

Söndagen 11:e september 2011 blev en bra kryssardag på Björn. Jelmer Poelstra, gästforskare i Uppsala från Holland, hittade Upplands första och Sveriges blott fjärde eksångare (förutsatt godkännande av RK, SOF:s raritetskommitté). Fågeln upptäcktes på morgonen i västra dungen på Björn. Den var hårt skulkande, höll sig undan långa stunder, så det dröjde några timmar och krävdes intensiv spanande av flera personer innan artbestämningen var klar. Här följer Jelmers egen berättelse:

Olivaceous Warbler on the island of Björn

JELMER POELSTRA



Eksångare, *Hippolais pallida*. Björn 11 september 2011. FOTO: MAGNUS CORELL

Even though most rare birds turn up later in the season, early autumn migration can be great. Good bird numbers and especially diversity with a host of scarcities makes for memorable birding days. After a rather impressive yield had been reported from Björn on 4/9, Holger Schielzeth and I also wanted to try our luck. It seemed that more birders had gotten 'autumn fever', as we eventually were in the first of no less than three boats to depart from Fågelsundet on Sunday 11/9.

Things started off well when I found a

Red-breasted Flycatcher foraging near the houses around 6h30. I warned the other birders, but it then stayed out of sight for a while (eventually, at least four were seen, and everyone connected). With most birders lingering in the eastern part of the island, I decided to head out westwards, and it was soon clear that good numbers of passerines, such as Willow Warblers, Redstarts, and flycatchers, were present.

In the pine-covered area in the west, I tried to get a better look at a Pied Flycatcher

at 8h35, when I noted a warbler with a distinctly long bill. I saw it from almost straight below, with not much colour visible, as it was foraging high in the pine I stood underneath. An autumn *Acrocephalus* or *Acro*-like bird is always exciting, and I anxiously kept my bins on the bird. It was then joined by a Willow Warbler, and turned a bit: it was only slightly bigger than the Willow, and incredibly pale! This had to be one of the rare, pale *Hippolais* warblers! But almost immediately, the two warblers got into a fight, and I lost them. I realized that pictures and/or many observers would be needed, or it would get away as just another 'exciting pale warbler'. Therefore, I first ran after two birders who had just walked by: Curt Johnsson and Annika Rastén. Explaining that I had seen an exciting-looking bird, kind of like a Booted Warbler, but with a much longer bill, Curt filled in the species I was thinking of: Sykes' Warbler. Yet arriving back at the tree, there was no longer any sign of the bird...

I warned Holger, while Curt spoke to the nearby ringers and contacted some of the other birders on the island. When I resumed searching, the distinct call of a Yellow-browed Warbler came out of nowhere - the first of the autumn! But I wasn't that thrilled, thinking mainly about the other warbler... Johan Södercrantz and David Hammarberg then approached, also hearing the yellow-browed. I told them what I had just seen, mentioning that it closely resembled a Sykes'. The bird had however dipped its tail, and I knew this was characteristic of Olivaceous. Yet it had seemed so small!?

Almost an hour later, I finally refound the bird, foraging amidst a bird flock with many Willow Warblers. Barely watching it, but panicking instead, I blew my whistle and phoned Holger, who was very nearby. A few other birders also approached, but the flock moved on, and the warbler was lost. I was quite frustrated that still no one else had seen it, and that I hadn't taken a very good look myself, either. But I was relieved that the bird had now looked equally scary as during the first sighting: a smallish and

very pale warbler with a bill and head like an *Acro*. While the bird was dipping its tail, I had now also seen white outer tail feathers. Together this definitely excluded odd-looking *Acro*'s (e.g. pale Blyth's) and Icterine/Melodious (which can be quite pale). So it really had to be one of these pale *Hippolais*, with Booted (too short bill), Isabelline (does not dip tail), and Upcher's and Olive-tree (too large) also excluded. But was it Olivaceous (clear pro: tail-dipping), or Sykes' (apparent pro: small size)?

I had to head back to the lighthouse for food, but was only just on my way when Holger saw the bird at 10h10. Right when Holger pointed it out to me and other birders that were rushing in, it flew off. Lost once again! On the bright side, Holger could confirm most of what I had seen. We settled on Olivaceous as by far the most likely option, after we had seen in the bird book that the size was actually alright for the species. Unfortunately, only a few people seemed to be looking for it - but how could we convince more people to start searching?

