

FIRST RECORD OF A LANCEOLATED WARBLER IN CALIFORNIA

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On 11 September 1995, on Southeast Farallon Island, 42 km west of San Francisco, California, we found and banded a Lanceolated Warbler (*Locustella lanceolata*), the first recorded in the state.

Strong northwest winds characterized the weather of the week preceding 11 September. The morning of 9 September brought diminished southeast winds and high cloud cover. At approximately 1540 on 11 September, Hickey and Capitolo were censusing birds near the east landing of the island with the intention of catching any unbanded birds. Hickey spotted a small, brown bird scampering like a mouse to hide under the dead vegetation near a mist-net. She slowly approached the bird as it scurried short distances. At this time, Capitolo saw it dart into the opening of an auklet burrow, after which Hickey successfully flushed the bird into the net. Hickey and Capitolo had no previous experience with the genus *Locustella* and were unable to identify the bird at the time of capture.

We identified the bird as a *Locustella* by using Bruun and Singer (1970), then telephoned Peter Pyle and Keith Hansen for assistance in identifying the bird to species. We used plumage criteria, measurements, and wing formula information from Svensson (1992) to distinguish the bird as *L. lanceolata*. We took all appropriate measurements, wrote a detailed description, and sketched key plumage features. After photographing the bird, we pulled three undertail coverts and released it. Documentation has been provided to the California Bird Records Committee, and the undertail coverts have been deposited at the California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco (accession number 5107).

We resighted the bird the following morning around 1100 near the two houses on the southwest side of the island. Capitolo inadvertently flushed the bird and saw it fly and land on the ground under the bush mallow (*Lavatera*) around the houses, giving one loud, sharp chip. The bird also gave this call once in the banding lab. Hickey and Capitolo saw it preening at a distance of 10 m in good lighting. All three of us then observed the bird fly low to the ground for approximately 25 m when its brown, graduated tail was clearly visible. The bird was not seen again.

MEASUREMENTS AND DESCRIPTION

The bird (Figure 1) was mainly in fresh first basic plumage but appeared to have substantial juvenal plumage remaining. It had a partially pneumatized skull and no indication of active molt. The upperparts were pale brown with dark brown centers, giving the back and crown a boldly streaked appear-

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Figure 1. Lanceolated Warbler (*Locustella lanceolata*), Southeast Farallon Island, California, 11 September 1995. Note the unbarred graduated tail, the boldly streaked appearance of the back and uppertail coverts, and the streaking on the sides. It is highly unusual for the Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella certhiola*) to have streaking from the breast to the undertail coverts.

Photo by Mike Schultz

ance. The supercilium was buff, and a buff-yellow submoustachial stripe was set off by a dark brown malar streak and solid pale brown auriculars. Except for the belly, the underparts were streaked with brown. The throat was pale yellow-buff, the flanks were buff, and the belly was buffy white. The undertail coverts were pale buff with thin, dark brown shaft streaks along the distal one-third of each feather (Figure 2), while the rectrices were uniformly brown and the tail clearly graduated. The upper mandible was dark, contrasting with the uniformly pink lower mandible. The legs and feet were also pink, and the iris was olive-brown.

We recorded the following measurements: total length, 126 mm; bill length from the nostril, 7.1 mm; exposed culmen, 11.1 mm; tarsus, 19.7 mm; wing chord, 57 mm; notch on primary 9, 6.6 mm; tail (central rectrices), 45 mm; tail (outer rectrices), 32 mm; weight (with band), 12.3 g. Wing formula measurements were taken with primaries (p) numbered distally and secondaries (s) numbered proximally, as in Pyle et al. (1987). Wing formula: p10 reduced, longer than primary coverts by less than 1 mm; p9 notched; p8 emarginate and the longest primary; p9 < p8 by less than 1 mm; p7 < p8 by 2.0 mm; p6 < p8 by 4.2 mm; p5 < p8 by 6.8 mm; p4 < p8 by 7.0 mm; p3 < p8 by 9.0 mm; longest primary (p8) minus the longest inner secondaries (s1-6), 14.0 mm; primary projection beyond tertials (longest primary minus the longest tertial, s7), 11.0 mm.

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Figure 2. Lanceolated Warbler (*Locustella lanceolata*), Southeast Farallon Island, California, 11 September 1995. Note the thin and distinct central streaks of the undertail coverts. The difference in undertail covert pattern is valid for separating all races of the Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) from *lanceolata*. The central streaks on the Grasshopper Warbler's undertail coverts are wide, diffuse, and reach the base of the feathers.

Photo by Mike Schultz

IDENTIFICATION SUMMARY

The genus *Locustella* is characterized by a broad well-graduated tail, long broad undertail coverts, brown upperparts, and skulking behavior (Cramp 1992). The genus consists of eight or nine species of varying size and with varying amounts of streaking and tail graduation. Of these, five or six species, the River (*L. fluviatilis*), Savi's (*L. luscinioides*), Gray's (*L. fasciolata*, including *amnicola*), Middendorff's (*L. ochotensis*), and Pleske's or Styan's (*L. pleskei*) warblers, are unstreaked so should not be confused with the Lanceolated. Within the genus *Locustella*, only the Grasshopper (*L. naevia*) and Pallas' Grasshopper (*L. certhiola*) warblers resemble the Lanceolated closely.

