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Olive-tree Warblers in the Kalahari

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Having done my ringing apprenticeship in Gauteng, it was a shock to the system moving down to a farm near Witsand Nature Reserve in the Kalahari, where the 30-50 (and sometimes 100) birds ringed during a morning session in Gauteng was exchanged for 20 birds ringed per session, on a good day, in the Kalahari. But what I lost in quantity was often made up for in quality. So it was also with my last ringing session. The previous morning's ring produced a single White-browed Sparrow-Weaver in five hours of ringing, and so I decided that a change of site was necessary.

On 19 March I set up at one of my other sites, situated at the base of a mountain in a patch of Swarthaak *Acacia mellifera*. The first check of the morning produced a handful of birds, but nothing exceptional. On the second check, I was rather surprised to find an Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* in my net, and even more surprised when I found two Olive-tree Warblers *Hippolais olivetorum* and another three Icterine Warblers further down in the nets! I had never previously recorded either one of these species on the farm (although having only lived here for 18 months), and the field guides indicated that Olive-tree Warblers are not supposed to occur here. Knowing this, and to guard against the possibility that the early mornings were starting to play tricks on my mind, I immediately phoned a nearby birder who arrived within minutes and confirmed the identities of the birds. Suddenly the two hours it would take me to get my nets out of the thorns didn't seem so bad! Later in the morning I caught a third Olive-tree Warbler, and heard another individual calling from the same patch of bush.

Herremans (2005a) indicates that Olive-tree Warblers only occur as far west as eastern North-West Province and as far south as south-western Botswana, ca. 400 km distant, while Icterine Warblers have occasionally been recorded in the vicinity of the farm (Herremans 2005b). Owing to the fact that neither species has previously been recorded on (or near) the farm, the timing of these observations and the numbers involved (at least three Olive-tree Warblers, a species that usually occurs singly [Herremans 2005a]), it is believed that these birds were most probably migrating through this area rather than being resident here, as is the case with some other species on the farm. It is interesting that at least one Olive-tree Warbler was also present at Tswalu Kalahari Reserve near Kuruman during March (B. Smit, pers. comm.). This raises the possibility that this species may be more common in the Kalahari than presently thought, or that they show influxes into this area during suitable climatic events. This is lent further support by a number of other bird species being recorded from the same farm for the first time this season, some of which were also out of range.

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References

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Herremans MLJ. 2005b. Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina*. In: Hockey PAR, Dean RWJ, Ryan PG (eds), Roberts birds of southern Africa (7th edn). Cape Town: Trustees of the John Voelcker Bird Book Fund. pp 804-805.



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