Luckily, just after 11h, Annika and Curt refound the bird, and they, too, could confirm that the bird looked like an Olivaceous. Most people now started searching, and we also relocated some nets, with tape of Olivaceous' song underneath. Incredibly though, it then failed to turn up, and by 13h40, some people had already left the island, with many others heading back east to leave at 14h. Although at that point we were quite certain that the bird was an Olivaceous, we had not seen all the relevant features; with only a few very brief observations and no pictures, it would be no match for a rarity committee. But miraculously, David Hammarberg then rediscovered the bird, and Holger and I arrived as the bird was foraging calmly near the top of a pine. It was exhilarating to finally see it well! While watching with six people we discussed the identification features, which were all in favour of Olivaceous, and movies and pictures were now also being made.

The very impressive bill simply seemed too large for (at least a typical) Sykes', and

other features that we could now properly judge were also in favour of Olivaceous: (1) the rather long primary projection (at least 50%; shorter in Sykes'); (2) under some angles, a pale wing patch was visible (absent or very vague in Sykes'); (3) no sign of a dark smudge on the lower mandible (often present in Sykes'); (4) the colour of the upperparts was pale sandy grayish (lacking the brownish tones typical for Sykes'). And once again, the characteristic tail-dipping was seen (Sykes' should twitch the tail more shallowly, and both up and down from the normal position). We also saw that the lores were dark, confirming that it wasn't an Isabelline Warbler. The excellent pictures by Magnus Corell, made on the 12th, showed additional supporting features, most notably white tips to the secondaries. This apparently never occurs in Sykes'. Because of the fresh wing feathers, the bird was likely a first calendar-year.

By then, the majority of birders were on the other side of the island, but they rushed back, since most of them had not yet seen the bird. Fortunately, it was swiftly relocated a few times, and everyone, including some

birders who set off after the bird had been reported on BMS, could see the bird well. The bird was also seen on the 12th, 17th and 18th, but often not during the whole day, and was therefore dipped by relatively many. The bird's habit of moving very slowly and high up in the pines made it quite hard to locate the bird, and it was easily lost when flying off. Yet once it was located, excellent views could be obtained with some patience. Luckily, it was also strikingly faithful to a rather small area of pines.

If accepted, this is the 4th record for Sweden (with previous records in summer and autumn in 1993, 1997, and 2004), and the first for Uppland. It was seen by at least 86 people according to Svalan. Interestingly, a Sykes' Warbler was discovered on the very same day as this bird, on the Faeroer islands. Also, the preceding weeks had seen records of three rare *Hippolais* species (Booted, Sykes' and Olivaceous Warbler) in Norway. With relatively many Blyth's and Paddyfield Warblers also turning up, all of September surely is a good time to go looking for a strange *Acro*-like bird!

Några ord på svenska: Morgonen började bra på Björn. Mindre flugsnappare sågs och det var gott om sångare och flugsnappare. I västra dungen på Björn hittade Jelmer en *Acrocephalus* liknande sångare. Han förstod snart att det var en blek *Hippolais*, en i gruppen stäppsångare, saxualsångare, macchiasångare eller eksångare. De är inbördes mycket lika varandra och vår närmaste släkting är härmsångare. En taigasångare upptäcktes parallellt under upphetsningen. Med stöd av andra skådare pekade fältbestämningskarakterärerna och att fågeln regelbundet slog nedåt med stjärten allt mer mot eksångare. Någorlunda bilder togs och dagen efter fick Magnus Corell mycket bra bilder som konfirmerade bestämningen.

Eksångare

(lat. *Hippolais pallida*, eng. Olivaceous Warbler) häckar i Sydosteuropa, närmast oss i Ungern. Den var tidigare sammanslagen till en art med macchiasångare (lat. *Hippolais opaca*, eng. Isabelline Warbler) som häckar i södra Spanien. Dessutom är saxualsångare (lat. *Hippolais rama*, eng. Syke's Warbler) och stäppsångare (lat. *Hippolais caligata*, eng. Booted Warbler) mycket lika eksångare.

Saxualsångare och stäppsångare, som båda har ett mer östligt utbredningsområde, har också nyligen betraktats som en gemensam art. I den allra modernaste forskningen finns det krafter som vill bryta ut dessa fyra arter från *Hippolais* släktet och bilda ett nytt släkte under namnet *Iduna*.