

Notes and observations
on
the Brown Hill Warbler (*Prinia polychroa*)¹

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On 25 January 1967, a drab unidentified warbler was netted east of Wu She (Nantou County: Lat. 24-02N, Long. 121-08E, Alt. 1148m). A specimen was made and the bird was later identified as a Brown Hill Warbler (*Prinia polychroa*) with the following measurements (given in millimeters):

Total length	—177
Wing	— 51
Tail	—106
Tarsal diameter	— 2.0
Tarsal length	— 21.6
Gape	— 16.4
Bill	— 12.2

(Specimen in Biology Department, Tunghai University)

The tail length of the specimen in question measures 106 mm. The longest tail length for a winter bird given by Hachisuka and Udagawa (1951) is 94 mm.

Description: Forehead, crown, nape, and back light brown, streaked darker. Dark brown feathers edged lighter lend the streaked appearance. Rump and uppertail coverts solid brown. Tail brown, each of the 10 feathers tipped lighter brown; long and graduated. Wing short and rounded; feathers brown, edged exteriorly rufous. Wings appear reddish brown when folded, redder than back. Dirty white below. Face light brown, lores lighter. Malar region spotted brown. Flanks and undertail coverts yellowish-brown. Leg coverts distinctly pale rufous. Legs and feet light yellowish brown. Bill brown. Iris brown.

Field Marks: Brown above, streaked darker. Dirty white below. Long tail. The long, graduated and seemingly loosely jointed tail is characteristic of the genus *Prinia* in Taiwan. (See fig. 1).

Voice: Song, a dry, syncopated, rapidly-delivered “ti-cha’, ti-cha’, ti-cha’, ti-cha’,” etc., with emphasis falling on the “cha.” Note, a soft, non-descript tick.

Plumage: Hachisuka and Udagawa (1951) make the following comment about this species:

“In the field it resembles greatly to *flaviventris*
and only a trained naturalist can distinguish
their song and plumage.”

1. This research was supported by the U. S. Army Research and Development Group (Far East), Department of the Army under Grant No. DA-CRD-AFE-S92-544-68-G130.

In Taiwan, *polychroa* is not easily confused with *flaviventris* in either song or plumage. Whereas the call of *polychroa* is the dry, repeated "ti-cha" described above, *flaviventris* gives both a cat-like mewling and a clear, liquid descending whistle. In plumage, the brown *polychroa*, streaked above, differs from *flaviventris*, with gray crown, olive-green back, and no streaking.

Courtship and mating: On 20 April 1967, the following observation was made just east of Wu She on the road to Lu Shan. A female was perched on the branch of a sapling on the steep face of the road embankment. The male was moving quickly from branch to branch around the female. His movements consisted of rapid wing jerking while he pivoted from side to side on each branch. He accompanied his movements with song. During this performance, the female fluttered her wings steadily and rapidly. The courtship display lasted about half a minute. The male mounted the female quickly and flew off into the brush above the embankment, uttering his call.

Habitat and Distribution: Wherever this species has been observed, it has been associated with dry, grassy slopes of *Miscanthus* and scattered second growth. It is secretive seldom showing itself and preferring to remain in the dense undergrowth. It is heard more often than seen.

According to Hachisuka and Udagawa (1951), Brown Hill Warblers are

"scarce in most places but in Koshun district
(southern tip of the island) large numbers breed.

They are found generally between 300-600m. and
descend lower during the colder months."

The specimen in question was netted at an altitude of 1148 meters. The highest altitude at which this author has noted them is 2506 meters (Hsin Jen Kang: Lat. 24-07N, Long. 121-13E. See Table 1). In March, April and June, they are common at Wu She (1148m) and Tsui Feng, Nantou County (Lat. 24-06N, Long. 121-11E, Alt. 2306m). Their presence in Wu She in January, March, April, and June suggests that they are permanent residents at this altitude, but this has yet to be verified by observation in other months. Whether they are permanent residents all year at altitudes above Wu She or descend to lower altitudes as Hachisuka and Udagawa state also remains to be verified. On 8 December 1967, an intensive search was made at Hsin Jen Kang (2506m), but none was seen or heard. None has ever been seen or heard at Tsui Feng during the winter months. Although this would seem to support the statement that they descend, it might also be attributed to their skulking nature and the difficulty in observing them. It is certain, however, that the altitudinal range of this species is higher than originally noted.

The present distribution of this species at the southern tip of the island remains unconfirmed. Observations made during the month of September, 1967 and 1968, up to an elevation of 500 meters did not produce any sight or call records.

Table 1: Status and distribution of *Prinia polychroa* with respect to month and altitude

Month	Place (altitude in meters). Status.
January	Wu She (1148). Uncommon.
March	Wu She (1148). Common. Tsui Feng (2306). Common.
April	Wu She (1148). Common. Tsui Feng (2306). Common.

April	Hsin Jen Kang (2506). Uncommon.
June	Wu She (1148). Common. Tsui Feng (2306). Common.
September 1967, 68	Koshun, or Heng Chun, district (0-500). None seen or heard.
December 1967	None seen, heard, or banded between Wu She (1148) and Yuan Feng (2756).

Literature Cited

HACHISUKA, M. and T. Udagawa (1951). Contribution to the Ornithology of Formosa, Part II. *Quarterly Journal of the Taiwan Museum*, Vol. IV, Nos. 1 & 2. Taipei, Taiwan.

ABSTRACT

The Brown Hill Warbler (*Prinia polychroa*) in Taiwan is discussed with a description of its plumage, voice, courtship, status, and distribution given. Its distinct dissimilarity to the Yellow-bellied Wren Warbler (*P. flaviventris*) is noted where previously they were thought indistinguishable in the field. Its altitudinal range is noted as higher than previously recorded.

有關斑紋鷓鴣之觀察筆記

文中討論臺灣的斑紋鷓鴣，敘述其羽毛花色叫聲，求偶過程，現狀，及在臺灣之分佈情形。以往，斑紋鷓鴣及灰須鷓鴣被認為極其相似，以致於野外甚不易辨認，文中亦指出其非常明顯之不同。此外，斑紋鷓鴣分佈地區之海拔高度亦不同於過去之記載。