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Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* new to Plateau State, Nigeria

On a field trip on 2 Oct 2004 to Panyam Fish Farm (9°25'N, 9°12'E), 70 km SSE of Jos, on the Jos Plateau in central Nigeria, a Little Rush Warbler *Bradypterus baboecala* was discovered, constituting a species new to Plateau State (Elgood *et al.* 1994, Urban *et al.* 1997, M. Hopkins pers. comm.). The site consists of a series of dikes containing fish ponds in a farmland landscape, the ponds being bordered of varying amounts of *Typha*, *Phragmites* and *Cyperus* reeds. At 7h30 the bird was heard singing while hidden in the reeds in one of the ponds. Since the song was unknown to the observers, recordings of songs and calls (Chappuis 2000) of species potentially present were played, resulting in responses from Greater Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus rufescens* and Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis*. After a brief view of a medium-sized dark warbler, the song of Little Rush Warbler was played. It was identical to that of the bird singing in the reeds, which also responded to the playback, approaching to within 1 m. The song was distinctive: a loud series of identical, dry, single notes, accelerating and stopping abruptly. Wing-clapping was also heard, as in display flight (Urban *et al.* 1997).

The bird was difficult to see, often moving low in the vegetation, but it was seen singing and moving a few times. The upperparts and flanks were dark chestnut brown, rather than olive-brown as described by Urban *et al.* (1997) and Borrow & Demey (2001), and tinged rufous on rump and upper tail coverts. The tail was dark, graduated, and quite long. The dark brown head bore a pale supercilium. The throat, breast and belly were whitish, with darker streaks creating a band on the breast. The bill was blackish, the eyes dark brown and the legs pinkish. The bird was restless and perched in a near-horizontal position.

Little Rush Warbler is a widespread but fragmented African endemic, with the largest populations in southern Africa. In W Africa it is known as a rare and local resident in small, isolated patches. *B. b. chadensis* occurs around Lake Chad in NE Nigeria and Chad, where it breeds Apr–May (Urban *et al.* 1997, Ottosson *et al.* 2001), while *B. b. centralis* occurs in small areas in N, S central and SE Nigeria (Elgood *et al.* 1994) between 300 and 450 km from Panyam, and also on the border of W Cameroon, where it breeds Jun–Aug (Serle 1981), and along the lower Sanaga river in Cameroon. The species also occurs in S Congo, where it has not yet been determined to subspecies (Borrow & Demey 2001). Recently, a Little Rush Warbler (with

streaked breast) was found north of Lomé in Togo (Selfe 2003), and there is a single, unconfirmed record of a bird singing in N Ivory Coast (Thiollay 1985).

The bird at Panyam probably belonged to *B. b. centralis*, based on the breast streaking, which is lacking in *B. b. chadensis*, and on the known ranges of the ssp. in Nigeria. The species may be overlooked in W Africa owing to its secretive behaviour (Elgood *et al.* 1994, Borrow & Demey 2001, Selfe 2003).

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