

## The First Record of Spotted Bush Warbler *Locustella thoracica* in Thailand

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Knowledge of the status of some of the unstreaked Asian warblers in the genus *Locustella*, formerly placed in the otherwise African genus, *Bradypterus*, has been confounded by past uncertainties over the identification of both museum specimens and field sightings. We document the first recorded observation of a Spotted Bush Warbler *Locustella thoracica* in Thailand, from Chiang Rai Province, on 27 December 2013. This is the only non-breeding season record of this species away from the north and north-east of the Indian Subcontinent and northern Myanmar (DEL HOYO *ET AL.*, 2006), significantly extending its presumed wintering range. Nomenclature follows GILL & DONSKER (2014).

On 27 December 2013, during a routine mist-net check by WB, a warbler was found dead in the lowest panel of a mist-net set during ringing operations at Nam Kham Nature Reserve, Chiang Saen District, Chiang Rai ( $20^{\circ}17'N$ ,  $100^{\circ}04'E$ ) at about 10:27 h (Figure 1). On the basis of measurements and photographs of the specimen immediately after extraction from the net it was subsequently identified as a Spotted Bush Warbler *Locustella thoracica*. The specimen was preserved in 70% alcohol for deposition in the Natural History Museum, National Science Museum, Thailand. The record has been accepted by the Bird Records Committee of the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (LIMPARUNGPATTHANAKIJ *ET AL.*, 2014).

**Description.**—An unstreaked bush warbler with the typically strongly rounded tail and long, graduated under tail-coverts of the genus *Locustella*. The longest under tail-coverts were longer than the shortest outermost tail-feathers. Dark brown upperparts; grey-tinged sides of head and breast. Lower throat and upper breast grey-washed, with indistinct blackish spots or mottling. Brownish-washed flanks. Narrow whitish supercilium present but extent not specifically noted. White chin and throat, centre of lower breast and belly (Figure 1A). The individual feathers of the under tail-coverts had dark brown centres and sharply contrasting, narrow, white tips (broadest white tip 2.4 mm) (Figure 1B). Upper mandible blackish-grey, lower mandible, pale flesh with slightly dusky tip; legs pale horn. Wing length (maximum chord) 55 mm; tail 52 mm, bill (to skull) 15.6 mm; tarsus 18.9 mm. Wing strongly rounded; wing point p 4; p 2 -7.1 mm, falling roughly opposite the tips of the secondaries; p 3 -1.3 mm; p 5 -1.0 mm; p 6 -1.6 mm, p 7 -3.9 mm; p 8 -5.1 mm; p 9 -5.6 mm; p 10 - 6.4 mm. p 1 (outermost primary) 7.9 mm longer than longest primary covert (Figure 1C). Projection of primaries beyond tips of

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tertials 8.4 mm; p 1–p 2 = 17.6 mm; p1 to wing point 24.6 mm. Primaries 3–5 were emarginated. The primaries were numbered ascendantly—from the outermost inwards. The shortest (outermost) tail-feather was 27 mm shorter than the longest tail-feather; projection of the longest tail-feather beyond the longest under tail-covert was 19 mm.

It was noticeable that the bird had two ages of primaries. The outermost primaries, pp 1–7, were relatively fresh, having presumably been renewed earlier in the winter, whereas the innermost three primaries were old and worn.

**Identification.**—The present individual was identified as a Spotted Bush Warbler on the basis of its large size (wing 55 mm), long tail which projected 19 mm beyond the longest under tail-coverts, and the narrow white edges to the under tail-coverts, following ALSTROM *ET AL.* (2008). The similar Baikal Bush Warbler *L. davidi* is smaller and shorter tailed, with much broader white edges to the under tail-coverts, and a less strongly rounded wing. Baikal Bush Warbler (formerly considered a race, *shanensis*, of Spotted Bush Warbler) is a relatively common winter visitor to (mainly wetland) habitats in northern and central Thailand (LEKAGUL & ROUND, 1991; ROUND & LOSKOT, 1995) and a total of 51 have so far been ringed at Nam Kham. Two previous records of supposed Spotted Bush Warblers from northern Thailand, assigned to *L. t. przewalskii* and *L. t. thoracica*, (DEIGNAN 1945) were shown by DICKINSON *ET AL.* (2000) to be misidentified Russet Bush Warblers *L. mandelli*. The present record is therefore the first undoubted Spotted Bush Warbler for Thailand where, as with Baikal Bush Warbler, it is presumed to be a winter visitor. The Spotted Bush Warbler breeds from East and Central Himalayas, north and east to Central China, at elevations from 2200–3700 m (ALSTRÖM *ET AL.*, 2008; DEL HOYO *ET AL.*, 2006). The taxon *L. [t.] kashmirensis* of the western Himalayas is now considered to constitute a distinct species (ALSTRÖM *ET AL.*, 2008).

**Circumstances of the find.**—Ringing has been implemented regularly at the privately administered Nam Kham Nature Reserve since March 2008, mainly during the months September to May, so as to primarily sample migrant and wintering birds, in collaboration with Chiang Dao Wildlife Research Station, Wildlife Research Division, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Plants Conservation. The 14.4 ha site lies only a few km from the Mekong River and is managed primarily for reedbed and wetland birds. In the present instance, a Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* was seen flying away from the immediate vicinity of the Spotted Bush Warbler when it was found, having seemingly predated it. Some feathers were missing from the right wing but no other external injuries were evident. While an occasional predation incident may be inevitable, ringing operations are carried out by well-trained ringers who do their utmost to reduce netting accidents (there have been very few in over 2,600 handlings of birds at the site.) The value of results obtained through mist-netting, ringing and processing birds is considerable, as both the present observation and earlier observations (summarized in PIERCE *ET AL.*, 2013) indicate.



Figure 1. Spotted Bush Warbler *Locustella thoracica*, found dead, Nam Kham Nature Reserve, Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand, 27 December 2013: A, ventral view. B, view to show the underside of the tail in close-up. Note the relatively long projection of tail beyond the under tail-coverts, and also the very narrow whitish edges to the latter. C, details of the wing formula. Note the relatively long outermost primary (p 1); the wing point (p 4) and the relative positions of p 3 and p 5. Photos by Woraphot Bunkhwamdi.

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