Roosting behaviour of a Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* in Oman

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Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* breeds in central Asia from the Sayan and Altai mountains of northern Mongolia and southern Siberia through northern Sinkiang, southern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to the Himalayas with a possibly isolated population mainly in Szechwan. The species winters to the Indian subcontinent east to Thailand (Snow & Perrins 1998). In Oman, Hume's Warbler is a rare passage migrant and winter visitor late September–mid April (www.BirdsOman.com).

I was fortunate to have a wintering Hume's Warbler in my garden in Muscat during the winters of 2005/06 and 2006/07. It foraged mainly in our garden's large *Acacia* tree, and was especially active during late afternoons, allowing good sightings (Plate 1). Normally the bird disappeared early evening. In February 2007 I realised it had started roosting in a 3 m tall tree situated a couple of metres away from our patio. It would come to roost to the exact same branch nearly every night, some 1.5 m above ground level. The branch was extremely thin, and I presume this was chosen so it could detect subtle movements by potential predators at night. At the same time a Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* also roosted in the garden, choosing a similar type thin branch but in a different nearby tree. With my family sitting quietly on the patio a few metres away, both warblers allowed stunning close-up views.

Plate 1. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Muscat, Oman, 12 February 2007. © *Kjetil Schølberg*

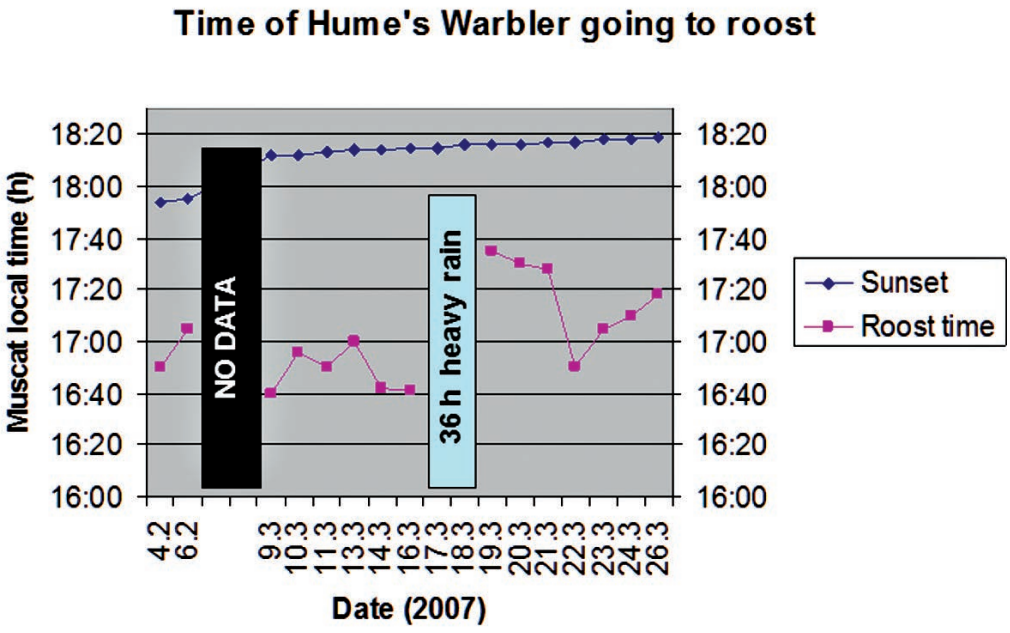

Figure 1. Time (pink curve) of Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* arriving at its night roosting branch, Muscat, Oman, 2007. Sunset is indicated in dark blue. Following the rain the bird seemed to 'reset' its clock, going to roost up to 1 hour later.

Because of my work commitments it was not possible to follow the bird on a regular basis; however, in March 2007 I was able to monitor it almost daily over a two week period. It would typically arrive in the garden some 5–25 min prior to going to roost. One typically gets alerted by this species by its characteristic disyllabic '*tse-huiit*' call. It would be foraging in the middle to upper parts of trees (preferably *Acacia*) for insects. In typical manner, it would flick its wings every 1–3 s, while picking insects from underneath leaves, occasionally hovering. In some situations, it would catch insects in flycatcher-like fashion. Following this it would typically preen itself over a period up to 4 min, while occasionally stretching. Eventually it would drop down to its roosting tree. Once there it would go to rest at its usual branch within seconds or a maximum of a minute after arriving in the roost tree. It would then sit motionless, 'inflating' its feathers (Plate 2).

On the evening of 17 March, we experienced heavy rain with a slight drop in temperature which lasted till midday 19 March. During these two days I could not locate the bird. On the evening of the 19th the bird once again turned up, but appeared to have 'reset' its clock: it arrived at its roosting branch 1 h later compared to the nights before the rain. On average it would go to roost 20–25 min later after the rain (Figure 1). This seemed logical given the longer daylight hours too. Prior to the rain it went to roost a mere 1 h 20 min (on average) before sunset. This I interpret as a 'leftover' from winter when sunsets are a lot earlier; at *c*17.15 h local time.

Only one morning, 14 March 2007, did I monitor it minute-by-minute till it left the roost. Up until 04.47 h it was sitting motionless. From 04.48–05.46 h it occasionally moved its head, looking around. At 05.47 h it stretched a bit before hopping onto another branch where it proceeded stretching its wings and feet. One minute later, at 05.48, it flew up into

Plate 2. Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* at night roost, Muscat, Oman, February 2007. © *Kolbjørn Schølberg*

the neighboring *Acacia* tree where it started foraging. Given it went to roost at 17.00 h the night before, this suggests a solid 12 h 47 min motionless slumber!

Cramp (1992) referred to a wintering Hume's Warbler in the Netherlands which followed set routes daily within some 1 km^2. It roosted in a park "at 2–3 m in dense growth of holly *Ilex* and *Cotoneaster*; also used 2nd site *c*500 m away in shrubbery between two blocks of flats." This confirms my observations since clearly my bird had alternative roost sites nearby—not every night did it come to my garden.

The last sighting that season was 30 March. Apart from the present record, in Oman I have previously seen a Hume's Warbler in my garden, 13 January–11 February 2003 and additionally I recorded two individuals at separate locations at the Saiq plateau, Jebel Akhdar, 27 January 2006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Edwin Lamers for his comments on my initial draft and to my brother Kjetil Schjølberg for the photo in Plate 1.

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