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First confirmed record of Alström's Warbler *Seicercus soror* in Laos, with comments on its status in South-East Asia

NICK DYMOND

On 29 January 2005, I was birding in central Laos near the village of Ban Naphong on highway 8, some 14 km east of the main north-south highway 13, at an altitude of c.200 m (at c.17°56′N 104°27′E). The area is dominated by outcrops and spectacular ridges of limestone karst which is the prime habitat of the restricted-range Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herberti*. Near the village, I located a trail leading into a narrow valley between two karst ridges. There was closed canopy forest in the valley floor, but more patchy, rather stunted forest with a broken canopy on the karst slopes. At around 09h30 I ventured with some difficulty some 20 m up the karst slope and soon had the good fortune to come on a foraging party of five Sooty Babblers. However, the knife-edge karst formations, some of which were loose, and the deep crevices made stalking the babblers extremely dangerous, so I retreated a little and found a safe, but very uncomfortable, spot to sit and wait.

Fortunately the babblers remained in the area and were intermittently in view for more than 20 minutes. During this period I heard sharp, high-pitched calls coming from the valley-floor understorey just below me. I recognised the calls as being those of Alström's Warbler, formerly called Plain-tailed Warbler *Seicercus soror*, and using a Sennheiser microphone and Sony Walkman cassette player I made a 50-second recording which includes an irregular sequence of nine monosyllabic call-notes and six disyllabic call-notes (Fig. 1). From my precarious position I had several brief views of the single calling bird in shaded light at ranges down to c.25 m, although it was within earshot for at least ten minutes. It had yellowish-green upperparts, greyish-green head with

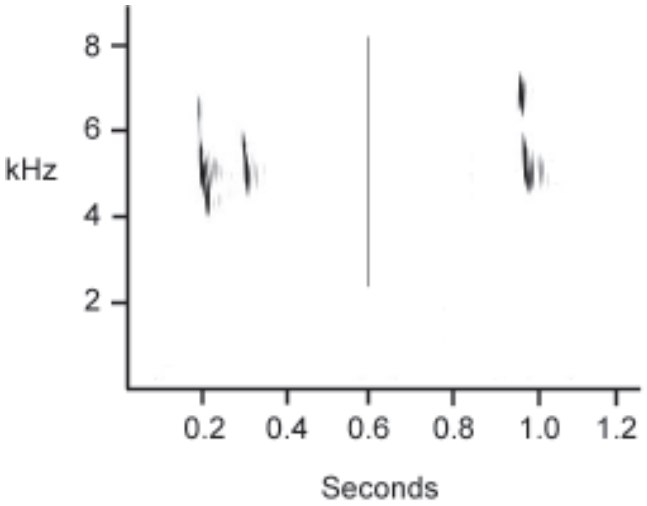

Figure 1. Sonograms of two calls of an individual Alström's Warbler *Seicercus soror*, recorded on 29 January 2005 near Ban Naphong, Laos.

dark grey lateral crown stripes, yellow eye-ring, bright yellow underparts, and a hint of a broken yellow wing-bar; I also had several glimpses of some white in the outer tail.

'Golden-spectacled Warbler' *S. burkii sensu lato* has recently been split into six species: Bianchi's Warbler *S. valentini*, Whistler's Warbler *S. whistleri*, Alström's Warbler *S. soror*, Martens's Warbler *S. omeiensis*, Grey-crowned Warbler *S. tephrocephalus* and Green-crowned Warbler *S. burkii* (Alström and Olsson 1999, 2000, Martens *et al.* 1999, 2002, Martens and Eck 2000, Olsson *et al.* 2004, Päckert *et al.* 2004; common names follow Rheindt 2006). Field identification of this group using plumage criteria is extremely difficult and usually impossible. In the breeding season knowledge of the distributional and altitudinal ranges together with recordings of the songs and call-notes of each species considerably reduces the identification problem. However, the current knowledge of the winter distribution of each species is far from complete, and usually the only vocalisation given away from the breeding areas is the call-note. Fortunately, the call-notes are much less confusing than the songs.

