

First breeding record of Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* and apparent breeding of White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, for Iraq

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SEDGE WARBLER *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

On 28 May 2012, Richard Porter and I found a pair of Sedge Warblers *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* in Chami Razan area (35° 48' 31" N, 45° 01' 18" E, Figure 1) 47 km northwest of Sulaimani city, Iraqi Kurdistan. They were collecting food in low vegetation in an overgrown wooded stream. We watched them for at least an hour during which time they took invertebrates into the same spot in a patch of tangled sedge and other vegetation. At least five visits by each bird were made, carrying invertebrates. This seems to be the first breeding record in Iraq of this species (Ararat *et al* 2011, Salim *et al* 2012). A few days later, on 31 May 2012, RP found a pair of Sedge Warblers and heard three singing males in riverine vegetation, including reeds, in Mawat area (35° 56' 21" N, 45° 22' 57" E, Figure 1), 44 km north of Sulaimani city and close to the Iranian border.

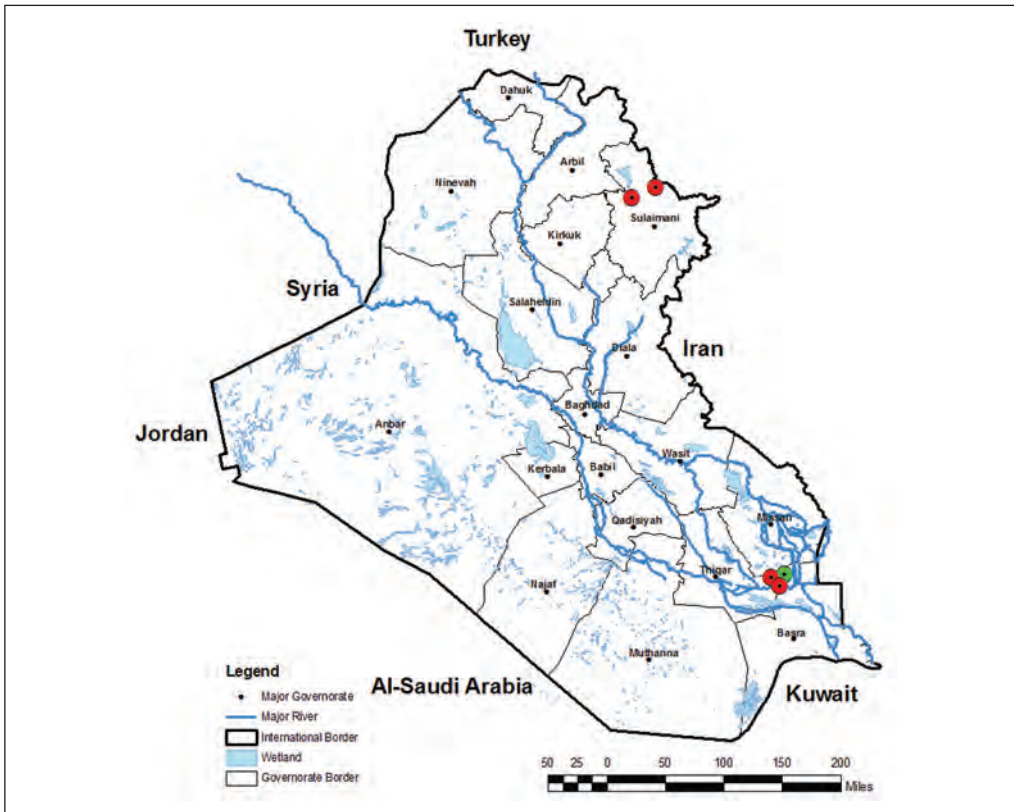


Figure 1. Map of Iraq showing locations mentioned in text. The red symbols show Chami Razan and Mawat (in north), Zichri marsh and Baghdadiya lake (Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*). The green symbol indicates the Zichri area (White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*).

There were some other interesting Sedge Warbler findings. On 15 May 2015, accompanied by Samad Ali and a boat driver, I found two pairs in the Central marshes, southern Iraq (Figure 1). The first pair was in Zichri marsh (31° 05' 51" N, 47° 07' 23" E), Thi-Qar governorate. I saw the second pair, at Baghdadiya lake (31° 01' 51" N, 47° 01' 58" E), Chibaish district, Thi-Qar governorate. The latter male (Plate 1) caught my attention by its loud singing. It was perching over a sedge plant. We moved the boat near it and it moved to other plants. The female was inside the vegetation and it followed the male. I spent 15 minutes watching the pair, photographing and taking notes.

WHITE-CROWNED WHEATEAR

Oenanthe leucopyga

As part of a joint project between Nature Iraq and BirdLife International (AVJC Foundation project), surveys were conducted in the Central marshes in the summers and winters of 2014 and 2015. On 26 May 2014, I used a driver to visit the



Plate 1. Singing male Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* 15 May 2015, Baghdadiya lake, Chibaish district, southern Iraq. © Laith Ali Al-Obeidi



Plate 2. White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, c30–35 days old, 26 May 2014, Zichri area, Al-Mdeina district, southern Iraq. © Laith Ali Al-Obeidi



Plate 3. White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*, c30–35 days old, 26 May 2014, Zichri area, Al-Mdeina district, southern Iraq. © Laith Ali Al-Obeidi

Zichri area (Figure 1), Basra governorate, southern Iraq. At an earth embankment (#712), which represents the eastern boundary of the Central marshes, I found a juvenile White-crowned Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga* (at 31° 06' 29" N, 47°13' 23" E). I managed to get c8–15 m from it and the observation, including photography, took 20 minutes (Plates 2, 3).

The bird lacked a white cap and had no bluish gloss on its body. It was confirmed as a juvenile from my photos and description by RP. It was c30–35 days old, and in view of the mainly sedentary nature of this species it must have bred in Iraq (Peter Castell *in litt* to RP). Palfery (1988) noted "In Arabia [eastern Saudi Arabia] in 1986, the first young hatched at the beginning of March and fledged a fortnight later. After fledging they were fed by the adults for a further three weeks until they became independent. They then moved out of the nesting area and occupied areas on the fringes of their parents' territories." There have been no breeding records of White-crowned Wheatear in Iraq (Ararat *et al* 2011, Salim *et al* 2012). The species was first recorded in Iraq in winter 2010 (Salim 2010). It is a breeding resident in Saudi Arabia (Jennings *et al* 2009) and a common resident in southern and western Jordan (Andrews *et al* 1999, Shirihai *et al* 1999). Additionally, the species has been recorded twice in Syria (Murdoch & Betton 2008), is rare in Kuwait (Al-Sirhan 2016) and is a vagrant to Iran (Scott & Adhami 2006).

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