

Rare birds (*Streptopelia roseogrisea*, *Caprimulgus europaeus unwini*, *Iduna rama*, *Acrocephalus agricola*) at Eilat's ringing station, Israel, autumn 2008

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We present details of four rare birds at the ringing station of the International Birding & Research Centre in Eilat, Israel, autumn 2008.

AFRICAN COLLARED DOVE

Streptopelia roseogrisea

On 12 September, an adult African Collared Dove was caught and ringed. This dove immediately drew our attention by its white belly and undertail coverts and its short tail. We have ringed more than 1500 Eurasian Collared Doves *S. decaocto* in the past two years and are aware that c0.5% have white bellies and undertail coverts, but this bird was different in the hand. We are alert to the differences between the two species, as African Collared Doves have previously been ringed at Eilat (Yosef *et al* 2004). However, all previous African Collared Dove records at Eilat were in spring. Identification was straightforward because a Eurasian Collared Dove was trapped simultaneously which allowed in-hand comparison of the two birds (Plate 1).

Overall, the African Collared Dove was smaller than the Eurasian. The wing, 168 mm long, was shorter than a Eurasian Collared Dove's (175–180 mm when fully grown). The tail was relatively short, 112 mm long, and full grown. In comparison, Eurasian Collared Doves have a tail 120 (not fully grown)–140 (adults) mm long. The white undertail coverts completely covered the black tail markings (Plate 1). Wing-chord length was 168 mm. Legs were reddish pink and iris deep red with some brown in the very thin inner circle, suggesting a probable second-winter bird. A white eye ring was clear and conspicuous (Plate 2). The bill looked smaller and shorter than the Eurasian's. The forehead was steeper and the colour of the head much pinker,



Plate 1. African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea* (left) alongside a Eurasian Collared Dove *S. decaocto* (right), 12 September 2008, Eilat, Israel. Note the pale undersides of *S. roseogrisea* and that its white undertail coverts completely cover the black tail markings. © Noam Weiss



Plate 2. African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*, 12 September 2008, Eilat, Israel. Note white eye-ring, steep forehead, pinkish tinge. © Noam Weiss

contrasting with the brown back. The back was sandy brown, warmer and somewhat darker in shade than the Eurasian's, and contrasted with the pink head and white belly. The lower back, rump and small and median coverts of the wing had a faint and broad scaly pattern. The secondaries, primary coverts and alula formed a grey area like that of the Eurasian Collared Dove's, but more contrasting. Primaries were dark. Underwing was white and grey. The chest was pink, just like the head, but contrasted with the white belly and undertail coverts.

The African Collared Dove inhabits sub-Saharan regions of Africa though it does breed in parts of Egypt and southern Arabia, and is known to be spreading north as recorded for Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*) in the 1980s (Shirihai 1996).

SYKES'S WARBLER *Iduna rama*

On the morning of 21 September we caught a little brown bird in one of our mist nets. While removing the bird it appeared to have the jizz of a *Phylloscopus* but colours of an *Acrocephalus* warbler. Once out of the net it was obvious that it was a '*Hippolais*' warbler, but not Eastern Olivaceous *Iduna pallida*, which we catch in large numbers. After years of examining short-winged Olivaceous Warblers and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers *I. p. elaeica* that we occasionally catch at the ringing station, it was clear that this bird was actually a Sykes's Warbler (see Helbig & Seibold 1999, Castell & Kirwan 2005).

The general colour was more yellow-brown than in Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, with silky white underparts (Plate 3). Head shape was round, resembling Upcher's Warbler (*Hippolais languida*). Ringers also know to check throat colour of '*Hippolais*' Warblers. It was yellower than Upcher's but more orange than that of Eastern Olivaceous. Legs looked short and had a horn-pink colour (Eastern Olivaceous has grey blue legs). The brown eye colour, worn tail and partially-worn primaries suggested it was an adult bird.

The bill was slenderer and shorter than that of an Eastern Olivaceous, but longer than that of Booted Warbler's *I. caligata*. The head pattern also differed from an Eastern Olivaceous and had a broader supercilium before the bill and some darkening above it which was hard to see from certain angles or even a short distance. Ear-coverts were whiter than the rest of the cheek. In addition, the outer tail feathers had a broad outer whitish shaft from bottom to top. Wing was rather rounded with $P_{2'} = P_{7/8}, P_{3'}, P_{4'}, P_{5}$ and P_6 were emarginated. The emargination on P_6 was faint but present (Table 1).

