

More records of the European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* in South Africa

J.M.H. Raijmakers & J.H.F.A. Raijmakers

PO Box 5067, Vanderbijlpark, 1900; raijmakersk@telkomsa.net

Recently records for European Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* in southern Africa have increased especially for Namibia and Botswana. Komen (1988), Van den Brink & Loske (1990), Herremans (1992) and Tyler & Tyler (1997) all reported on catching European Reed Warblers in Namibia and Botswana in increasing numbers. Tyler and Tyler (1997), for instance, reported 53 European Reed Warblers between November 1996 and April 1997. In South Africa, however, only two confirmed records of European Reed Warblers exist: one by Schmitt (1975) in the Transvaal in December 1974 and the other by Raijmakers (1995) at Vanderbijlpark on 5 March 1994.

Since the record at Vanderbijlpark in 1994, four more European Reed Warblers were netted, three at the same location at the Iscor Bird Sanctuary and the fourth a few kilometres away on the farm Boschbank in the Sasolburg district.

The Iscor Bird Sanctuary is situated north-west of the Iscor works at Vanderbijlpark (26°38'S, 27°50'E). The habitat is predominantly marshy with extensive Phragmites reed beds around large purification dams containing semi purified industrial effluent and rain water. The surrounding marshy areas with standing water are covered in Phragmites, Typha, weeds and sedges. The total area of dams and marsh is approximately 60 hectares. No trees are present in the immediate vicinity.

The farm Boschbank is situated along the Vaal River in the Sasolburg district (26°47'S, 27°46'E). The area where the European Reed Warbler was netted is where the Leeuspruit enters the Vaal River. It is an area with extensive Phragmites reed beds along the Leeuspruit with some riverside bush and opening into a large vlei area with Typha, weeds, sedges and tall vlei grass and some areas of open water. The bush consists mainly of

Table 1. Biometric data of European Reed Warblers.

Ring number	AD68427	Not ringed	AD68879	AD56991
Location	Iskor B S	Iskor B S	Iskor B S	Boschbank farm
Date	3 February 1996	3 February 1996	22 November 1997	14 February 1998
Wing length	65	70	68	71
P2 notch	12.0	13.0	12.0	12.5
Tail	57	57	57	56
Tarsus	23.0	23.5	23.5	23.4
Tarsus width	1.8	1.7	1.85	1.85
Culmen	17.5	17.4	18.4	17.9
Culmen width	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.05
Head	34.7	34.1	35.5	33.6
Mass	9.8	11.2	12.1	10.2
Moult	yes	complete	complete	yes
Walinder score	9.94	10.26	10.45	10.41
P2 notch on remiges	P10/S	P10/S	P10	P2 still growing

Acacia karoo, *Rhus lancea* and *Celtis africana*.

All the birds were netted in reed beds over water. Three birds were caught at the Iscor Bird Sanctuary: two on 3 February 1996 and the other on 22 November 1997. The bird at Boschbank was caught on 14 February 1998. Two birds had completed moult, one had only moult in the secondaries whilst the other was nearly complete with the last three primaries having a moult score of four, four and three.

All birds were identified on P2 notch length, on P2 notch in relation to the other primaries, as well as on Walinder score (see Walinder *et al.* 1988). The P2 notch was also used in combination with the wing length as described in Walinder *et al.* (1988) and this also confirmed European Reed Warbler.

Biometric data was recorded in millimetres, the wing length was measured to the nearest millimetre according to the maximum chord method and the notch was measured to the nearest 0.5 mm as described by Svensson (1992). All other measurements are in millimetres (Table 1).

Although European Reed Warblers are rare birds in South Africa it seems that they are overlooked to a large extent and that they may be more common than generally believed. It may also be that they only reach South Africa in certain years and not in others as the Iscor Bird Sanctuary was used as a ringing site for nearly ten years and European

Reed Warblers were only caught in three of these. Unfortunately the ringing site has now been lost for ringing purposes. This must have been one of the best warbler sites in the country with large numbers of African Marsh-, Cape Reed- and European Sedge Warblers present. Great Reed- and African Sedge Warblers were common and in another part of the sanctuary Willow-, Garden-, European Marsh Warblers and Whitethroat have been netted.

References

- Herremans, M.** 1992. New records of the European Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* from Botswana. *Babbler* 24: 10-13.
- Komeu, J.** 1988. Identity crisis: African Marsh, European Reed and European Marsh Warblers. *Botmakiene* 40(4): 106-110.
- Raijmakers, J.M.H.** 1995. Record of European Reed Warbler at Vanderbijlpark. *Birding South Africa* 47: 95.
- Schmitt, M.B.** 1975. In: New distributional data: 6. *Ostrich* 46: 177.
- Svensson, L.** 1992. Identification guide to European passerines. 4th Ed. Stockholm: Lars Svensson.
- Tyler, S.J. & Tyler, L.** 1997. A year's ringing at Phakalane sewage lagoons in south east Botswana. *Safring News* 26: 81-82.
- Van den Brink, B. & Loske, K.** 1990. Botswana and Namibia as regular wintering quarters for European Reed Warblers? *Ostrich* 61: 146-147.
- Walinder, G., Karlsson, I. & Persson, K.** 1988. A new method for separating Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* from Reed Warblers *A. scirpaceus*. *Ring and Migration* 9: 55-62.