NOTES

AN ARCTIC WARBLER IN BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

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On 12 October 1991 we discovered an Arctic Warbler (*Phylloscopus borealis*) on Punta Eugenia, west of Guerrero Negro, Baja California. This sighting constitutes the first record of this primarily Old World species from Mexico and from North America south of Alaska.

The locality of the observation was Rancho San Miguel, 27°30' N, 114°31' W, at km-marker 122 on the road from Ejido Vizcaino to Bahía Tortugas and the tip of Punta Eugenia. The ranch, located about 100 m southwest of the road, consisted of two buildings and a small courtyard containing several shrubs and one flowering ornamental acacia (Leguminosae), 8 m tall. A natural spring in a canyon 300 m southwest of the buildings provided water for the vegetation at the ranch. The outer portion of Punta Eugenia, including the area surrounding the ranch, is arid, rocky, and barren, devoid of leafy vegetation; Rancho San Miguel and the nearby Rancho Santa Monica (2 km southeast of Rancho San Miguel) were small oases of greenery attracting migratory landbirds.

We studied the Arctic Warbler from 1220 to 1255 through binoculars, at ranges as close as 4 m, in sunny lighting. The sparse branches of the acacia allowed optimal viewing of the bird and double checking of all field marks. Also foraging in the tree were two Yellow Warblers (*Dendroica petechia*), a Magnolia Warbler (*D. magnolia*), a Yellow-rumped Warbler (*D. coronata*), two Townsend's Warblers (*D. townsendi*), and a Painted Redstart (*Myioborus pictus*).

The Arctic Warbler was similar in body size to the Townsend's Warblers but had a larger head and a shorter tail. The bill was significantly larger than that of the *Dendroica* warblers in the tree; its relative size and the bird's head shape suggested a Louisiana Waterthrush (*Seiurus motacilla*). The Arctic Warbler was active, continually hopping and flying short distances, at times swinging upright on vertical branches of the acacia. It foraged for insects primarily in the low to middle portions of the tree and upper portions of the surrounding shrubbery; on one occasion it foraged in the uppermost branches of the tree.

The bird was in fresh plumage. The upperparts were uniformly drab olive with a slight grayish cast. The tips of four or five outer greater coverts were pale creamy tinged lemon, forming a distinct lower wingbar. One or two median coverts had minute pale tips of the same color, forming a vague upper wing bar. The flight feathers were dusky, with narrow greenish-yellow edges on the outer webs of the primaries. A prominent wide creamy superciliary extended from the base of the bill to well behind the eye; its posterior end curved up toward the nape when the bird looked upward. Below the superciliary was a dusky eyeline extending evenly through the lores. A small indistinct whitish subocular crescent was present. The auriculars were dirty lemon with diffuse pale dusky streaking concentrated toward the rear. The underparts were primarily whitish or off-white unevenly tinged lemon. The paleness of the lower throat extended dorsally, posterior to the auriculars, to the sides of the nape. Pale dusky patches with diffuse dusky streaking were present on the sides of

the breast; a vague hint of this streaking extended across the center of the breast. The thigh feathers were mixed dusky and pale.

The wing tips were long with seven evenly spaced primary tips visible beyond the tertials. The tip of the tenth (outer) primary, visible when the bird drooped its wing, extended 1–2 mm beyond the tips of the primary coverts. The tips of the undertail coverts fell beyond the tips of the closed wing. The eye and maxilla were dark; the mandible was bright orangish on the basal four fifths, including the sides, becoming dusky at the tip. The legs were dusky flesh-colored, the soles of the feet slightly brighter. The Arctic Warbler did not vocalize while we watched it.