Each of the six species has diagnostic call-notes, but those of Alström's Warbler are, to my ears, more distinctive than the calls of the other five species. I describe the monosyllabic call as a sharp, high-pitched *tseet*, rather similar to the call of Pale-legged Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tenellipes*, but less clipped and without the metallic tone. This analogy is supported by U. Treesucon (*in litt.* 2006), although P. D. Round (*in litt.* 2006) likens it to a truncated Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*. I describe the disyllabic call as a sharp *tsit-dit*. Other descriptions of the two calls are *tsrit* and *tsi-dit* (Robson 2000) and 'a short, rather high-pitched, thin *tsi(-)dit* or, differently transcribed, *tsi(-)rit*, occasionally a single *tsrit*' (Alström and Olsson 1999). It was these very distinctive calls that were given incessantly by the single bird that I found near Ban Naphong. Jesper Hornskov (verbally 2005) and Per Alström (*in litt.* 2008) have heard the recording and concur with my identification as Alström's Warbler.

White-spectacled Warbler *S. affinis*, a close relative of the 'Golden-spectacled Warbler' complex, complicates the identification problem as not only does its altitudinal range overlap widely with that of both Alström's Warbler and Martens's Warbler, but some populations of *S. affinis* can have yellow rather than the usual white eye-rings (Olsson *et al.* 2004, Bairlein *et al.* 2006). However, all forms of White-spectacled Warbler have richly developed melodious songs and distinctive call-notes (Olsson *et al.* 2004, Bairlein *et al.* 2006, Rheindt 2006).

The complexities of 'Golden-spectacled Warbler' systematics had not been published when the Wildlife Conservation Society of New York carried out numerous ornithological surveys in Laos, largely during the 1990s, nor when BirdLife International carried out surveys in Vietnam, although most observers in both countries were aware that splits were likely. The published reports of those surveys list all relevant records as 'Golden-spectacled Warbler'. Thus my observation on 29 January 2005 constitutes the first confirmed record of Alström's Warbler in Laos.

The species breeds in China with apparently disjunct populations, one mainly in Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces in south-central China, and the other in Fujian, Zhejiang and Jiangxi provinces in south-east China (Alström and Olsson 1999, Bairlein *et al.* 2006, Rheindt 2006). It occupies a lower elevation than its congeners.

In winter it is the commonest *Seicercus* warbler in lowland areas of central and eastern Thailand, overlapping widely with Martens's Warbler at montane elevations, including on Khao Soi Dao in the extreme south-east, adjacent to the Cambodian border (P. D. Round *in litt.* 2006). In Cambodia it seems that only in the Cardoman mountains in the south-west have any *Seicercus* spp. been found, mostly Alström's Warbler (P. Davidson and J. C. Eames *in litt.* 2006), although there is at least one specimen of Martens's Warbler from the Cardoman mountains in the Natural History Museum, Tring, England (P.D. Round *in litt.* 2006). In Vietnam Alström's Warbler has been recorded fairly frequently in recent winters on the Di Linh and Da Lat plateaux of South Annam, while one at Cat Tien national park in the winter of 2005–2006 was the first record for Cochinchina (C. R. Robson *in litt.* 2006). Grey-crowned Warbler and Bianchi's Warbler occur in northern Thailand, northern Laos and northern Vietnam, but the reported occurrence of Grey-crowned Warbler in Cochinchina (Robson 2000) is most likely to refer to Martens's Warbler which had not then been split from *S. tephrocephalus sensu lato*. Given this wintering range, the occurrence of Alström's Warbler in Laos is not at all surprising and further records in central and southern Laos can be expected.

