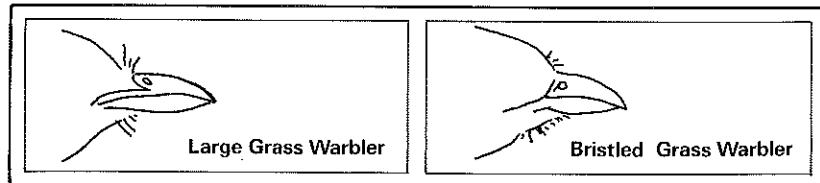
Large Grass Warbler has a more uniformly coloured, dark blackish brown tail. Only a few skins examined showed slightly paler webs to some inner feathers. Bristled Grass Warbler by contrast has a dull brown tail, with numerous fine dark bars, and has distinctly paler fringes to the inner feathers, presumably 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

flushed by P. Tipler, S. Taylor and myself from relatively dry ground close to some wet field edge. From my experience with Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* during several visits to its breeding grounds in Siberia I was fairly confident about the identity of the bird as soon as it got up. At this point a number of snipe, chiefly Common, but with at least two Pintail, rose and the unusual bird joined the party which circled over us at a height of some 10m or more. The flock did a couple of circuits of the immediate vicinity, affording us relatively brief, but quite adequate comparative views of the three species in the air at the same time, and my initial identification of the unusual bird was confirmed. The flock then moved over a small river and dropped into a more extensive area of wet fields, but we were unable to follow them up as a crossing point could not be found.

By comparing the birds in the air together, although only Common Snipe was actually alongside the Swinhoe's, it was apparent from all angles, i.e. in profile when going around, when directly overhead and when tail-on going away, that the Swinhoe's was distinctly larger and bulkier than the Common in both body-depth and width of the wing. The bill was roughly the same length as that of the Common Snipe and was held almost horizontal, but the plumage, i.e. wing-pattern above and below, was like that of a Pintail Snipe. All the Pintail Snipe that we had flushed looked distinctly smaller and shorter-billed than the Common Snipe, although Taylor (1984) found bill-length to be not particularly helpful when separating these two species. The body appeared rather long, although depth of breast and belly gave it a chunky appearance. Only the very tips of the toes, at most, projected a little beyond the tip of the tail, a feature that I have observed with Swinhoe's in Siberia. Plumage details were admittedly sparse. It had a typical snipe head-pattern, the belly was unmarked whitish, similar in extent to that of Common Snipe, the breast was dull light brownish, but the underwing was densely and uniformly barred throughout on the coverts, with no paler central areas visible as on Common Snipe. Neither the underwing nor the upperwing had the white trailing edge to the secondaries, which was visible on the Common Snipe in the air with it. The upperwing, seen as the bird was rising, was dull light brown, rather uniform and not as contrastingly marked as in Common Snipe, with flight feathers not obviously darker; in short it looked less striped on the upperparts than does Common Snipe but very much like Pintail Snipe in pattern and coloration both from above and below.

To summarize its features, the bird had the upper- and underwing pattern of a Pintail Snipe but it was obviously larger and longer-billed, it was a little larger and bulkier than Common Snipe, with a rather longer and deeper body and broader and slightly blunter primaries, but the bill was roughly the same length as that of Common Snipe. It was not as bulky as a Great Snipe *G. media*, which I have seen on two occasions previously, and was considered definitely not to have been large enough for a Solitary Snipe *G. solitaria*, although this is a species that I have never seen. The toes projected only very slightly beyond the tip of the tail, but no more so than in Common Snipe and

not as extensively as is considered to be diagnostic of Pintail (Taylor 1984). Compared to Pintail Snipe flushed at the same site it was noticeably larger and relatively longer-billed and with a heavier and slower flight action. Pintail Snipe appear distinctly smaller and a little shorter-billed when seen in flight with Common Snipe, and show a fairly prominent projection of the toes beyond the tip of the tail if this is looked for. The latter feature would have been visible in the good profile views obtained as the bird circled us, especially as we were looking for it. The remote possibility of the bird being the very similar Latham's Snipe *G. hardwickii* was discounted, partly on range (it has never been recorded from the Indian subcontinent) and from subsequent experience of it in Australia, where I felt that Latham's was substantially larger and bulkier than Swinhoe's and invariably called when flushed.

Although this is the first record for Nepal, it is not unexpected as this species has been recorded from various parts of eastern India in winter (Ali and Ripley 1984).

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### Letter: *Setornis criniger*, *Malacopteron albogulare* and conservation in Indonesia

In his paper on habitat preferences of the Hook-billed Bulbul *Setornis criniger* and the White-throated Babbler *Malacopteron albogulare*, Sheldon (1987) notes that a common denominator in their habitats is 'poor-soil' forest. In lowland forests, this term encompasses peat-swamp forest, heath forest (*kerangas*) on podzols, forests on ultrabasic soils, and also those transitional forests between *kerangas* and the typical rich lowland Mixed Dipterocarp Forest (MDF). While pedologically very different from each other, the soils have common factors of high acidity and severe nutrient deficiency or toxicity, resulting in poor quality forests with low species diversity.

More recent data from Borneo support these observations on habitat