

# Evidence of breeding of Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* in Iran

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In June 2015, at least six Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* were found in the eastern and central portions of Anzali wetland in Gilan province, Iran. The behaviour and song of the birds and the period during which they were present in the wetland are strongly suggestive of breeding. This is the first indication of breeding by Savi's Warbler in Iran since May 1958, when a male was collected and other birds were heard in song along the southern shore of Anzali wetland.

Savi's Warbler is a cryptic, territorial, migratory passerine (Cramp 1998). It occurs in large wet reed-beds and is generally considered to be a reed-bed specialist (Cramp 1992). Its distinctive insect-like song can be a good indication of the bird's presence during the breeding season. The species is a widespread passage migrant in the Middle East (Porter & Aspinall 2010) and has been found breeding in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Jordan, but hitherto there have been no confirmed records of breeding in Iran. Here, I present evidence which strongly suggests that Savi's Warblers were breeding at Anzali wetland in Gilan province, northern Iran, in 2015. The Anzali wetland complex (37° 25'–37° 30' N, 49° 25'–49° 30' E) lies on the southern coast of the Caspian sea, Gilan province, northern Iran. The wetland covers an area of 19 300 ha and is comprised of four parts: the western, eastern and central portions of the main wetland, and Siahkeshim wetland to the southwest. Parts of the eastern and central portions are covered in marsh



**Plate 1.** Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*, the eastern part of Anzali wetland, northern Iran, 16 June 2015.  
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**Plate 2.** A Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* in typical habitat, Anzali wetland, northern Iran, 23 June 2015. © A Ashoori

vegetation, especially the Common Reed *Phragmites australis*, as is most of Siahkeshim wetland, while part of the western portion is an open lagoon (Ashoori & Abdoos 2013).

In Iran, Savi's Warbler occurs as a rather scarce passage migrant mid March–late April and late July–October (Kaboli *et al* 2012). Savi's Warbler was first recorded in Iran in the late 19th century and at least a dozen specimens were obtained in the 1940s and 1950s. Most of these were probably birds on passage, but on 16 May 1958, several birds were heard in song and a male was collected on the south shore of Anzali Mordab in Gilan (Schüz 1959). There were about 30 records of the species in the south Caspian region and central and southern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s, but these were all thought to relate to birds on passage (DA Scott *in litt*). The only record between the late 1970s and 2015 was of a bird at Siahkeshim wetland in Gilan on 6 October 2009 (Khaleghizadeh *et al* 2011). However, the species is probably much commoner than the paucity of records might suggest, because of its skulking behaviour (Kaboli *et al* 2012).

On 16 June 2015, in the eastern part of the wetland, I heard the song of a Savi's Warbler in the reed-beds. I could not see the bird and so I played a commercial recording of Savi's Warbler. The bird responded to the play-back, soon appearing in front of me (Plate 1), and proceeded to sing vigorously, as if defending its territory. On 18 and 19 June 2015, I heard birds making the same song at a minimum of five other sites, at least 500 m from one another, in the central part of the wetland. The birds also responded to play-back. Although I was unable to find any nest, when I checked the same sites after one week, I heard singing of the birds at all of same sites and they responded to play-back of their song. I was able to see at least four of them in four different areas, sites where I had seen or heard them in previous visits. I found the birds again. These records are strongly

suggestive of breeding. The vegetation at all sites was very similar and was covered with dense low vegetation and litter, close to or within medium-height and tall stands of the Common Reed in shallow water (Plate 2) where has been reported as suitable places for nesting of Savi's Warbler in west Portugal (Neto 2006).

These records of Savi's Warblers in song and exhibiting territorial behaviour in suitable breeding habitat during the breeding season are the first evidence of probable breeding by this species in this area and in Iran since the 1950s. It is quite possible that Savi's Warbler is a regular breeding species in wetlands in Gilan province, but has been almost entirely overlooked in the past.

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