

None of the references from the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) mentions this species to be breeding in Assam. However, Payne (2005) indicates that it breeds in Assam during the months of April–August, but this may be a transcription error, wherein the breeding months for a Plaintive Cuckoo, mentioned as 'April–August' in Baker (1934), was erroneously copied under Grey-bellied Cuckoo. The movement pattern of this species is little understood in eastern India, and hence more reports are required to obtain an overall picture.

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Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* from Ladakh, India

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The Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* is one of the largest Old World warblers (Baker 1997). It is a common and widespread warbler that breeds in northern- and temperate Europe, from West Norway, the British Isles, western- and southern France, eastwards, till Siberia, southwards, in Italy, the extreme northern part of Greece, central- and south-western Ukraine, and the north-eastern region of Kazakhstan (BirdLife International 2004). It is seen till the extreme part of West Asia, in the southern Ural Mountains. It is strongly migratory, flying south to tropical Africa in the winter, to Sierra Leone, southern Sudan, northern Congo, Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, and southern Somalia.

On 16 September 2016 while on a birding trip to Ladakh we were birding in the Tso Kar area (33.31°N, 77.96°E; 4530 m asl), which is a salt lake situated in the Rupshu Plateau and Valley in the southern part of Ladakh. In the early evening, we headed to Startsapuk Tso (33.26°N, 78.02°E), a freshwater lake on the south-eastern aspect of Tso Kar. Together, Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso form the More Plains pool. The terrain is rocky, with a few clumps of sedge, and nettles. We were birding on the south-eastern shore of the lake. At around 1715 hrs MK headed towards our car, which was parked some distance from the shore, when she saw a warbler hopping about on the ground near the

parked car. It was busy feeding on the seeds of the small clumps of grasses growing there on the stony ground. She was able to cautiously approach fairly close to it, and continued to observe it for the next ten minutes or so through binoculars, and also clicked several photographs of it, as it seemed quite unconcerned by her presence. MK was quite sure that she had never seen this particular warbler before, as it had an extremely bright yellow, and long supercilium, with a black line below, and a brightly coloured yellow throat and upper breast with an absolutely white belly. In the meantime, RD, NK & NS also came towards the car, so the bird got a bit disturbed and flew a little distance away. However, all saw it through binoculars, and NK also took a few pictures of it.

On going through the books available with us on the trip (Kazmierczak 2009; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we could not match the warbler we saw to any of the *Phylloscopus* warblers in the book. After returning from the trip, MK checked the all images of warblers on the Oriental Bird Images website (www.orientalbirdimages.org), but could not get a match. Though it was later realised that there was a single image of this species on the website, taken in Belgium, the angle of the bird in the photo was not useful in appreciating the full set of field features. Finally, MK sent a few pictures to Adesh Shivkar who confirmed the pictures

were of a Wood Warbler, which was, incidentally, reported by another group who visited the same site a couple of days after our visit. In its regular range, a Wood Warbler could be confused with a Common Chiffchaff *P. collybita*, or a Willow Warbler *P. trochilus*, but it can be differentiated by its yellow supercilium, throat, and upper breast, pale edges to its tertials, a shorter/broader tail, and a longer primary projection—as evident in the pictures [124-127].



All: Mandeep Kang

Wood warblers are documented to prefer shady but open woodlands of mature beech and oak trees (Baker 1997), however they are ground nesters. They are mainly insectivorous. But we saw the bird on stony ground in an open lakebed, feeding on grass seeds.

As far as we understand, this is the first record of a Wood Warbler in India (Praveen *et al.* 2016), and possibly the first documented one for South Asia (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). An unpublished record exists from Bhutan in 2007 (Farrow 2007), while it is listed for Afghanistan in Avibase without further details (<http://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/checklist.jsp?region=af>). Eastern populations migrate through south-western Russia and Iran in October and it is uncommon on passage through the United Arab Emirates during September and early October, arriving in Ethiopia in November before moving further south into the African continent (Clement 2016). Vagrants have been recorded from Seychelles, Aldabra, Amirantes, and Kuwait (Clement 2016). It is listed as a fairly common passage migrant/winter visitor in Oman, and a vagrant/migrant in Iran, and Iraq (OSME 2016). The bird we saw was also probably a vagrant from the eastern population migrating towards Africa, but it straggled eastwards into the Ladakh Valley.



124-127. Wood Warbler from different angles.

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