

Cricket Longtail breeding in southern Morocco

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Cricket Longtail *Spiloptila clamans* is a small bird of the Cisticolididae family which breeds in a narrow band from southern Mauritania and northern Senegal across northern Nigeria and Chad to Sudan and Eritrea (Perrins 1998, del Hoyo et al 2006). Inside the boundary of the Western Palearctic (WP) (as defined in Cramp & Simmons 1977) it was until recently only recorded from an isolated area around Atâr in northern Mauritania (Lamarche 1988, Urban et al 1997, Perrins 1998, Snow & Perrins 1998). In recent years, there have been numerous more northern records and breeding evidence in Saharan Mauritania with, for instance, 15 individuals found near Choûm on 4 December 2006, three near Boû Lanouâr on 9 December 2006, and six near Teïchot, Banc d'Arguin, in December 2007 (van den Berg 2005, Demey 2006, van den Berg & Haas 2007, Isenmann et al 2010). In February 2008, it was

discovered in Oued Jenna along the Aousserd (Awserd) road in Western Sahara, Morocco (van den Berg & Haas 2008, Pettersson et al 2008). Since then, it was reported regularly from this area in most months (eg, van den Berg & Haas 2009, Bergier et al 2010a, 2011a, 2011b).

The species breeds almost throughout the year: in June-September in Mauritania, from January to November but mainly in September-October in Senegal and in January-April and August in former Sudan (Urban et al 1997, Perrins 1998, Snow & Perrins 1998, del Hoyo et al 2006, Isenmann et al 2010). In the Sahel zone, it may be partially migratory at the northern edge of the range, since some move south in the dry season (April-May in Mali), returning north during the rains (July-September) (Perrins 1998, Snow & Perrins 1998). However, no sign of seasonal movement was noted for Mauritania (Isenmann et al 2010).

283 Cricket Longtail / Krekelprinia *Spiloptila clamans*, Oued Jenna, Aousserd, Oued Ed-Dahab, Morocco, 15 March 2011 (David Monticelli)





284 Cricket Longtails / *Krekelprinia's Spiloptila clamans*, adult male with recently fledged juvenile, Aousserd, Oued Ed-Dahab, Morocco, 25 October 2010 (*Mohamed Radi*). Note yellowish gape-flanges in juvenile. **285** Cricket Longtail / *Krekelprinia Spiloptila clamans*, recently fledged juvenile, Aousserd, Oued Ed-Dahab, Morocco, 25 October 2010 (*Mohamed Radi*). Note yellowish gape-flanges and less black greater coverts. **286-287** Cricket Longtail / *Krekelprinia Spiloptila clamans* with nest material, Aousserd, Oued Ed-Dahab, Morocco, 3 February 2010 (*Fabian Schneider*)

Because of the geopolitical situation of the region, the southernmost Western Sahara (region of Oued Ed-Dahab-Lagouira) and especially the Aousserd region used to be one of the less birded areas in the WP, although it later proved to hold a much sought-after assemblage of desert and subtropical species, some of which are not easy to see inside the WP. One of these, African Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunnii dunnii*, is probably different enough to be considered a potential future split (Lees & Moores 2006, cf Svensson et al 2009). Following the political stabilisation of the region, the number of visiting naturalists has increased considerably in recent years. As a consequence, some significant ornithological discoveries have been made. Since the old records of the 1950s, Black-crowned Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix nigri-*

ceps had not been reported from the region until 1999 (Thévenot & Bergier 2008). African Dunn's Lark was first discovered by Lees & Moores (2006) and its subsequent breeding was recorded by Copete et al (2008). Desert Sparrow *Passer simplex* has only recently (since 1999) been discovered in this region where it was absent in the 1950s (Thévenot & Bergier 2008), and later it proved to be an abundant species in the area. Sudan Golden Sparrow *P luteus* was first found on 21 April 2009 (van den Berg & Haas 2009, Bergier et al 2010a, 2011a). Cricket Longtail was not discovered until February 2008 (Pettersson et al 2008), although Charlton (2011) claimed to have recorded a pair feeding at least two, probably three or more young on 19 September 2007.