Both of us immediately recognized the bird as an Arctic Warbler from our previous field experience with the species in Southeast Asia, Britain, and Alaska, and with most of the other migratory *Phylloscopus* species in Eurasia. The combination of the shape, size, plumage characters, and the presence of a tenth primary rules out all species of North American warblers and vireos and is diagnostic of the genus *Phylloscopus*. Within this genus the lack of a crown stripe and presence of a single prominent wingbar rule out all species except the Arctic Warbler, Greenish Warbler (*P. trochiloides*), Green Warbler (*P. nitidus*), Two-barred Greenish Warbler (*P. plumbeitarsus*), northern races of the Chiffchaff (*P. collybita abietinus* and *P. c. tristis*), and perhaps worn individuals of the central Asiatic race of the Yellow-browed Warbler (*P. inornatus humei*) (Dean 1985). Features that distinguish the Arctic Warbler and the bird we observed from these include the combination of the large

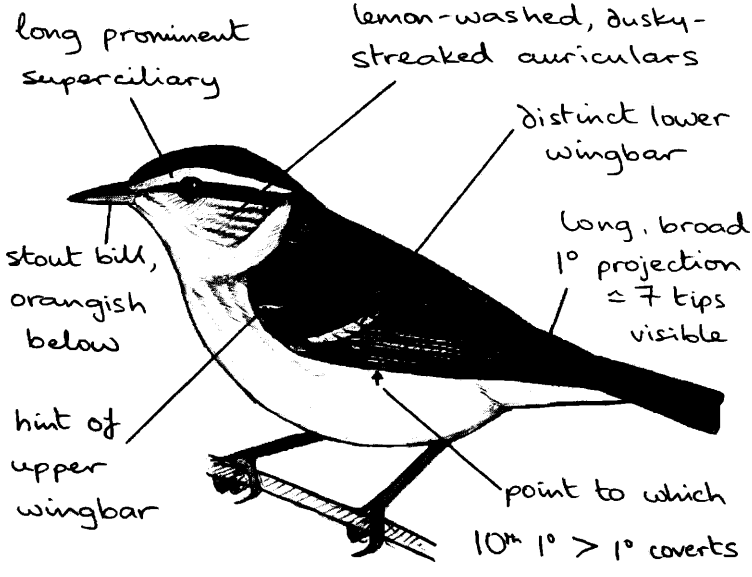

Figure 1. Arctic Warbler, Rancho San Miguel, Baja California, 12 October 1991. Drawing derived from field sketches and notes taken at the time of observation.

Sketch by Steve N.G. Howell

size and large bill, hint of an upper wing bar, long and prominent superciliary that tends to curve upward posteriorly, lemon auriculars streaked with pale dusky, extensive orange at the base of the mandible and, especially, the long wing tip and wing formula (Ticehurst 1938, Dement'ev et al. 1954, Williamson 1967, Marshall and Pantuwattana 1969, King et al. 1975, Robertson 1984, Svensson 1984, Dean 1985). The similar species have more delicate bills, fewer primary tips visible beyond the tertials (4–6; 7 in the Greenish Warbler), and a longer 10th primary, extending 4–10 mm beyond the tips of the primary coverts. We confirmed these differences and our identification by examining museum specimens at the California Academy of Sciences (CAS), San Francisco, and the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), New York.

The Arctic Warbler breeds from arctic Scandinavia through Siberia to western Alaska, south to northern Mongolia and northern Japan, and winters primarily in southeastern China, the Philippine Islands, and the Malay Peninsula (Dement'ev et al. 1954, Vaurie 1959). The species is a regular vagrant to Britain (Rogers 1987); a July vagrant collected on Prince Patrick Island, Northwest Territories (Godfrey 1966), represents the only previous New World record outside Alaska. The only other published North American records of *Phylloscopus* warblers south of Alaska are of three Dusky Warblers (*P. fuscatus)* in central California (Pyle et al. 1983, Roberson 1986, Pyle and McCaskie 1992).

Vaurie (1959) recognized six subspecies of the Arctic Warbler, including the Alaskan *kennicotti* and five Asiatic forms. The bird we observed was large and had a very large bill, drab olive upperparts, lack of extensive yellow on the underparts, and a relatively long tenth primary, features suggesting one of the northern Asiatic subspecies, *borealis* or *xanthodryas*, rather than *kennicotti* (Ticehurst 1938, Dement'ev et al. 1954; Vaurie 1954, 1959; pers. obs.). As the taxonomy of northwestern populations of the Arctic Warbler is incompletely resolved (D. Gibson in Phillips 1991), an identification to subspecies should be considered tentative.

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