There are several plumage characteristics that are useful in separating the Lanceolated from Pallas' Grasshopper Warbler, but not all of these features can be used conclusively. The tail of Pallas' has distinctive dark barring, a black subterminal band, and a pale grayish tip, although the subterminal dark patches may not be a constant feature, so their absence may not rule out the species (Galsworthy 1990). The Pallas' has a white bulge on the tip of the inner web of the tertials, a feature not found on the Lanceolated. It is unusual for Pallas' to have streaking that extends from the breast to the undertail coverts (Galsworthy 1990), a feature that is a constant for the Lanceolated. A well-marked and broad supercilium characterizes the Pallas'

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but its absence can not rule out the species. The supercilium of a Lanceolated is much less distinct and sometimes absent. One of the most useful features in separating these two species is the ground color of the upperparts. A distinct contrast between the olive-gray crown and the rufous back and rump of the Pallas' has been found to be constant in both adults and first-winter birds (Galsworthy 1990). The ground color of the Lanceolated, however, is a uniform olive-brown. Using a combination of the above criteria for separation of the Pallas' from Lanceolated, we have ruled out Pallas' as the possible identity of the Farallon bird. Ranging northeast to Kamchatka, Pallas' is the only other streaked *Locustella* likely to reach North America.

Separation of the Lanceolated from the Grasshopper Warbler (*L. naevia*) is challenging, but several features can be used to eliminate the latter. First, Cramp (1992) stated that the difference in undertail covert pattern is valid for separating all races of *naevia* from *lanceolata*. On the Lanceolated, the dark brown central streaks of the undertail coverts are thin, distinct, and restricted to the distal one-third of the feathers, as they were on the Farallon bird (Figure 2). The central streaks on the Grasshopper Warbler's undertail coverts are wide and diffuse, reaching the base of the feathers (Lewington et al 1991, Svensson 1992). Second, the range of the measurement for the notch on p9 recorded by Cramp (1992) for the Grasshopper (8.0–11.0 mm) is larger than that of the Lanceolated (6.0–8.0 mm). The Lanceolated's tertials have a well-defined border between the dark brown center and the chestnut edging, while the tertials of the Grasshopper tend to have a wide, diffuse margin between the central area and edging. Furthermore, the distinct streaking on the crown, rump, upper breast, and flanks of the Lanceolated differs from the more ill-defined and rounded or triangular streaks of the Grasshopper Warbler. These criteria clearly identify the Farallon bird as a Lanceolated Warbler. The Grasshopper Warbler breeds east only as far as northwestern Mongolia so is far less likely as a vagrant to North America than the Lanceolated.

The Japanese Marsh Warbler (*Megalurus pryeri*), with a very localized and limited breeding range in the Far East, resembles the Lanceolated in its streaked upperparts but differs in its unstreaked underparts, rufous upperparts, unstreaked nape, and much longer tail (P. J. Leader pers. comm.). Beaman (1995) recently placed this species in the genus *Locustella*.

DISTRIBUTION

The Lanceolated Warbler breeds in Eurasia from northern European Russia to Kamchatka, the Kurile Islands, and northern Japan. It winters in south-east Asia south to the Greater Sunda Islands, west to northern India and the Andaman Islands, and east to the Philippines (Cramp 1992, Rogers et al. 1995). With 63 records through 1994, this species is a rare vagrant to Britain, with the majority of records for Fair Isle, Shetland (Lewington et al. 1991, Rogers et al 1995). It is considered accidental in France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Yugoslavia. Finnish records include singing males in the summers of 1971, 1981, 1983, 1984, and 1985 (Lewington 1991), suggesting sporadic breeding. At Beidahe, Hebei Province, China, with a latitude almost identical to Southeast Farallon Island's, the passage of Lanceolated Warbler covers the period 22 August to 28 October,

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with a peak in numbers in the last days of September and the first week of October (M. Williams, fide P. J. Leader pers. comm.).

The Lanceolated Warbler found on Southeast Farallon Island constitutes the first record of this species for California. The only other published record for North America is of at least 25 birds on Attu Island in the western Aleutian Islands, Alaska, 4 June–15 July 1984 (Tobish 1985). The Southeast Farallon bird's occurrence coincided with a remarkable variety of other Asian land birds that reached the west coast of North America during the fall of 1995: there were reports of several Yellow Wagtails (*Motacilla flava*), a Black-backed Wagtail (*Motacilla lugens*), an Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*), two Dusky Warblers (*Phylloscopus fuscatus*), and several Northern Wheatears (*Oenanthe oenanthe*) (G. McCaskie, P. Pyle, and D. Yee pers. comm.). Evidently, many migratory birds of northeastern Asia are capable of reaching California.

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