The bird was not an Eastern Olivaceous Warbler because of the round head shape and the shortish and slender looking bill, head pattern with a supercilium broad at base, general brown colour, *Phylloscopus*-like appearance, leg colour and tarsus length and tail pattern. In addition, the rather round wing formula where P_2 'falls' between $P_{7/8}$, emarginated P_6 (should be 5/6/7 in Eastern Olivaceous Warbler), and $P_1 > P_{2'}, P_2 > \text{tip}, P_6 > \text{tip}, P_{10} > \text{tip}$ convinced us of the same.



Plate 3. Sykes's Warbler *I. rama* (left) and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *I. pallida* (right) in-hand, 21 September 2008, Eilat, Israel. The general colour of the Sykes's Warbler is more yellow-brown with a slenderer and shorter bill, broader supercilium and the outer tail feathers had a broad outer whitish fringe from bottom to top. © Miguel Rouco

Table 1. Biometrics (in mm) and wing formula of the Sykes's Warbler *Iduna rama* ringed 21 September 2008 in Eilat, Israel, and some corresponding details from the literature for Sykes's, Booted and Eastern Olivaceous Warblers (http://www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/bi_hippolais_rama.htm).

	Eilat bird	<i>I. rama</i>	<i>I. caligata</i>	<i>I. p. elaeica</i>
Wing	61	59–65	57–64	60–71
Tail	50	48–56	43–50	48–59
Bill to skull	15.3	14.8–16.3	12.9–14.5	15–17.4
P1 > PC	5.7	6–10	6–10	3–7
P1 > P2	25.1			27–33
P6 > wing tip	2.7	1–3	1–3	3–6
P10 > wing tip	10.3	8–11	8–11	11–15
Emargination P6	Present	Present	Present	Absent
Additional biometrics				
Tarsus	19.3			
P2 =	P7/8			
P2 to wing tip	5.5			
Primary projection	14			

Separation of the bird from Booted Warbler was based on head pattern (no clear dark edge to upper supercilium, the paler area at ear-coverts and a ‘not very *Phylloscopus* look’) and, especially, on bill length (Table 1).

An odd measurement was $P_1 > pc = 5.7$ mm, 0.3 mm short of the minimum mentioned by the Portland Bird Observatory (www.portlandbirdobs.org.uk/birds). This could partly be a result of difficulty in straightening this small feather or the rather worn condition of P_1 .

PADDYFIELD WARBLER *Acrocephalus agricola*

Following the first half of the autumn in Eilat, which was characterized by eastern birds passing through, with waves of Willow Warblers *Phylloscopus trochilus acredula*, Common Whitethroats *Sylvia communis icterops* and *S. c. rubicola* and the afore-mentioned Sykes's Warbler, another eastern vagrant appeared on the morning of 8 October, a Paddyfield Warbler.

Already in the net, the warbler looked unusual. It was similar to the Sykes's Warbler caught just two weeks previously, in shape, head pattern and colour, but was obviously an *Acrocephalus* warbler. Out of the net it showed its main features, a prominent and long eyebrow with darkish eye stripe and cap, warm brownish tones to the upper parts, a short primary projection and an *Acrocephalus* atrophied P_1 . It was obvious that the bird was a Paddyfield Warbler.

At the ringing station a full description and biometrics were noted. The warbler was identified as a first year based on the olive-green eye, tongue spots and fresh plumage. The legs had a brown–horn colour and the feet were yellowish. The upper mandible was dark and lower mandible horn coloured but clearly dark towards the tip (Plate 4).

The face was strongly patterned with a wide and long light cream supercilium reaching well beyond the eyes to the end of the ear-coverts. A dark eye-stripe started at the lores and went all the way to the ears. The supercilium was bordered also from above by a dark stripe on the sides of the warm brown cap. Upper parts were warm brown with even rustier rump. The tail was warm brown. Wing coverts and flight feathers were warm brown and the tertials warm dark brown on the outer web, somewhat lighter on the inner web and clearly fringed cream. The underparts were creamy-white with sides of breast warm buff. Throat was whitish.

Biometrics helped confirm the identification: a short wing, 56 mm, which ruled out Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus* (shortest at Eilat 59 mm) and short primary projection of 9.8 mm. The wing formula (mm) showed a round wing with $P_2 = P_{7/8}$, $P_1 - PC = 2.1$, $P_1 - P_2 = 26.1$, $P_1 - \text{tip} = 30.1$, secondaries (SS) $1 - \text{tip} = 12.2$. An important feature was the relatively long emargination on $P_2 = 13.5$. The notch on the P_3 reached P_{10}/SS . Other measurements (mm): tail = 52.0, bill to skull = 16.0, bill to feathers = 9.3, tail round = 0.6, tarsus = 21.5, hind claw = 6.1.