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First records of Wallace's Hanging-parrot *Loriculus flosculus* from Rinca Island, Komodo National Park, Indonesia

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Wallace's Hanging-parrot *Loriculus flosculus* is a small parrot endemic to Flores Island, East Nusa Tenggara, primarily in tropical semi-evergreen, and moist-deciduous rain forest (250–1,000 m), at the west and eastern parts of the island (BirdLife International 2003, 2004, Coates and Bishop 1997). This parrot is considered Endangered because it has a small global range and probably a small population which is threatened by ongoing conversion of tropical forest habitats on Flores (BirdLife International 2001, 2004). Here we detail two independent records (in 2003 and 2006) extending its range westwards to Rinca Island, within Komodo National Park, Indonesia. Rinca Island (205 km^2) is dominated by monsoon savanna (55% of land area), except in the south, which is predominantly covered by tropical dry deciduous forest. The elevation is 0–765 m. The island is separated from adjacent West Flores by a narrow strait only 400 m wide.

At 10h00 on 28 April 2003, in Loh Dasami valley (8°46′19.9″′S 119°39′15.6″E; at about 10–20 m altitude), two green parrots were observed in flight below the canopy of coastal moist deciduous forest (Monk *et al*. 1997) area in the south of Rinca Island. The forest was dominated by *Pterospermum javanicum* (Sterculiaceae), a tree that can reach 25 m in height (Rudiharto 2006). The parrots were followed to a roosting tree. The birds were estimated to be c.10–12 cm in length and the predominant colour was bright green. They possessed a dark red nape, bright red rump, red uppertail-coverts, and bright red bills, confirming that these birds were Wallace's Hanging-parrots. They were readily distinguished from the uniformly green plumage of the Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematoduis* (race *weberi*, endemic to Flores Island; Coates and Bishop 1997). Furthermore, we noted differences in the plumage of the two birds, with one possessing a red spot at the throat, whilst the throat of the

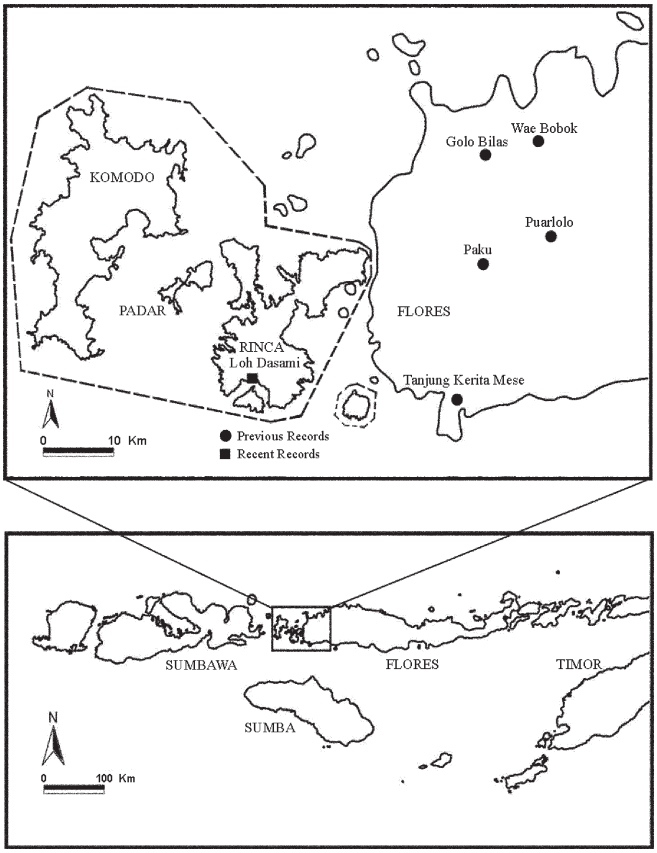

Figure 1. Localities indicating the presence of Wallace's Hanging-parrot *Loriculus flosculus* on Flores and Rinca islands, Indonesia. The map below is that of the Lesser Sunda region, within which Flores and Rinca lie. Dashed lines show the boundary of Komodo National Park. Solid circles indicate previous records of Wallace's Hanging-parrot while the solid square indicates our current observations.