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Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*: first record for Nepal

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While carrying out an ornithological survey of Royal Sukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal, on 22 December 2002, we heard an unusual bird call by the edge of Rani Tal marshes (28°51'N 80°11'E). We located the bird moving low just above the water at the edge of tall (1 m high) *Phragmites karka* and *Saccharum arundinaceum* grasses. We had several clear views to within 5 m at 10h35 for 15 minutes, using 10x50 and 8x42 binoculars. The weather was cool and foggy with a light wind.

In the field, the bird appeared to be same size as Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* but slightly more plump. It had a distinct broad white supercilium, a darker eye-stripe, dark ear-coverts, whitish throat, light rufous and unstreaked rump, and a streaked head and back. The call appeared to be distinctly different from any other *Acrocephalus* spp. warblers occurring at this site. We immediately identified the species as Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* using Grimmett *et al.* (1999). HSB and TG were familiar with the species from Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan, India.

We visited the site again on 24 and 25 December and made further observations of at least three individuals to as close as two metres. One individual was trapped, measured, photographed and released. In the hand, the supercilium was almost white, and terminated rather broadly behind eye. The crown, lores and moustachial area were dark grey-brown. The mandible was dark grey except for the base of lower mandible which was fleshy pink. The mantle and head were streaked with dark brown. The tarsi and feet were dark grey, with pale yellow soles. The call was a muffled, 'throaty' and thick *treck* as described in Mullarney *et al.* (1999). The following measurements were taken: wing: 60 mm; tarsus: 20.6 mm; bill length: 10.5 mm; weight 10 g.

These field notes and the photographs were checked with Grimmett *et al.* (1998, 1999) and Svensson (1992) and confirmed the identification as Moustached Warbler. This constitutes the first record for Nepal.

Within the Indian subcontinent, this species has been reported in India and Pakistan, where it is described as a winter visitor, possibly breeding in small numbers in northern areas (Ali and Ripley 1987, Roberts 1992, Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It is interesting to note that Inskipp and Inskipp (1991) had predicted the species to occur in west Nepal. We suspect this species to be either a passage migrant, or winter visitor, to Nepal in small numbers.

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