The Paddyfield Warbler breeds in the Danube delta (Romania), Ukraine, north Black sea region, Caspian sea area and east to central Asia. They winter in southern Asia and India. In the Middle East they breed in northeastern Iran, and are a rare to scarce migrant in east Iran, Kuwait and Oman, and a vagrant to Cyprus and Israel (Shirihai 1996). The Paddyfield Warblers of the Danube area are known to migrate not through Turkey but north of the Black sea (Snow & Perrins 1998).

This observation is the fifth record of this interesting warbler in Israel. All past records also involved trapped birds, mainly from Eilat in October. The previous individual was seen in late October 1992.

EUROPEAN NIGHTJAR

Caprimulgus europaeus unwinii

On 27 October, a ranger of the Nature Reserves & Parks Authority brought to the IBRCE rehabilitation centre two nightjars that had crashed into windows in town. One was the usual European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus europaeus* but the other was much paler, with colours similar to those of Egyptian Nightjar *C. aegyptius* but the field marks were those of European Nightjar, such as the dark back stripes and the dark underwing coverts. The head pattern was of a classic *C. e. unwinii*, lacking the dark moustachial stripe and faint streaks on the crown (Plates 5 & 6).



Plate 4. Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, 8 October 2008, Eilat, Israel. Identified as a first year based on the olive-green eye, tongue spots and fresh plumage. © Shachar Alterman



Plate 5. European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus europaeus* (top) and *C. e. unwinii* (bottom). © Avi Meir

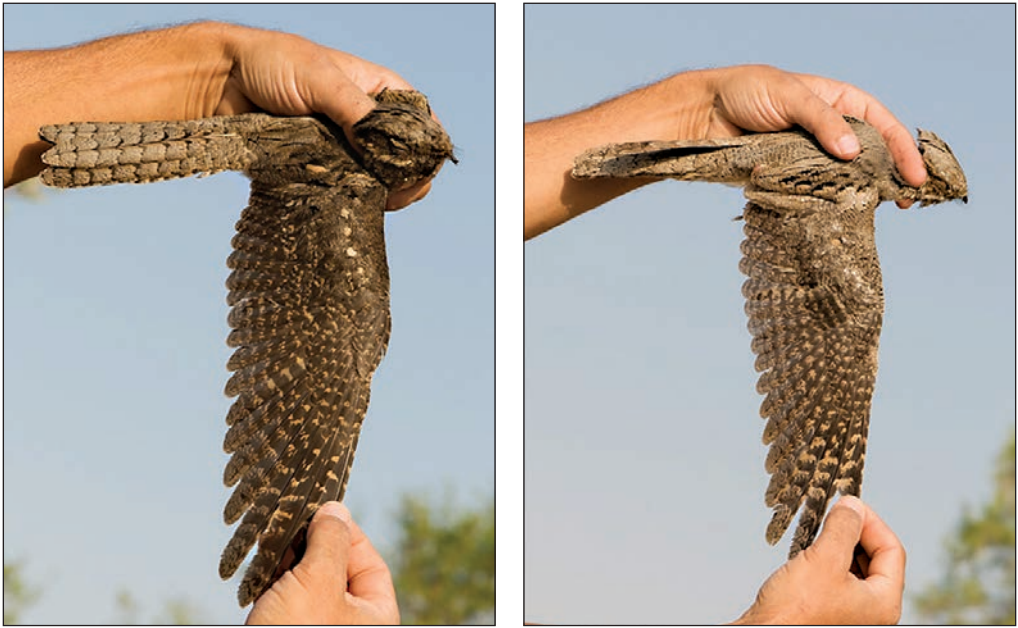


Plate 6. European Nightjars *Caprimulgus europaeus europaeus* (left) and *C. e. unwini* (right). © Avi Meir

Subspecies *unwini* is known as an uncommon visitor to the Persian gulf, and Shirihai (1996) considered it to be a scarce migrant in small numbers and rare winter visitor in Israel, identified mostly at Eilat. In recent years there have been no reports of *unwini* from Israel but a similar bird was seen at Neot Hakikar, in the southern Dead sea basin, on 22 September by NW.

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