

The First Record of Pallas's Leaf Warbler

Phylloscopus proregulus in Iran

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Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus* breeds in the southeastern Russian Federation, northern Mongolia and northeastern China. The main wintering grounds are located in southern China and northern Vietnam (BirdLife International 2013). Although the main migration routes of the species seem to follow a simple north–south path, the bird occurs regularly in western Europe. It was formerly considered to be only a rare vagrant to western Europe, but is now known to be an annual visitor in small numbers, mainly in autumn (Svensson 2010).

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

At c09.45 h on 27 October 2013, while searching for Asiatic Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus venaticus* and photographing a wild sheep *Ovis* sp in a dry rocky river bed in Naybandan wildlife refuge (Shand valley, 32° 28' 33" N, 57° 19' 13" E, South Khorasan province), SATG spotted a small bird moving towards us through some bushes. The bird disappeared in a thick *Amygdalus* bush but soon reappeared and came much closer, eventually perching within 0.5 m of SATG's shoes. After 1–2 minutes, the bird moved away and perched on a stone near AM. After a while, the bird flew away and disappeared among the rocks in the river bed. The peculiar behaviour of the bird astonished us, as it showed almost no fear of humans and seemed as if it was trying to inspect us. According to our notes, there was a light wind at the time of our observation and the sky was cloudy. The temperature was c15°C.



Plate 1. Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Naybandan WR, Iran. © Arash Moody

DESCRIPTION AND IDENTIFICATION

The bird was immediately identified as a *Phylloscopus* warbler by its small and compact size, generally greenish appearance and conspicuous supercilium. The bird had two clear yellowish wing bars, a very dark eye stripe, a broad yellow supercilium, a conspicuous yellowish stripe through the centre of the crown and a conspicuous pale yellow rump. Other features noted at the time included the yellow-tinged alula and rather pale legs.

It was not possible to identify the bird at first because of the lack of reference books, but as soon as we had access to the relevant literature, we were able to identify the bird as a Pallas's Leaf Warbler. The bird was distinguished from Yellow-browed Warbler *P. inornatus* and Hume's Leaf Warbler *P. humei* by its bold yellow crown-stripe (Plate 1) and pale yellow rump (Plate 2). It also differed from Hume's Leaf Warbler in its brighter olive and yellow colouration, two very distinct wing-bars and rather pale legs. Two similar species, Lemon-rumped Warbler *P. chloronotus* and Chinese Leaf Warbler *P. yunnanensis*, were eliminated because of the deep yellow supercilium which is characteristic of *P. proregulus* (Per Alstrom *in litt*).



Plate 2. Distinct rump patch of Pallas's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus proregulus*, Naybandan WR, Iran. © Seyed Amir Talebi Golt

OCCURRENCE IN THE REGION

Given that Pallas's Leaf Warbler is a regular visitor to European countries from its east Asian breeding grounds, its occurrence as a vagrant in Iran is not unexpected. The occurrence of this individual in Naybandan wildlife refuge on 27 October coincides very well with the peak period of occurrence in western Europe, namely late October and November (Derek Scott *in litt*, Svensson 2010). The only other records of Pallas's Leaf Warbler in the Middle East would appear to be from Israel, where the bird has been recorded as a vagrant (Porter & Aspinall 2010) as well as some records from Turkey (Harrison & Grieve 2012). This record constitutes the first known occurrence of Pallas's Leaf Warbler in Iran and has been accepted by the Iran Records Committee. SATG regretfully passed away during a field investigation after submission of the manuscript.

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