Breeding records

Apart from Charlton (2011) in September 2007, Pettersson et al (2008) also reported a breeding record as they watched one singing male and one female seemingly collecting nest material at km 176 of the Dakhla-Aousserd road on 17 February 2008. Fabian Schneider photographed a male with nest material on 13 February 2010; he also found and photographed a nest located at the base of an *Acacia* tree (Fabian Schneider pers comm; Bergier et al 2011b). Two singing males and an adult feeding a young bird were observed on 17 April 2009 by Carlos Gutiérrez Expósito, José Luis Copete and Dave McAdams. In addition to these records, Bergier et al (2010a, 2010b, 2011a, 2011b) listed several observations made by various visiting birders in the years 2009 and 2010; some of these observations concerned singing or displaying birds.

In October 2010, we went on an exploratory naturalist (botanical and ornithological) survey to southern Western Sahara after the rainy season (for the map of the itinerary and list of species recorded, see Qninba et al (2011)). On 24 October, we arrived at Oued Jenna late in the day after exploring other parts of the region. Soon after arriving, a single Cricket Longtail was noted; it was restless and moved from one bush to another. As darkness fell, we went to sleep in a small Zaouia in Laglat, a few kilometers to the south-west of the Aousserd road. The next morning, we first explored the Laglat massif, then returned to Oued

Jenna in the afternoon. As soon as we arrived, we found a family of five Cricket Longtails in an *Acacia* bush. The birds were flying around following each other from one *Acacia* tree to another. An adult female was seen on the ground with a caterpillar. The adults were feeding the juveniles that were easily recognised by their begging behaviour and the conspicuous yellowish gape-flanges. Another family of three Cricket Longtails was observed c 200 m away from the first site and other birds were seen or heard in the area. As only a small portion (c 1.5 km) of the Oued Jenna was surveyed on our trip and considering the extensive potential breeding habitat, the area probably holds a considerable population.

Status

The species is apparently resident in this region as birds were recorded by various birders in December-May, July, September and October (our observations). However, we feel that labelling the species as 'resident breeder' in the region (Bergier & Thévenot 2010, Bergier et al 2010c) is premature as we still do not have sufficient information on its occurrence throughout the year. Visiting birders are encouraged to pay attention to the species' activity in all seasons and to record and document any breeding activity in this newly discovered population.

Other breeding species

During our survey we recorded the breeding ac-

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tivity (adults collecting nesting material, eggs, broods, juveniles) of several Saharan bird species (Qninba et al 2011), such as African Dunn's Lark, Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*, Thick-billed Lark *Ramphocoris clotbey*, Fulvous Babbler *Turdoides fulva*, Desert Sparrow and Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*. Other birds were observed singing, flight-displaying or alarming, such as Black-crowned Sparrow-lark, Bar-tailed Lark *A cinctura*, Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* and Desert Grey Shrike *Lanius elegans*. For some of these species, autumnal breeding has never been recorded in the WP.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Fabian Schneider for sharing his photographs and observations. Carlos Gutiérrez Expósito, José Luis Copete and Dave McAdams sent us their records. José Luis Copete and Alexander Lees kindly provided us with their respective papers. Arnoud van den Berg helped in updating the published records of the species in southern Morocco and Mauritania.

Samenvatting

KREKELPRINIA BROEDEND IN ZUID-MAROKKO Krekelpriņa *Spiloptila clamans* broedt overwegend in een smalle zone van Zuid-Mauretanië en Noord-Senegal via Noord-Nigeria en Tsjaad tot voormalig Soedan en Eritrea. Binnen het West-Palearctische gebied was hij ook vastgesteld rond Atâr, Noord-Mauretanië. In recente jaren zijn elders in het noorden van Mauretanië meer waarnemingen gedaan en broedgevallen geconstateerd. Vanaf september 2007 en februari 2008 zijn ook in de Westelijke Sahara in het zuiden van Marokko meerdere exemplaren waargenomen langs de weg naar Aousserd (Awserd), waarbij aanwijzingen voor broeden werden genoteerd. In 2009 werden juveniele gezien die werden gevoerd en in 2010 werd een nest gevonden. Dit artikel documenteert de waarnemingen in oktober 2010 van ten minste twee families (vijf en drie exemplaren) met adulte en juveniele, terwijl in de omgeving toen nog andere exemplaren werden gezien of gehoord. De soort lijkt daarmee behoorlijk algemeen op deze plek en is in bijna alle maanden van het jaar vastgesteld, waarbij broeden zowel in september-oktober als in februari-april plaatsvond.

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